





Reimagine the Financial Management Workforce

for Success in an Age of Innovation

By Sean Vineyard, David Fitz, Leroy Larkins and Amy Parker

For public servants, it is understood that the government – whether federal, state, local or otherwise – does not operate like a business. In short, it is because business exists to make a profit through the provision of goods and services, while government, with little-to-no regard for profit, exists to serve citizens. However, government shares likenesses with certain aspects of business, such as attracting and retaining talent, while it also faces the challenges of a structured, time-consuming and, at times, prohibitive hiring process subject to various requirements not generally found in the private sector. Since employees are the highest value asset in any enterprise, the government – with its many idiosyncrasies in hiring and keeping its workforce – could benefit from a new plan to meet these challenges.

This article explores the Learning Enhancement, Advancement and Development (LEAD) Model, designed by the authors to help organizations create a program that attracts, develops and retains leading talent to maximize their ability to achieve missions and objectives. While LEAD does not exclusively serve the federal financial management (FFM) community, we developed the model with FFM insights and experiences from our collective service of more than a century. The LEAD Model focuses on elevating employee user-experience to help government agencies handle challenges posed by cumbersome government hiring processes and still ensure they hire and develop a talented workforce capable of responding to ever-increasing FFM demands.

In a rapidly evolving technological environment, new concepts such as data analytics, robotic process automation (RPA), artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing, and intelligent automation (IA) bombard the government workforce. With each evolution, expectations of the financial management (FM) community grow exponentially. LEAD-based approaches provide a solid foundation for organizations to accept and adapt to the ever-changing technological environment and leverage advancements to match experiential learning with the pace of the emerging technology. The LEAD Model can guide organizations to:

- ◇ Embrace change.
- ◇ Establish a customer-centric view.
- ◇ Develop a career success path and plan.

EMBRACE CHANGE

Implementing a new program, initiative or effort that departs from the status quo is considered change. The way organizations respond to change does not always reflect its benefits; therefore, change may not be perceived as good. A critical factor in the effectiveness and success of change is embracing the need for it and its subsequent outcomes. While many employees fear the implementation of technology poses a threat to jobs,¹ it will not replace the traditional, human workforce. Rather, employees' knowledge and abilities will strengthen as they develop skills in non-routine cognitive tasks, such as analysis, and, perhaps, take on new positions that were non-existent before the introduction of innovations. As a result, ignoring the need for new technology threatens the workforce more than adopting it.

Choosing the proper approach to change management can make the process more relatable for the people involved. By leading their humans as the high-value assets they are, organizations will develop a workforce more willing to accept change. To that end, insights and techniques from the LEAD Model are useful.

Understand Both Current and Future States

To properly effect change, an organization must understand the current state; therefore, a detailed analysis should be performed to understand the end-users or stakeholders and how organizational operations — namely people, processes and technology — function both as a system and as individuals contributing to the organizational ecosystem. With the proposed change in mind, the end goal, the future state, must also be envisioned. To navigate the path from the current to future state, an organization should possess a definitive understanding of the way each existing variable (people, processes and technology) will operate in the future. Likewise, it must anticipate future needs for additional people, processes and technology.

The preeminent variable in any change effort — and a cornerstone of the LEAD Model — demands managers understand the connection between the current and future states. An industry best practice for navigating organizational change that merits review is the ADKAR[®] Model developed by Prosci. An acronym, ADKAR[®] focuses on five actions and outcomes necessary for successful individual change and, therefore, successful organizational change:

- ◇ **Awareness** of the need for change. Offer detailed examples of challenges in using the current system.
- ◇ **Desire** to support the change. Explain why collaboration is the best way to achieve desired results.
- ◇ **Knowledge** of how to change. Develop the training process for the gap between the current and future states.
- ◇ **Ability** to demonstrate skills and behaviors. Share the importance of dual training opportunities; train with the new process; and align with policy in system training.
- ◇ **Reinforcement** to make the change stick. Document the ways consistency in communication affects employees before, during and after implementation.

An ADKAR[®] Model Case Study

It is important to remember that changing a process is simple. Instead, leaders must concentrate on the people involved and their response to change, which is far from simple. To be successful, leaders must adopt an agile change management strategy to handle “overall change culture as well as the microcosms within various significant programs and offices.”²

Implementation of the Veterans Affairs Time and Attendance Systems at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides a perfect case study of the practical application of the ADKAR[®] Model. While this initiative involved putting a system in place, it yielded an opportunity to convince thousands of reluctant stakeholders to accept, adopt and eventually champion change through deliberate

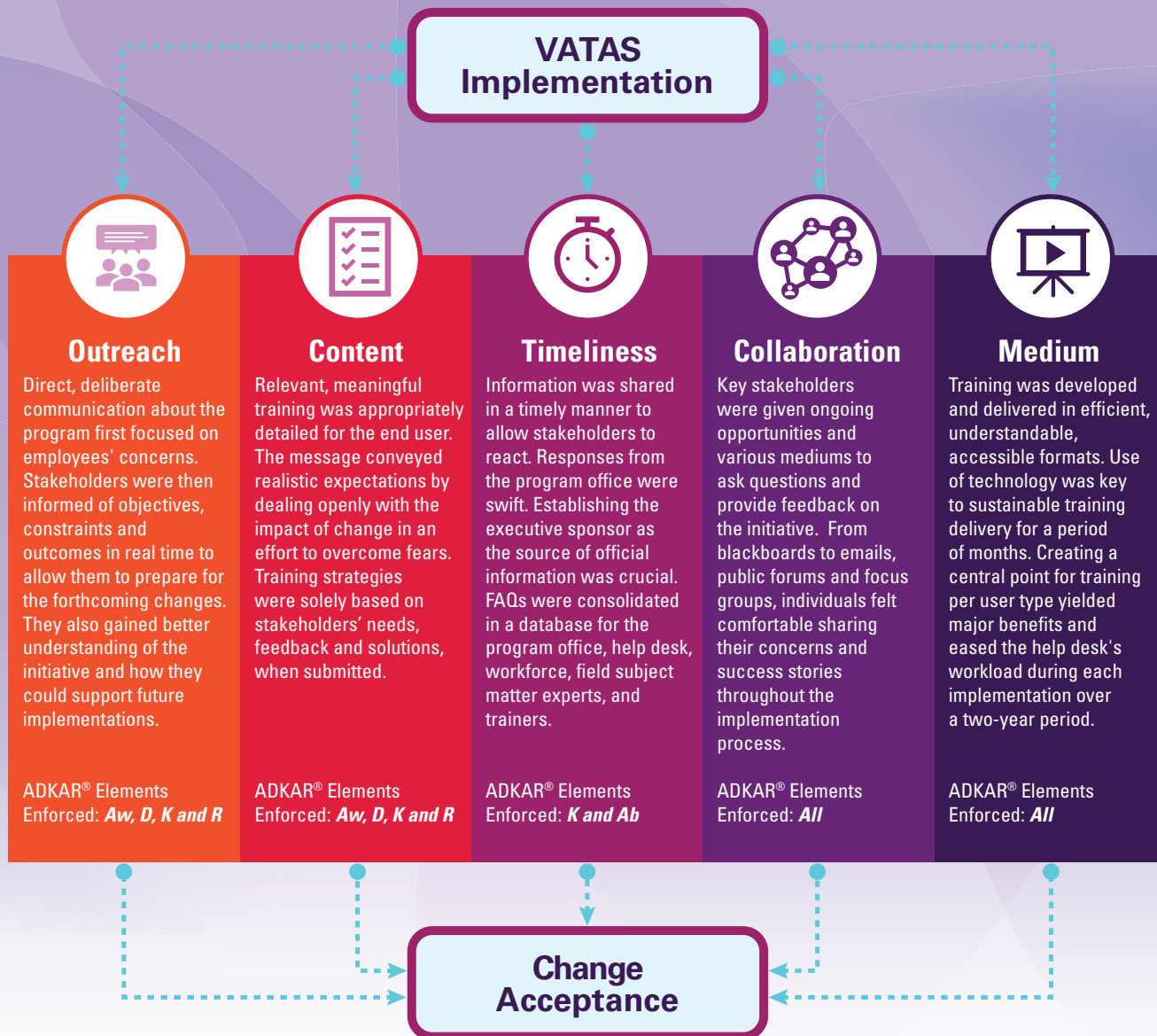
techniques. Critical success factors included developing and executing communications, training, and change management strategies, as detailed in **Figure 1**.

ESTABLISH A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC VIEW

Although the government is not a business, likenesses exist between the two. For example, both have customers outside and within organizations. Success in change management depends on approaching employees as customers, with their perceptions and needs in mind. To incorporate a customer-centric view, employers should:

- ◇ Define the consumers of programmatic resources and relevant outputs to better understand their program customers.
- ◇ Discover what motivates their people. Learn and understand the differences among populations of employees. Since varying factors fuel motivation in individuals, a unique mixture of techniques will propel an employee's driving force. Take time to recognize this concept and to understand these intrinsic motivations. For example, get to know the motivations among millennials, Gen Xer's and baby boomers — groups whose impetuses can diverge wildly.
- ◇ Understand what senior leaders seek in future leaders. Create a customized development process to help employees better understand expectations, should leadership be their desired path.
- ◇ Capture, gauge and monitor individual success. Just as motivation differs among employees, so does success. Develop a method to oversee individually defined achievement and create an atmosphere that better promotes success.
- ◇ Proactively request feedback from employees on all aspects of career activities and, where practical, integrate it into the process.
- ◇ Identify and develop or procure the appropriate tools and infrastructure to support a customer-centric

Figure 1. LEAD Implementation at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs through the Veterans Affairs Time Attendance System (VATAS)



view. Infrastructure will allow the organization to harness the time and energy spent understanding customers by tailoring administrative, mundane or support tasks to suit abilities and needs.

DEVELOP A CAREER SUCCESS PATH AND PLAN

Among the change management techniques used in the LEAD Model, the aspect arguably considered by employees to be one of the more

beneficial is a clearly articulated plan that binds all of the previously presented information. An effort of this magnitude would classify as a program — and a program needs a plan, a clear path from point A to point B. A career plan has three objectives:

- 1 Establish expectations with a high level of transparency.** Setting expectations is a communication technique for leaders to confirm and broadcast the skills, competencies and capabilities that should

be exhibited by employees at the various levels of their careers. By establishing expectations, employees gain the ability to understand what a role requires.

Transparency in setting expectations is vital to the communication process. Expectations are often conveyed in a vague or wavering way, but such a mindset will set up an organization and its employees for failure. A career success path and plan allow leaders to communicate expectations efficaciously.



Understand the LEAD Model

The LEAD Model is based on proven principles employed for decades. In his groundbreaking 1970 essay entitled “The Servant as Leader,” Robert Greenleaf defined servant leadership as a “philosophy and set of practices that enriches the lives of individuals, builds better organizations, and ultimately creates a more just and caring world.”³ Servant leadership is a central concept in developing the workforce, and its principles underpin a fruitful career journey.

Three Themes in LEAD

Three themes of servant leadership support the LEAD Model’s three principles of action — Enhancement, Advancement and Development. These three themes of servant leadership are:

- ◆ **Be Self-Aware** — Servant leaders understand and work actively to update their understanding of who they are, how they lead, and how peers, team members and leadership perceive them. This self-awareness is used to leverage strengths and build well-rounded teams while it also addresses weaknesses.
- ◆ **Put Others First** — A primary focus for servant leaders is the interests of others, including the organization(s) they support. While important, this theme is sandwiched between “Self-Awareness” and “Balance Results and Relationships” to ensure it does not become dominant. Servant leaders are not doormats or push-overs; instead, they are selfless, and their actions demonstrate kindness and courtesy.
- ◆ **Balance Results and Relationships** — Results are important, but so are maintaining professional relationships. Servant leadership involves finding a balance between the two. If results receive priority over relationships, teams become hardened and deadened, looking for reasons not to come to work and not to work with others. Ultimately, they become unhappy and underperform. With too much emphasis on relationships, too much time is spent listening to reasons why people say they cannot get things done, for example. By developing relationships and communicating expectations and results, high performance becomes natural.

These three themes, woven throughout the principles of the LEAD Model, act as fibers in a rope. Individually they can be reliable; however, as a group, they work in concert with one another and strengthen outcomes.

Three Principles of LEAD

As stated earlier, the LEAD Model principles include enhancement, advancement and development.

Enhancement

Functional enhancement of the workforce involves increasing their understanding of current financial management through a program to build competency in respective fields. Enhancement can take various forms, but it should include developing core expectations, evaluating the existing workforce, and creating a strategy to address workforce gaps. Examples of government agencies working to accomplish this goal include the Department of Defense FM certification program and the VA’s FM Training Initiative. Regardless of the approach taken, this element of the LEAD model maintains that prior education and training be considered to avoid unnecessary retraining. Without the foundational understanding of the workforce gained in this action, moving on to advancement and development becomes nearly impossible.

Advancement

A focus on complementary and supportive capability progression is critical. Consider competencies that are not required by a core function but would otherwise support it to form a highly effective multidisciplinary team. Also, evaluating emerging technologies for various FM functions

helps the FM community understand these advancement areas. For instance, data analytics techniques and software can significantly reinforce financial reporting; a combination of analytics and RPA can boost internal control testing; and IA can improve budgetary modeling for congressional budget justifications.

Another aspect of advancement demands consistent, recurring guidance throughout the process, including shadowing, mentoring, coaching, and continuous learning opportunities. Because required skills will likely be new to the workforce, this element of advancement plays a pivotal role in increasing the likelihood of success by providing a feedback loop.

Development

Emphasize employees’ career journeys as future leaders and, in this instance, as future leaders who leverage emerging technology. This progression in the leadership development cycle involves improving leadership skills at various points, broken into three distinctive phases:

- ◆ Self, Merging and Team Leaders.
- ◆ First-Line Supervisors.
- ◆ Managers and Senior Leaders.

The initial phase relates to accountability frameworks, coaching fundamentals, and the basics of partnering. The second phase, first-line supervisor development, focuses on management essentials, strategic planning frameworks, intermediate coaching skills, and decision-making models. The final phase concerns influencing and negotiating, conflict resolution, political environment savvy, financial and employee management, and mastery of coaching skills.

2 Provide a platform to evaluate success.

With expectations set, employees often desire to understand their career trajectory and what needs to happen to progress along the path. Evaluations must occur at various points. By mapping a career path, organizations can determine the intervals at which assessments will take place and the criteria for success. Without such a plan, employees merely assume and estimate progress.

3 Give employees flexibility in their career growth direction, trajectory and speed. Career success paths and plans should offer multiple tracks from which employees can choose to best support their career visions. One may want to become highly technical and support a myriad of initiatives, while another may want to lead large teams. Multiple tracks allow for that flexibility.

Additionally, consider moving away from the traditional annual performance evaluation process. Employees do not achieve significant milestones every year, so performance measures should not be evaluated on that schedule. Several recent studies indicate fluid, objective-based performance reviews will help employees by rewarding them when they are performing at the next level, instead of months or even longer after meeting a goal.⁴

By emphasizing the employee user experience, the LEAD Model provides a path to change that is

intuitive. It creates an experience designed to meet the needs and desires of each employee rather than an outdated approach that is “one size fits all.” Organizations must balance employees’ desires for career development and how these wants assist organizations to achieve their objectives. The LEAD Model serves as the mechanism to manage the balance. █

Endnotes

1. The 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer revealed that 47% of people worldwide think technological innovation is happening too fast and causing change that is not good; 59% believe they lack training or skills needed for a well-paying job in a tech environment; and 55% think innovations are taking away jobs.

2. Vineyard, Sean and Quimby Kaizer. “Enhancing Capabilities and Culture through Effective Coordination of Enterprise Risk Management and Internal Control.” In Stanton & Fletcher (Eds), *Public Sector Enterprise Risk Management – Advancing Beyond the Basics*. New York: Routledge Publishing, 2019; p. 89.

3. Greenleaf, Robert K. *The Servant as Leader*. Cambridge, Mass: Center for Applied Studies, 1970.

4. Cappelli, Peter and Anna Travis. “The Performance Management Revolution,” *Harvard Business Review*, October 2016.



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