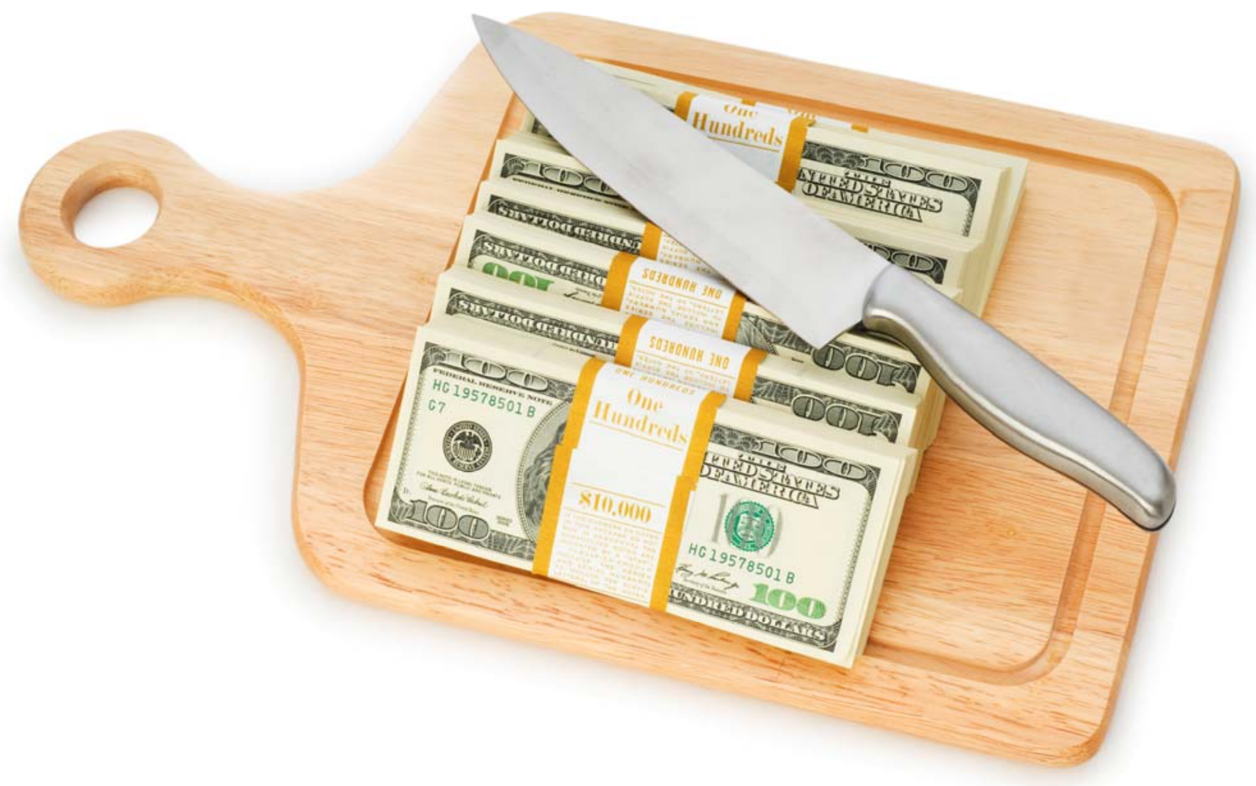
Survivalist Cost Cutting

What Government Can Learn from the Private Sector

March 2013



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Introduction

The Federal Government faces fiscal challenges greater than at any time in recent history. With massive borrowing needed to finance ongoing spending, government leaders are left with the difficult task of finding ways to cut both popular discretionary and mandatory program spending and increase revenue.

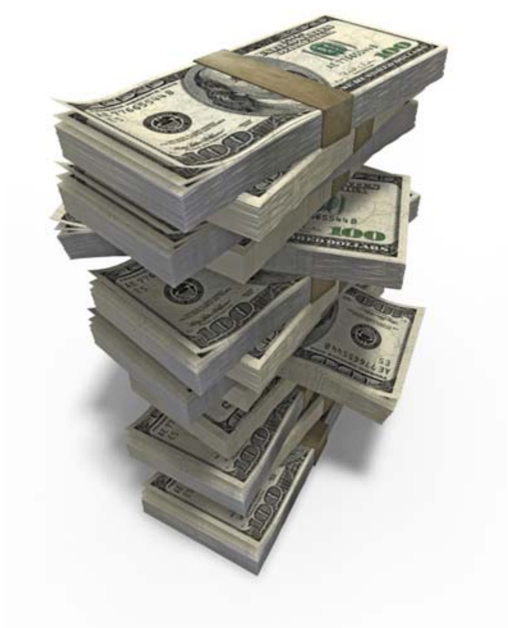
Although government's a very different animal, there are lessons to be learned from the oil and gas, automotive, and banking industries. In just the past few decades, each of these industries faced dire challenges and had to cut spending drastically or face the very real prospect of going out of business. Many large multi-national companies have also been forced to make significant spending reductions in order to survive. There are some common cost reduction practices that can help governments cut costs and minimize the damage to their mission:

1. Develop a cost reduction plan
2. Reduce acquisition cost through strategic sourcing
3. Streamline operations
4. Consolidate facilities and operations (footprint reduction)
5. Reduce headcount

Each of these leading practices is addressed in this white paper and offers a roadmap for federal agencies that need to cut costs dramatically or simply to find money to reinvest.

The Current Budget Environment

On October 1, 2012, a new fiscal year for the Federal budget began. Assuming receipts ($2.7 trillion) and outlays ($3.6 trillion) are as projected, the current fiscal year deficit is about $ 850 billion. Deficit spending is the primary reason the United States has more than $16 trillion in accumulated debt. Looking ahead 10 years and based on current estimates of receipts and outlays, the deficit will grow another $10 trillion, increasing U.S. debt to $26 trillion.[1]



No entity, public or private, can thrive by employing long-term deficit spending. We see examples of this in countries like Portugal, Ireland, Greece, and Spain, which together have triggered a European sovereign debt crisis.

We also see examples of city and state governments here in the United States facing severe fiscal challenges and forced to make significant reductions in spending and services or increase revenues to balance their budgets. In June 2011, the city of Stockton, California became the largest city in the United States to file for bankruptcy protection.

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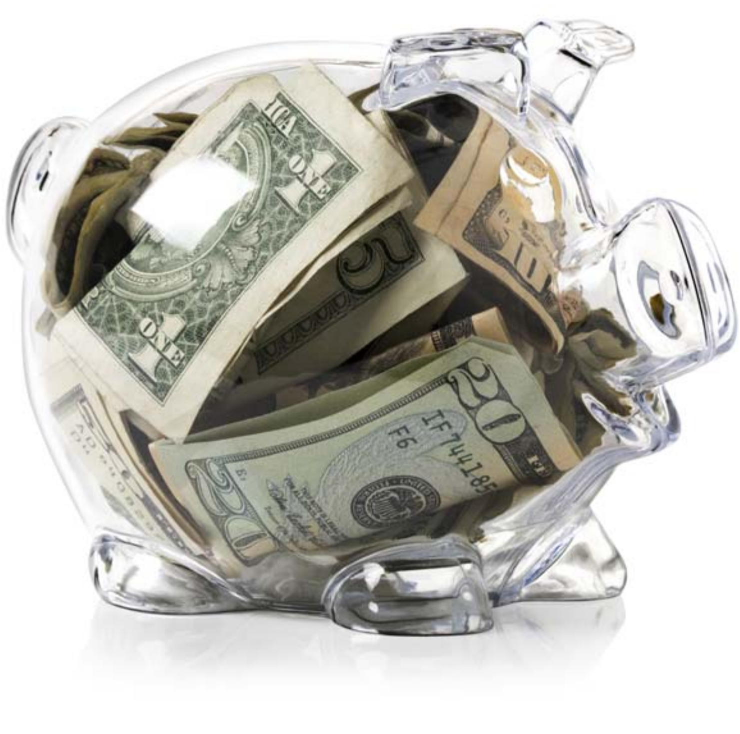
[1] *The Budget and Economic Outlook, FY2012 to 2023*, Congressional Budget Office, February 2013 (see http://www.cbo.gov/publication/43907)

The Challenge for Government

Anticipated spending cuts could slap federal agencies and programs with as much as a ten percent across-the-board reduction. The impending reduction in federal spending due to the recent sequester would represent a significant portion of total outlays. Mandatory outlays like Medicare, Social Security, and Medicaid represent 62 percent of total outlays and are largely off limits to cost reduction initiatives. Almost $1.5 trillion in discretionary spending remain and cost savings can be found. Even a one percent reduction in non mandatory spending saves taxpayers $15 billion a year.

Government entities will be challenged to find ways to cut spending, although the pressure to do so will mount. Unlike in the past, the difference is that the stakes are higher and the potential reductions in spending deeper. Large scale structural changes and more aggressive spending reductions will replace incremental cost cutting and process improvement. While it's not always true, this time government agencies can learn a lot from the private sector.



Private Industry has been Successful at Cost Reduction

The oil and gas industry is a good example of large scale cost reduction. After rising during most of the 1970s and early 1980s the price of crude oil plunged below $9 a barrel ($21 in today's dollars) in March of 1986. Exploration, drilling, and production was significantly curtailed and large publicly traded oil service companies like Schlumberger, Halliburton, Baker Oil, Smith International, and Hughes Tool Company were significantly bigger than they needed to be. Plants were closed. Operations were consolidated. Thousands of workers were laid off. Baker Oil and Hughes Tool, bitter enemies and long time competitors, even agreed to bury the hatchet and combine their companies.

More recent is the automobile industry crisis of 2008-11. High fuel prices in 2008, a global scale recession, and scarcity of credit led to big reductions in auto sales. With expenses exceeding revenues, the Big Three closed many factories, consolidated operations, and drastically reduced employment levels. Worse off were the automotive dealerships, 35 percent of which simply disappeared, as supply (automobile dealers) was greater than demand (new car buyers). While federal intervention softened the blow a great deal, acute cost cutting was necessary.

Large scale cost reduction practices are consistent across industry examples. All start with a plan of action, a kind of roadmap of requirements and goals to do what needs to be accomplished. Tools, methods, and an overall approach for cost reductions include strategic sourcing, streamlining operations, and reducing footprint and headcount. While all these tools and methods are employed to some extent in large scale cost reduction, the industry or company cost structure drives the degree to which they are used.

In industries where a significant portion of the cost structure represents payments to third party providers, the focus is on strategic scouring. People intensive businesses and industries like consulting focus on headcount reduction while capital intensive industries like semiconductors will focus on footprint reduction. But all employ the same path to cutting costs.

Leading Cost Management Practice 1: Develop a Cost Reduction Plan

The starting point for large scale cost reduction is to develop a plan of strategy, goals, methods, priorities, timelines, and actions to meet a cost reduction target without negatively impacting mission objectives. Good plans lead to success, bad plans result in disaster. The worst thing an organization can do is cut costs indiscriminately and hurt the mission. What's needed is a clear vision of what needs to be done and who is responsible.

The plan is critical and drives the effort and resources that will be deployed towards strategic sourcing, streamlining operations, and/or footprint and headcount reductions. Perhaps the most important thing to remember: management leadership must be continuously involved and willing to make difficult decisions and tradeoffs.

The plan must categorize cost reduction into a few target areas so that each can be attacked with specific, tailored strategies. Simple examples include replacing manual, labor intensive activities with automated ones; transforming business models or technologies that were formerly obsolete; and using strategic sourcing to address disjointed, uncoordinated procurement practices. Target areas can be expected to vary significantly between government entities. What works at Defense is different than what works at Commerce. Even within Departments, cost cutting strategies may differ.

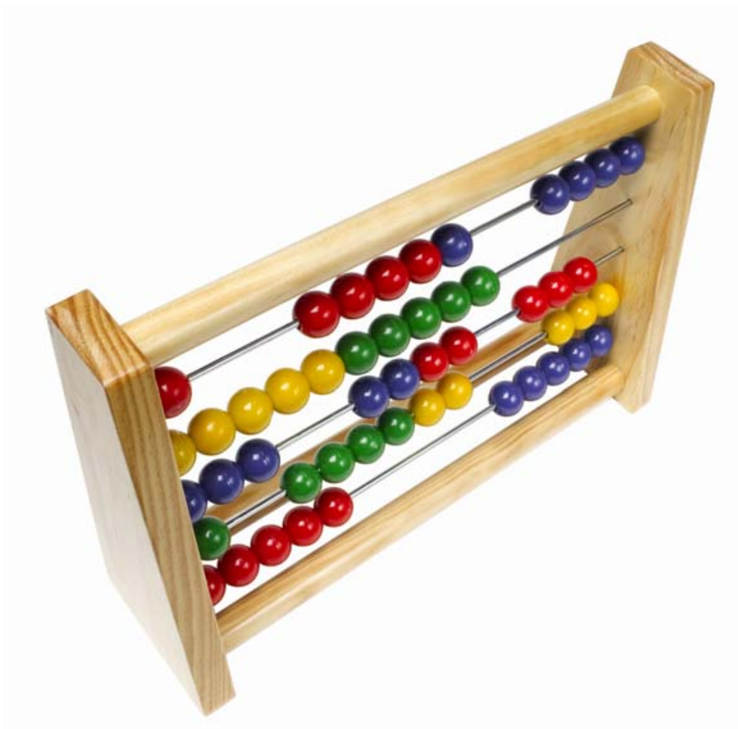
Leaders in the oil and gas service industry faced with declining oil prices, drilling permits, and drilling were able to clearly articulate the need to reduce the size and scope of their operations sometimes by up to 50 percent. In the grand scheme of things, the percentage cuts facing government agencies seem relatively tame. Oil and gas companies had to craft plans that chose which products to make, which customers to serve, what services to offer, and in which geographical areas to sell. The same applies in the public sector, except that certain public sector cost reduction strategies will often include elimination of programs or taking other, politically unpopular steps. Those more dramatic alternatives should not be dismissed, but they may take a longer timeline to implement.

The primary benefit of any plan is the coordination of people in the achievement of a well defined strategy with goals and objectives, decisions to be made, alternatives to be considered, and the requirements and tasks to get there.

Leading Cost Management Practice 2: Reduce Acquisition Cost through Sustainable Strategic Sourcing

Depending on the organization, costs for suppliers/commodities and third party service providers/contractors range from 20 to 80 percent of total spending. In the oil service industry, suppliers are approximately 40 percent of cost and spending. In the automobile industry, 70 percent of the total cost to make a car/truck is the cost of the components purchased from suppliers while for the banking industry, third party providers and contractors are a small portion of total costs. Like industry, depending on the Federal Agency, acquisition costs for commodities and services can be a large and significant part of the cost structure. In most cases, there will be opportunity for savings in these areas through Strategic Sourcing application.

Traditional Strategic Sourcing is an institutional procurement processes that continuously improves and re-evaluates purchasing activities and flows from “left” to “right,” from spend analysis to solicitation development through contract negotiation. It is a systematic and fact-based approach for optimizing an organization’s supply base and improves the overall cost of contracted commodities/services for both the supplier and the customer. The intent of traditional strategic sourcing is to establish longer-term relationships where suppliers and customers work together as partners to continuously improve the overall contract outcome. That means vendors and customers work together to reduce costs, increase quality, improve



operational efficiency, share best practices, and develop products and service specifications in a collaborative manner for both parties. In industry, suppliers and third party providers are willing to do this because they have a vested interest in the success of their customers. Like industry, contractors and suppliers have a vested interest in the success of their Federal customers. Lockheed Martin, Health Net, Computer Sciences Corporation, SAIC Inc, and Booz Allen Hamilton all have a significant stake in their government customers success, especially when you consider the percentage of their total 2010 revenues represented by government contracts was 79, 32, 27, 60, and 73 percent, respectively.

The best way for Government and industry to achieve collaborative results is through amending the market research process to improve communication within and amongst industry. Requests for information and industry meetings between, and amongst, government and suppliers enable vendors and suppliers to better understand and communicate the supply cycle and product costs for Government requirements. In turn the Government could adjust their requirements and avoid unintended over-specification for commodities/services acquired. This would enable the Government to also realize significant cost reductions, even though their acquisition process would remain competitive.

Spend Analysis is the critical first step and prerequisite for traditional Strategic Sourcing. Agencies have "Big Data" in their procurement systems that can be rich sources of savings. Analysis of this data can help identify possible targets. A Spend Analysis prioritizes the various spend areas for evaluation based on the goals and objectives of the organization. This involves identifying where the greatest spending is taking place and how much activity is being accomplished throughout the operating units with that spending. Spend analysis includes not just the amount paid to suppliers. Rather, it includes internal acquisition costs and takes into account the total cost of ownership of the goods or services being purchased. Government specifications, internal policies and procedures, internal processes, procurement, inventory, operational practices, and demand drivers can be significant parts of the total acquisition cost. These often inefficient practices and procedures can also be a significant driver of cost to the supplier, who, of course, builds such costs into the price they charge the government.
After spend analysis, the next steps in a traditional Strategic Sourcing process include: (1) an assessment of the vendor market (who offers what?), (2) total cost analysis (how much does it cost to provide goods and services?), (3) the development of an acquisition strategy (where and how to purchase, considering demand and supply situations, while minimizing risk and costs), (4) the creation of the solicitation package, (a finite set of requirements, developed through industry research and collaboration, that reduces Government and vendor costs while providing needed commodities/services), and (5) negotiations between supplier and customer (e.g., products, service levels, prices, and geographical coverage).

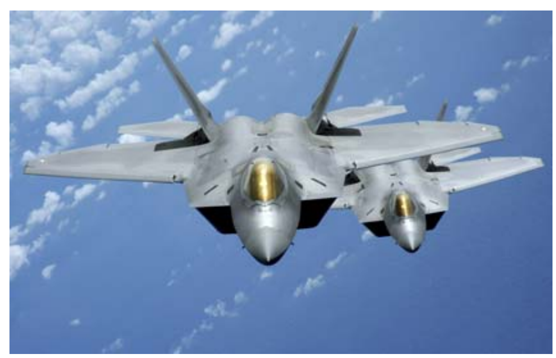
The most vital point in making strategic sourcing sustainable is transferring the commodity/service currently provided to the Government from old to new contracts. It's a critical step often ignored and not one dollar is saved without it. To do this requires transformation of the Government procurement and recipient offices and centralized governance that oversee them. This process must be imbedded in the Acquisition organization to ensure savings identified and contracted for become and remain realized. It is this compliance assurance process, across all of the Strategic Sourcing process steps, that differentiates sustainable Strategic Sourcing as a "high value" implementation strategy and yields demonstrably higher return on the sourcing investment.

Several critical barriers often confound attempts to implement strategic sourcing. The first and often most critical is identifying the data sources, collecting the data from its myriad sources and readying the data for the spend analysis process. This is often the most time consuming portion of the process (often 90 days or more of a six or seven month effort). The scale of the government's spending data that must be analyzed dwarfs most private sector enterprises, though its easy accessibility is a plus. Spending transactions and data requirements can number in the hundreds of millions. Modern data management systems are essential to the easy handling of this much information.

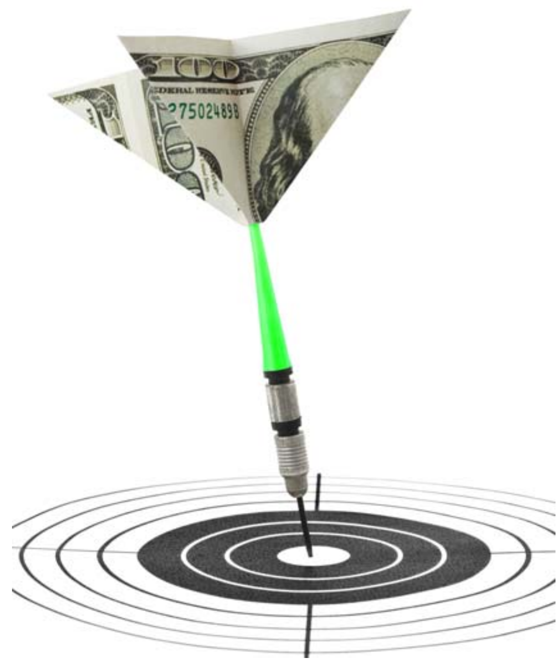
Additional barriers to strategic sourcing in the federal government include, among others, unreliable data and a well documented shortage of qualified and experienced procurement talent. While difficult to overcome, these and other challenges are not deal breakers. With leadership and focus, complete, timely and reliable procurement data is achievable. Furthermore, the lack of talent can be remedied by a focus on recruitment and retention of a workforce with the requisite data analytics and acquisition skills. As in all important endeavors, leadership commitment will be critical.

There is another category of barriers to strategic sourcing – legislative and regulatory. One important barrier is the prohibition against negotiating concurrently with multiple vendors, precluding auctions, which many private firms and States find attractive for realizing rapid cash savings. Another is the lack of ability to share information with any vendors (for fear of protest by all other vendors), which precludes those desired collaborative partnerships between government buyers and the supplier community that promote high value trusted partner relationships so valued in industry. Socioeconomic procurement goals, though laudable, may also limit the benefits that can be realized and compromise efficiencies otherwise achievable from strategic sourcing.

Finally, the Government cannot sign multi-year deals, as industry does, at guaranteed demand levels and pricing that do not require "out clauses" based on acts of Congress, the President, or other, unforeseen events. Government suppliers routinely incorporate risk premiums in their pricing to hedge against such events. Perhaps the most prominent example of this phenomenon was the "tail up" provision in the Air Force's F-22 contract which threatened $147 million in charges when the government's need for the aircraft was diminished. The cost to the Government from "risk premiums" is, in some cases, up to double what the cost would otherwise be for the same product or service.



Notwithstanding these barriers, there are great benefits to be realized from strategic sourcing. This is why the Office of Management and Budget has made it a priority.[2] The Department of the Treasury, alone, saved hundreds of millions of dollars over the last several years from strategic sourcing. The States of California and Georgia saved over $200 million each, as well. The Department of Defense has saved even more.



The key to maximizing the benefits of Strategic Sourcing is broadening the scope and amount of spending analyzed as part of the program. Carving out or insulating spending categories or contracts "in-place" limits the results organizations can achieve from the program. The Government should strive to make at least 25 percent of identified procurement spending available for sourcing with a target of 50 percent or more. Although results may vary by spending category, organizations can reasonably expect savings of 8 to 15 percent savings from Strategic Sourcing. With more than $500B in annual spending on goods and services, this is a target rich environment.

[2] *Improving Acquisition through Strategic Sourcing*, U.S. Office of Management and Budget, Memorandum M-13-02 (December 5, 2012) (See http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2013/m-13-02_0.pdf).

Leading Cost Management Practice 3: Streamline Operations

Streamlining operations, as the name implies, means consolidating activities and processes to eliminate waste, duplication, non-value added work and, most importantly, providing clearly articulated specifications and requirements. Streamlining operations drives customer satisfaction and bottom-line results, thereby promoting business performance excellence and accountability for continuous improvement. It enables agencies to define value through the eyes of their customers and subsequently restructure operations to consistently produce exactly what its customers want in the most efficient manner possible. Streamlining tools and methods include process mapping, Lean Six Sigma, continuous process improvement, benchmarking, statistical process control, and cycle time reduction.

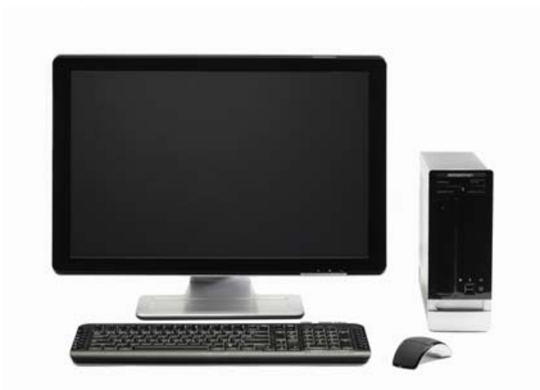
The three key steps and approaches to guide and manage operational streamlining efforts include (1) assessing the current state, (2) designing the desired future state, and, most importantly, (3) implementing required changes. Step one is to develop a clear picture of an organization's current state. This includes identifying and assessing process performance levels and comparing that to best practices and other benchmarks. This helps build ownership and accountability for success.

Step two is the design and testing of an improved future state process. This step includes assessing the cost and benefits of different options and developing a robust implementation plan based on the chosen alternatives. This step gives the organization a blueprint so it can understand the implications for change and prepare for the transformation.

The final step, executing the implementation plan and managing the future state process, encompasses the tools, techniques, competencies, measures, and authority to achieve and sustain future state performance, benefits, and value.

With large scale changes, agencies must prepare for internal and external barriers, such as the need for immediate results, resistance to change, and lack of resources. The need for immediate results can be achieved by initially focusing on short term, high value capabilities. These "quick win" capabilities can be implemented to provide "speed to value" and help build and sustain enthusiasm among stakeholders.

Resistance to change can be minimized by educating employees and communicating the change, enlisting employee participation, and providing training so team members are equipped with the skills to effectively perform their work. The more difficult obstacle to overcome can be the lack of resources. Quick wins can be a source of additional resources and by communicating the short and long-term trade-offs upfront, greater employee buy-in should follow. Agencies will have to invest some limited resources upfront; however, the elimination of waste will give agencies the flexibility to reallocate resources to value-added initiatives.



The main benefits of streamlining operations include standardized processes, reductions in variation, shortened cycle times, fewer errors and defects, minimized waste and even risk mitigation. Fifteen to 30 percent improvements can be achieved through implementation of operational best practices and targeted performance improvements. Standardized processes, procedures, tools, and templates enhance the quality, consistency, and timeliness of products and services. Better understanding of process and information flow, interdependencies, and key stakeholder involvement results in improved communication and collaboration to achieve agency specific business strategies. Operational frameworks linked to performance metrics and aligned to agency goals minimize the risk of cost overruns, missed deadlines, and performance shortfalls.

Leading Cost Management Practice 4: Consolidate Facilities and Operations (Footprint Reduction)

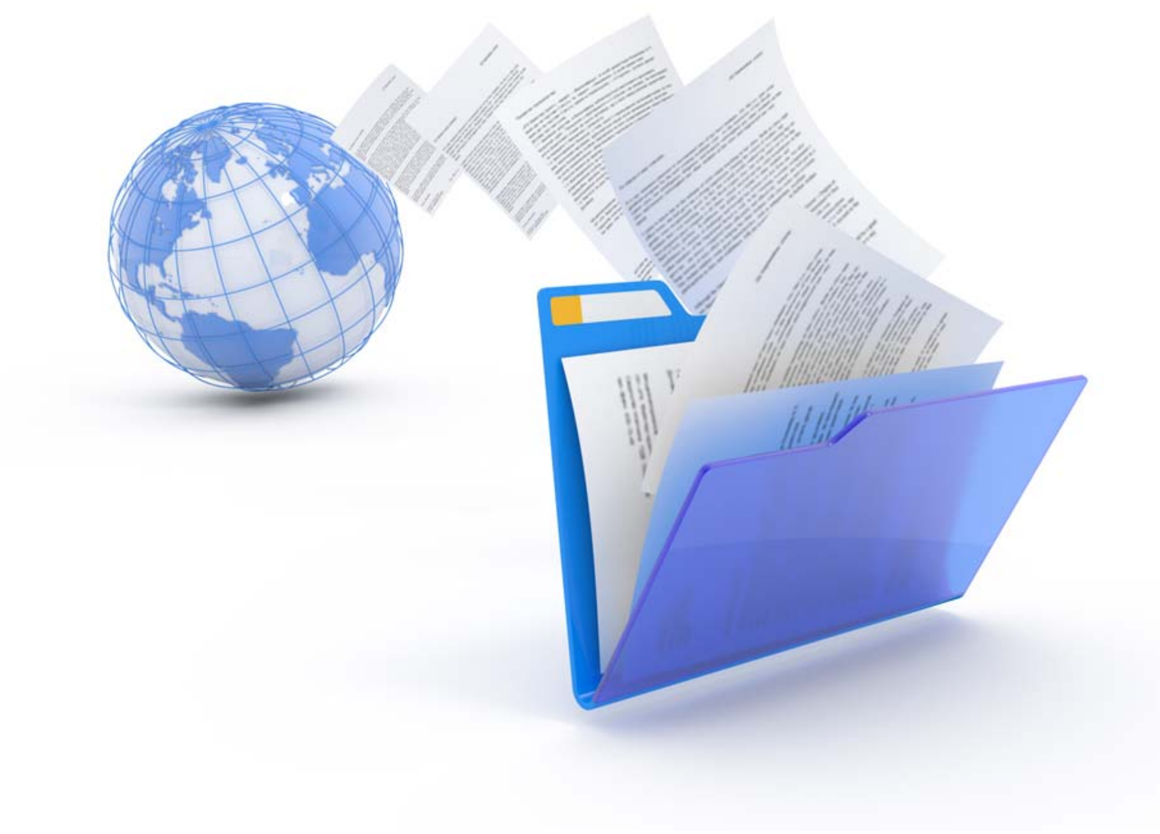
Consolidation of facilities and operations is another method of managing large-scale cost reductions and is common in the commercial sector. When two manufacturing plants, both operating at 50 percent capacity, are combined, the results are obvious. When costs exceed revenues, retail stores lose money and so must consolidate and close locations. It is not unusual for commercial organizations to pay the short term costs to move and relocate operations to achieve a footprint reduction that reduces long term fixed costs.

Footprint reductions extend to and include relocation of facilities, equipment, and machines to areas where it is less expensive to operate. According to the Government Accountability Office, the Federal Government manages 900,000 assets with a combined area of over 3 billion square feet. Talk about a target rich environment. It's no secret that the cost per square foot in the Midwest is substantially less than on the East and West coasts. And although it's not that simple for government, after the collapse of the oil and gas industry, large companies like Smith International, Baker Oil Tools, and Varco completely shut down their California corporate offices and manufacturing faculties and moved everything to the middle of the country – Houston, Texas -- thereby reaping significant footprint and cost reductions.

Reducing footprint is not new to government. A well-known example is the military's use of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) authority to significantly consolidate and reduce their number of bases. The Patent and Trademark Office implemented a program where people could work out of their homes, thereby reducing substantially the agency's footprint of offices and other facilities. And although the scale of excess capacity in the Postal Service is infamous – 37,000 owned facilities, many in very small towns – it has co-located with local governments to enhance its capability to share rent and maintenance costs.

Federal agencies can also learn from both public and private sector organizations that have combined back room support activities like accounting, finance, human resources, and information technology. Rather than performing duplicative functions in multiple locations, organizations have moved to shared services, consolidating back office functions into single organizations and enjoying significant reductions in costs.

Information Technology has grown exponentially over the past 10 years. With a cost of close to $80 billion annually, the Office of Management and Budget is looking seriously at information technology as a source of efficiency and cost savings. Eighty percent of the federal government's IT investment is in infrastructure. The fragmented and de-centralized infrastructure across the federal government is not sustainable due to shrinking budgets, wasteful redundancy, and costly maintenance. Consolidating and replacing redundant IT infrastructure with modernized 21st century IT is a foundation for good management. Not only will the consolidation save taxpayer dollars, but it will allow the federal government's employees to be more efficient and provide them better IT services for less money. It's one area where we can genuinely get more for less.



Agencies should track their IT portfolios, so they can gain insight into where they spend money, identify redundancies, and plan shared services to reduce footprint of IT infrastructure. Agencies can start with a confirmation of the scope and content of infrastructure services, e.g. telecommunication, mobile services, and hosting services. They can then take a structured approach to collecting inventory and costing information and organizing them into portfolios. Using the portfolio approach, agencies can conduct "what-if" scenarios and prioritize their infrastructure investments, which can help agency CIOs make business cases for infrastructure consolidation and cloud computing. IT center consolidations and to some extent outsourcing reduce the footprint and save a lot of money.
There are opportunities out there. A few years back, Congress required GAO to investigate and produce an annual report which identifies and reports on federal programs, agencies, offices, and initiatives which have duplicative goals or activities.

GAO issued its first report in March 2011.[3] It identified 34 areas with similar or overlapping objectives or similar services or fragmentation across multiple agencies or programs. It also identified 47 other opportunities for agencies to reduce costs or enhance revenue collection. In February 2012, GAO issued a follow-up to this March 2011 report, which found 4 areas addressed, 60 areas partially addressed, and 17 areas not addressed. [4]

Also in February 2012, GAO issued its second annual report. [5] That report found 32 areas of duplication, overlap, or fragmentation among federal programs. It also identified another 19 opportunities for agencies to reduce costs or enhance revenue collection.

[3] *Opportunities to Reduce Potential Duplication in Government Programs, Save Tax Dollars, and Enhance Revenue,* Government Accountability Office report no. GAO-11-318SP, March 1, 2011 (see www.gao.gov/products/GAO-11-318SP).
[4] *Status of Actions Taken to Reduce Duplication, Overlap, and Fragmentation, Save Tax Dollars, and Enhance Revenue,* Government Accountability Office report no. GAO-12-453SP, February 28, 2012 (see www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-453SP).

[5] *2012 Annual Report: Opportunities to Reduce Duplication, Overlap and Fragmentation, Achieve Savings, and Enhance Revenue,* Government Accountability Office report no. GAO-12-342SP, February 28, 2012he Budget and Economic Outlook, FY2012 to 2023, Congressional Budget Office, February 2013 (see www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-342SP).

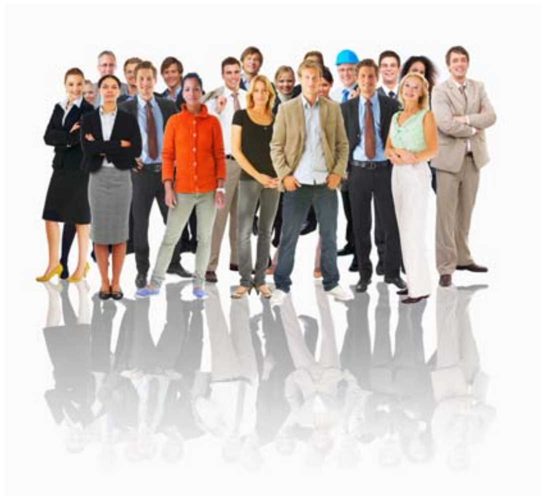
Leading Cost Management Practice 5: Reduce Headcount

For many government entities, the cost of human capital can be 50 percent or more of total outlays. In the public sector, people decisions and reductions are difficult to make, take significant time, and are not always based on performance. In the commercial sector, large scale cost reductions that involve significant reductions in people are based on factors like performance rather than longevity. People decisions are made in days not months and everyone understands that the work and requirements ahead will be difficult and challenging. For the private sector, it's not as easy as it sounds. But getting things done in this area is easier than in the public sector.

Headcount reductions ought to be driven largely by the strategic actions and goals set forth in the cost reduction plan. Headcount reductions resulting from the strategic decisions to reduce or eliminate selected programs will have more immediate results because the work is no longer necessary. Intermediate opportunities that come from the streamlining of process and activities described above will provide some level of work reduction, but it's the elimination or scaling back of existing programs that makes large scale cost reduction possible and attainable.

Some headcount reductions may be accomplished through a freeze on hiring of low priority positions. One lawmaker recently highlighted a number of potentially unnecessary position vacancies agencies might consider not filling rather than cut more strategic positions.[6] Agencies can use cost reduction imperatives to shape their workforces.

Collaboration with employee unions and navigating the government's labyrinthine workforce laws and regulations are essential to managing the workforce strategically through the inevitable downsizing. Leveraging the federal government's workforce management flexibilities takes knowledge, experience, and skill. Although it will be difficult, leadership commitment can help organizations enhance their organization while reducing one of their major cost drivers.



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[6] See http://www.coburn.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File_id=1b63826e-9d75-417d-b3d5-57b790468713.

Large-Scale Cost Reduction is Possible

When undertaking large scale cost reductions, something big has got to go. It's unavoidable. Unlike conventional tools like process improvement and waste elimination, where the goal is to do the same work but with fewer resources, large scale cost reduction means eliminating work altogether. Government entities, with the Congress serving as a sort of Board of Directors, decide what work/programs can be eliminated, reduced, or combined. Identifying which part of the work load and programs will be reduced or discontinued must be determined before cost reductions can occur.

In the public sector, target costs (i.e., funding reductions) will likely be passed down from Congress. Managers and leaders of government agencies and programs will be required to modify their strategy to meet those new, lower cost targets.

The requirement for reducing the deficit will not go away. The challenge to government agencies is enormous and the decisions and actions required are significant. While difficult, it is not impossible. The tools, methods, and practices described in this White Paper have been used successfully in both the private and public sectors. The need for cost reduction has never been more real. If federal agencies don't identify ways to make deep surgical cuts, they can expect blunt budgetary reductions that will likely hinder their ability to achieve their missions for years to come.

About the Author

John A. Miller has over 40 years of experience, a large portion of which has been in industry where he held the positions of CFO for a publicly held New York Stock Exchange manufacturing company and for a privately owned independent oil and gas exploration and production company. Mr. Miller was instrumental in the development of global cost management consulting practice at a large management consulting firm. With this background, John brings the mindset of a CFO and the skills of a consultant to client projects.

Mr. Miller is an internationally known speaker, writer, and principal author of ONE-EIGHTY, a newsletter for the performance management and measurement community. His landmark work, *Implementing Activity-Based Management in Daily Operations* (John Wiley and Sons), is a definitive work on methods and practices for improving organizational performance and financial results. His articles and papers have been published in dozens of magazines.

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For more Information Contact:

Ashok G. Vadgama, President, CAM-I
Tel: 512.617.6428
Cell: 512.296.6872
Email: ashok@cam-i.org

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For more Information Contact:

Robert Shea, Principal
Tel: 703.637.2780
Email: robert.shea@us.gt.com