

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT



Open Culture Plan

Version 1.0

November 2010

a New Day for Federal Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Does the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM):

- Wish to support our mission and innovation through sharing information openly and collaborating with external stakeholders to engage their voice, build trust, and draw upon diverse creative thought from the American people?
- Envision organizations across OPM collaborating to solve complex, interdependent problems to arrive at new solutions for old issues?
- Want to engage and empower employees while advancing learning and leveraging the work that has already been done in areas such as work/life balance to fulfill our mission and become known as one of the best places to work in the Federal Government?
- See the importance of preparing our future leaders by being a learning organization that supports knowledge workers and focuses on continuous learning and career development?
- Value providing a solid foundation for current and future OPM initiatives?

This document shows how OPM can create a foundation for reaching these goals and many others by embracing a culture of openness – transparency, participation, and collaboration.

Over 50 individuals from offices throughout the Agency, the union, other agencies, academia, and non-profit organizations put their heads together to articulate how OPM can attain a state of openness. This document is the result of these efforts.

In the following pages, readers will find an examination of six thematic areas on which OPM needs to work to become open and a vision for a future in which we and our stakeholders enjoy the benefits of openness. These themes are:

- Risk, change, and empowerment
- Communication, collaboration, and information
- Organizational silos
- Training, education, and continuous learning
- Performance management
- Sustainability

For example, widespread aversion to risk and little empowerment of employees impair our ability to be open, as does our preference for not reaching out beyond our organizational units to solve problems that affect a variety of stakeholders, including other organizations within OPM. Also, the tendency to equate learning with seat time in training classes without accountability for application of new knowledge impairs managers' and employees' ability to achieve higher levels of performance.

We provide recommendations on how OPM can:

- **Engage and serve external stakeholders better** to meet the Agency's mission
- **Focus on leadership, management, and performance** to find good role models and strengthen accountability
- **Foster continuous learning and accept failure as part of the learning and change processes** to find innovative solutions to our problems
- **Revisit policies, processes, and procedures** to maximize our ability to work together and with stakeholders
- **Understand, explain, embrace, live, and reward openness** to ensure that the changes we bring about are sustainable and we have a solid foundation for other initiatives
- **Use the people, knowledge, and skills we already have** to recruit, retain, and honor OPM's own employees while better serving other Federal employees, job seekers, annuitants, other agencies, and the many others we serve

Parts of the Agency are already following these best practices; it is essential that all of OPM enjoy opportunities to learn, grow, and become more effective. Together, we must support learning in the broadest sense of the word and acknowledge "the dependency of change on the capacity of the organization (the collective) to learn – to learn as an entity, not merely as the sum of the individual learning of its members. Effective organizational change can only occur when both performance and learning occur for the collective" (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000, p. 25). Only then will we all be able to perform at the highest possible level and fully reach our mission: to recruit, retain, and honor a world-class workforce to serve the American people.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction.....	1
	Open Government and Open Culture	1
	About This Document	2
II.	Benefits of an Open and Collaborative Culture	3
III.	Problem Statement	4
IV.	Current Culture	5
	Risk, Change, and Empowerment	6
	Communication, Collaboration, and Information	6
	Organizational Silos	7
	Training, Education, and Continuous Learning	8
	Performance Management.....	8
	Sustainability	9
V.	Future Open Culture	9
	Risk, Change, and Empowerment	10
	Communication, Collaboration, and Information	11
	Organizational Silos	12
	Training, Education, and Continuous Learning	12
	Performance Management.....	12
	Sustainability	13
VI.	The Gaps Between the Current Culture and the Future Culture	13
	Contextual Factors.....	13
	Organizational Factors.....	13
	Individual Factors.....	14
VII.	The Challenges in Creating an Open and Collaborative.....	16

Environment..... 16

VIII.Recommendations for Enabling OPM to Move to an Open Culture 17

 Engage and serve external stakeholders better 17

 Focus on leadership, management, and performance..... 17

 Foster continuous learning and accept failure as part of the learning and change processes 18

 Revisit policies, processes, and procedures..... 19

 Understand, explain, embrace, live, and reward openness..... 19

 Use the people, knowledge, and skills we already have..... 20

IX. Next Steps 20

X. Conclusion 21

XI. References..... 22

Appendix I: OPM’s Culture: Current, Future, and Gaps 23

Appendix II: Moving to the Open Culture..... 25

Appendix III: 2010 Employee Viewpoint Survey Questions (cited)..... 26

I. INTRODUCTION

In order to fulfill the requirements of the [Open Government Directive](#) of December 2009 (OMB M-10-06), the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) established an Open Government Core Team comprising thirteen representatives designated by the Agency's senior leadership and the union. That team, in turn, produced OPM's Open Government Plan and Open Government Forum Charter, which have already been approved by the Executive Board, as well as this Open Culture Plan.

This document provides recommendations to the Executive Board on creating and fostering an open culture at OPM. It is the foundation for [wider efforts](#), starting with the Agency's [Open Government Plan](#), as revised in June 2010, and [Open Government Forum Charter](#) of May 2010. These efforts are part of the overall [Open Government Initiative](#).

Open Government and Open Culture

An Open Government is one that is transparent, participatory, and collaborative. Sharing data and information, hearing and implementing ideas, and engaging in ongoing conversation with employees and the public not only increase our own accountability but also build trust with the American people. Listening and building upon ideas shared by others enables us to become more innovative, effective, and efficient in the work we do.

For an organization to practice openness, its culture must foster openness – that is, it must exhibit and promote values, norms, and behaviors that lead to consistent acts of transparency, participation, and collaboration, both within the organization and with external stakeholders. Openness is inherent in OPM's organizational values and strategic plan, but it is not uniformly fostered or practiced throughout the Agency. We must support and encourage those among us who are deeply committed to practicing openness while remaining aware of the importance of avoiding invading individuals' privacy or jeopardizing security. After all, culture comprises our values and gives meaning to what we do. The more we succeed at achieving openness, the better we, together, will reach our goals – hire the best, respect the workforce, expect the best, and honor service – to fulfill our mission: “Recruit, Retain and Honor a World-Class Workforce to Serve the American People.”

We seek a transparent, participatory, and collaborative work environment at OPM that ensures accountability, rewards sensible risk taking, values superior customer service, and achieves efficient, high-impact results. In striving to make OPM's culture more open, we must leverage the Agency's customer or stakeholder focus to make OPM more responsive to external stakeholders (e.g., job seekers, retirees, annuitants, academicians, Government-watch organizations and other Federal agencies) and a more pleasant and rewarding place to work. In this way, we will better serve all of our stakeholders all of the time.

The complaints that OPM receives regarding its customer service and the most recent Employee Viewpoint Survey (EVS) regarding job satisfaction demonstrate the importance of working to improve on both these fronts, but across OPM we can find individuals and groups who provide exemplary customer service and make OPM a place of professional growth and great camaraderie. We must draw on these people and their knowledge to make OPM ever more open.

Becoming open is an ongoing and always incomplete process, one that requires commitment to sustaining transparency, participation, and collaboration through integration of the principles of openness into OPM's business model in a uniform manner across the Agency. For this reason, it is essential that we address OPM's culture in open and frank conversation, not only now, but also as we move forward with enhancing openness at OPM.

About This Document

OPM's Open Government Plan and Charter called for the establishment of five Component Teams. The Executive Board and union nominated members for the Component Teams, and Core Team members sought additional external participants from academia, other agencies, and non-profit organizations. The result was five new teams comprising OPM employees, union representatives, academics, other agency employees, and non-profit participants. These teams began meeting in July 2010, and their first task was to conduct a detailed examination of OPM's culture. As the Core Team has done since it first met in February 2010, the Component Teams took an Action Learning (Marquardt, 1999) approach in their discussions on developing an open culture. Action Learning is a strategic effort to prepare groups with fresh thinking and to encourage people to learn as they explore new ways of solving problems. This learning-while-working approach builds upon generating new questions to existing knowledge followed by periods of reflection and action.

The Component Teams identified a problem related to OPM's culture, discussed the current and desired future culture, recognized the gaps between those two states, generated ideas for improvement based on their diverse expertise and referenced literature, noted many benefits and challenges, and offered some suggestions for next steps.

In August 2010, the Component Teams submitted documents to the Core Team based on ideas generated from their discussions. The Core Team synthesized all of the information shared by the Component Teams, inquiries received through the Open Government email and blog, and the results of the 2010 EVS. As such, this document draws on the reflective thinking and valuable perspectives of the 51 Open Government team members internal and external to OPM, including experts in the fields of organizational theory, diagnosis, change, and practice, as well as data from other sources. Overall, the analysis found that OPM has some very positive practices in its current culture; however, there are many areas needing significant improvement. The abundant and rich data gathered from these various sources were categorized into the following primary

interrelated cultural themes for ease of discussion throughout this document: (1) risk, change, and empowerment; (2) communication, collaboration, and information; (3) organizational silos; (4) training, education, and continuous learning; (5) performance management; and (6) sustainability.

Next, readers will find a discussion of the benefits of an open and collaborative environment, the problem statement that the Core Team produced based on the Component Teams' work, and sections on the current culture at OPM, the Agency's future open culture, gaps between the current culture and future culture, challenges we can expect to encounter, recommendations, and next steps.

II. BENEFITS OF AN OPEN AND COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

An environment in which information is shared, trust is high, learning and innovation are encouraged, and collaboration is the norm will be a vibrant environment in which OPM will be more efficient, effective, responsive, accountable, and respected by stakeholders.

For employees, this improved environment will mean:

- A clearer understanding of what is expected of them;
- Greater engagement and more commitment to OPM's mission, a feeling of ownership of the change and of their work, and improved participation in decision making;
- Greater accessibility of information, making their jobs easier;
- Many opportunities to learn and more room to grow professionally, leading employees to become knowledge workers prepared for the challenges of the future;
- Reduced job-related stress, higher morale, and greater job satisfaction; and
- The ability to produce more and better work products with the same effort. Openness will make for a virtuous cycle in which a reduced need for rework will both result from and cause improved efficiency, freeing employees to make better use of their talents and do the many things they now leave "on the backburner."

All of these changes will be mutually beneficial to employees and the Agency, and the benefits that accrue to the Agency will reinforce those gains. OPM will:

- Enjoy strong organizational performance and the ability to react nimbly to challenges and changes as they arise;
- Draw on an enhanced talent pool with diverse thoughts that will lead to frequent innovation;

- Be more efficient and effective, in part through better communication across the Agency, between leadership and staff, and with external stakeholders;
- Be more credible in the eyes of all stakeholders and more accountable to them;
- Have lower costs because of a reduction in duplication of efforts;
- Benefit from a better distribution of responsibilities and resources;
- Develop better policies – ones that are up-to-date and data-driven;
- Benefit from improved recruitment and retention: the public will see the Federal Government as an exemplary employer, and satisfied employees will be more likely to stay; and
- Enjoy continuous learning and improved transfer of institutional knowledge, aiding succession planning.

For non-OPM stakeholders, including other agencies, job seekers, retirees, academics, and members of the general public, perhaps the primary benefits will be more responsive customer service and more consistent answers to their questions, but several other benefits will also accrue to them:

- Easier access to information that is more complete and accurate, including through self-help tools;
- Engagement with OPM, helping stakeholders better understand and value our work, in turn mitigating frustrations when we are unable to provide them what they want (e.g., when OPM is not the responsible agency in the area in which they seek assistance);
- Greater satisfaction with OPM; and
- More trust in OPM.

Frequent evaluations will provide data on transparency, participation, and collaboration at OPM, supporting continuous improvement in all of these areas and allowing the benefits to continue to accrue.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Through the Action Learning process, the Component Teams all developed problem statements that were interestingly similar as they relate to OPM's current culture and openness. The teams identified the internal regulatory requirements of our mission and our role in a larger stakeholder network. Many entities in this network do not have a clear understanding of respective roles and

relationships. The Core Team agreed on the following problem statement related to creating an Open Culture at OPM; all Component Team voices are heard through this statement:

OPM is part of an interdependent network of stakeholders, both internal and external to the Agency, who do not always share a mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities. In this environment, OPM demonstrates inconsistencies in exhibiting, supporting, and maintaining the values, norms, and behaviors associated with openness (i.e., transparency, participation, and collaboration) needed to enhance and enable transformation, innovation, accountability, engagement, and effectiveness in support of our mission. These challenges impact the Agency's ability to be proactive in, be known for, and excel at delivering services.

IV. CURRENT CULTURE

In this document, we present a problem that OPM's culture faces and ways in which to address this problem; therefore, the document naturally has a somewhat negative tone. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that OPM's current culture has many positive aspects from which we can draw inspiration and momentum; we do not mean to turn OPM on its head.

OPM is a regulatory agency with a large footprint. We have not only a Government-wide impact, but also a reach into the lives of many members of the American public. As our Strategic Plan and espoused values make clear, it is our responsibility to treat all our stakeholders promptly, equitably, and with respect.

OPM has talented employees who can lead the way to openness. Many employees and teams are highly motivated and high-performing. The Agency has inspirational pockets of innovation and examples of passionate leadership. OPM has managers and staff who hold each other mutually accountable. Furthermore, there are members of the OPM community who are willing to take calculated risks. In short, OPM's culture and leadership are not uniform; the Agency's task is to leverage the positive while transforming the negative to foster employee role models for cooperation and career advancement.

An abundance of resources does not guarantee high performance or openness in organizations. However, the uneven distribution of resources, in the form of money, training, and technologies, negatively impacts OPM's ability to motivate employees in units with fewer resources or maintain consistently high performance throughout the Agency. Reliance upon various streams of revenue drives some of us to be particularly creative and relentlessly strategic in finding ways to reduce inconsistencies in employee experiences across the Agency.

Below, we discuss each of the six interrelated themes mentioned in the introduction as they present themselves in OPM’s culture today. As available and appropriate we also provide data points from OPM’s EVS to further substantiate these qualitative findings. In parentheses, we note the OPM percentage of positive responses to the related topic questions; cited EVS questions are found in Appendix III. An interesting finding of the EVS is that as the grade level of employees increases so too does their sense of satisfaction.

Risk, Change, and Empowerment

All of the Component Teams indicated sensible risk-taking was not consistently expected, valued, or rewarded in the current OPM culture. Having few incentives, we share a culture averse to change and innovation (EVS Question # 32, 39.7%).

Since OPM’s political senior leadership changes with the Administration, the incentive to wait it out until the new leadership arrives can be greater than the incentive to take risks or embrace change. This makes ensuring continuity of efforts a difficult task.

Nonetheless, at the Division level, incremental change does occur. However, this acceptance of change is not universal. Rather, it is dependent upon the willingness of the individual organizational leader to accept risk, promote change, and empower employees. As a result, empowered employees (EVS Question # 30, 48%) exist in parts of OPM – in organizations that have leaders who value and are willing to assume the risk of sharing power with employees.

Communication, Collaboration, and Information

Throughout OPM, informal alliances are a primary way for individuals to acquire information. Studies have indicated that informal ties and gossip can strengthen communities (Winerman, 2006). However, secretive practices paired with inadequate use of OPM’s formal means of communication lead to a situation in which information that should be communicated officially instead makes its way through the organization by word-of-mouth. Often the result is significant distortions of the message in what resembles a version of the classic game “telephone.” That is to say, at times we *replace* formal communication with rumors rather than *supplementing* formal communication with informal sensemaking (Weick, 1979) and community building. These inefficient flows of information negatively affect trust (EVS Question #51, 69.7%). Nonetheless, OPM has formal means of communication (EVS Question #56, 72.1%) that can be better leveraged, and the collective bargaining agreements that the Agency has in place are another way to share information and collaborate with employees.

Without trust, honest communication is impossible (EVS Question # 64, 53.8%). So, although opportunities for sharing information exist, these are limited or discouraged. Transparency is limited, and employees are selectively open with each other and even more so with the external world.

Thus, information that flows at the various levels of OPM's hierarchy is uneven, leaving line employees feeling confused and undervalued. To help alleviate this problem, managers could seek to share more information with their staff. Likewise, OPM line employees have great technical knowledge and could share that information more (EVS Question #26, 76%).

From the outside, OPM can appear arbitrary and capricious, and the information that OPM releases is not uniformly viewed as complete, accurate, easily accessible, timely, or intelligible. Justifications for withholding data can appear inconsistent, and when OPM publicly releases information, that information can be difficult to find or it may be presented without context, preventing the public from learning much from what OPM releases. Aggravating the situation is that fact that other agencies are often responsible for data that members of the public expect OPM to have, resulting in a perception that OPM is intentionally withholding information or simply not providing service. In other cases, the information simply has not been collected but members of the public expect it to be available through OPM. These misconceptions make it all the more important for OPM to clearly and publicly explain what information it has and does not have – and to be consistent in releasing or withholding information that OPM does hold.

Our ability to trust one another is somewhat impaired – and we are usually too focused on the crisis of the moment to think broadly and strategically – so it is no wonder collaboration outside of our units is the exception rather than the norm (EVS Question #59, 58.9%). This environment, plus the fact that OPM is a regulatory agency, allows for a general perception within the Agency that the need to seek input from or collaborate with others is very limited. Although we have some admirable examples of success, collaboration with external stakeholders is not highly valued or properly credited. Thus, external collaboration is even more difficult to achieve and sustain than internal collaboration.

Organizational Silos

OPM is a small agency, but due to its mission and regulatory nature, it has a large, Government-wide role. The Agency's decisions affect other agencies and employees across the Federal Government, as well as job seekers, retirees, employees' and retirees' families, and a range of non-governmental groups. Nonetheless, a holistic view of our stakeholders is largely lacking because each part of OPM is aware of its own stakeholders without necessarily taking the whole of OPM into account.

Various organizations within OPM have defined roles and expertise; at times, it is all too easy to overlook the fact that they are interdependent. As discussed under "Communication, Collaboration, and Information," above, we seldom work together across organizational boundaries (EVS Questions 58, 55.1%; 59, 58.9%). One result of this insufficiency in collaboration is multiple parallel projects that if combined or coordinated could make OPM more effective and efficient in meeting its mission. We tend to value highly technical knowledge more

than strong leadership skills so often see the need to protect our area of expertise; this further exacerbates the problem of organizational silos within OPM.

For example, we may procure similar information technology (IT) systems independently for a particular program rather than better utilizing resources by sharing across OPM. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for an inquirer to contact OPM through multiple channels and receive different answers to the same question – especially a question that touches on more than one organization’s expertise – or worse for such inquiries that go unanswered.

Still, there are examples of collaboration across organizational silos and with external stakeholders. One such example is Open Government: we have worked across the agency in the Core Team and both internally and externally on the Component Teams. Another example is the Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCO) Council.

Training, Education, and Continuous Learning

While OPM has pockets of high-quality learning and development, including Action Learning teams, training is often about one-time events. Employees attend highly technical courses that are specifically needed for a particular task, but when they take less technical courses, opportunities to apply what they learned to their work are harder to come by. OPM expends substantial resources in the form of time and funds, continuous learning and employee development remain inadequate (EVS Questions #1, 61.7%; #18, 54.8%; #27, 56.5%; #47, 69%; #68, 53.5%).

Performance Management

Among many internal and external stakeholders, OPM’s image is negative: the Agency is seen as non-responsive or even indifferent to the public. Daily routines, heavy workloads (EVS Question #10, 56.1%), and the need to respond to crises keep us reactive rather than proactive. This leaves little room for strategic thinking or embracing change and results in a cycle of quick and temporary fixes.

OPM has models of more open and proactive behaviors. Although we have pockets of strong collaborative leadership and talented, dedicated staff available to lead and empower employees to embrace openness, we need more such role models. Additionally, there are few rewards for being transparent with our stakeholders.

The individual decisions, practices, behaviors, and actions of OPM managers and staff are driven by position descriptions (PDs), and these PDs do not encourage collaboration or strategic thinking. Limited professional growth opportunities and resources for training and development in many organizations within OPM further contribute to a tendency not to look beyond one’s PD

for other opportunities. The result of this situation, for many employees, is low morale and a feeling that career advancement is not possible (EVS Question #67, 39.3%).

Members of OPM’s Open Government teams noted that the current delegations of authority and responsibility, as well as the setting of expectations of performance (including how positions fit into OPM’s strategic plan) affect employee performance and were not written with openness in mind. Furthermore, low morale in many parts of the Agency leads to apathy and indifference to the vital role that each individual plays in recruiting, retaining, and honoring the Federal workforce, thereby serving the American people.

Sustainability

Although there is stagnation within OPM, in some ways the Agency is in a position of constant unrest, making sustainability a crucial concern for any initiative – in fact, it may be difficult to imagine sustaining openness for years to come. Most obviously, changes in upper management and the political landscape are commonplace, as are updates to OPM’s Strategic Plan. Will a change in personnel, a new priority, or reduced public attention to openness affect OPM’s ability to be open? Since openness is essential to improving the quality of our daily work and the way we serve the American people, the need to build sustainability into Open Government is clear. We cannot afford to see openness as we view many other initiatives: as something that will pass. Rather, becoming more open needs to be seen as a different way of fulfilling our mission-related responsibilities, as something that is ongoing and never fully realized.

Similarly, shifting mission priorities and initiatives, as well as differences in opinion by political appointees and career employees at different management levels, can spell confusion for employees, thereby leaving programs, initiatives, and practices in a state of flux. Furthermore, all personnel do not share the same sense of urgency for completion of tasks or programmatic goals. The tendency to see everything as a priority – to be reactive rather than proactive – likewise fuels instability and uncertainty for staff. Finally, an overall lack of clarity or understanding among some stakeholders regarding OPM’s roles and mission, as well as the benefits of Open Government, could jeopardize the long-term sustainability of Open Government.

For all these reasons, keeping an eye on sustainability at all stages of our Open Government efforts is essential.

V. FUTURE OPEN CULTURE

We envision a future state for OPM in which the existing pockets of strong, collaborative leadership model open behaviors and lead by example. Given the opportunity, others will follow these examples, resulting in “snowballing” as the move toward openness gains momentum and

grows measurably: some people will be early adopters (Rogers, 1962), while others will resist the new models. OPM must take advantage of early adopters and allow them to be champions for change among their peers. Organizational commitment will then grow at all levels, with ever-increasing motivation, investment, and trust in Open Government principles. Throughout the Agency, employees will be engaged in transparent behaviors and proactive, strategic thinking that will transcend the reactive behaviors common today.

People, trust, and relationships are at the crux of the change to a healthier, open culture. Without trust and confidence, buy-in will be limited. Trust and change can be simultaneous – an iterative process; if we enhance trust and confidence, we will be better able to help people adapt to changes in OPM’s culture and as a result better service our stakeholders.

Furthermore, external stakeholders will be more engaged with OPM, and our workforce will be even more diverse on more dimensions – gender, generation, background, perspectives and thoughts, culture, race and ethnicity, (dis)ability – leading to a workforce that is better able to understand the differing people we serve and support.

In the following sections, we provide a vision for OPM’s open culture organized by the six themes used earlier to describe the current culture.

Risk, Change, and Empowerment

For openness to become the norm at OPM, employees and managers must enjoy greater empowerment. They will be empowered to utilize innovation, seek solutions for a more Open Government, and make more decisions within their subject-matter expertise while ensuring that supervisors are kept informed of potential risks and benefits (i.e., OPM will enjoy a culture of “no surprises”). Employees will regularly seek to exceed expectations and “go the extra mile” rather than simply “check the box” to solve problems and improve services. They will communicate in plain language with stakeholders and exercise existing flexibilities within regulations rather than simply quote regulation, thereby enhancing OPM’s effectiveness and external image.

For sensible risk-taking to be expected, valued, and rewarded, trust and accountability must be the cultural norm. We must have mutual trust among political appointees, executives, managers, supervisors, and staff with open communication to help ensure that risks are assessed, anticipated, and mitigated. Likewise, accountability must be two-way: in order to trust their organizational superiors, employees must feel that their leadership is accountable to them for the quality of decisions made, all the way up the chain.

With openness and sensible risk-taking woven into the fabric of OPM’s culture, it will be easier to embrace change. Employees will feel empowered to try new things, knowing that some failure is an accepted component of innovation and improvement. For example, while

employees will continue to exercise great care with personally identifiable information (PII) and other sensitive information, no longer will an aversion to risk lead them to withhold data.

Communication, Collaboration, and Information

While OPM's collective mindset and processes will support transparency and a right to information, we will protect individuals' private information and other sensitive data. We will also remain aware of the necessity to balance openness through compliance with the law. That is to say, nothing in this plan is meant to imply that OPM should not take the Privacy Act, security legislation, and associated laws and regulations seriously.

However, keeping privacy concerns in mind, openness will be the norm at OPM. We will: (1) share information and knowledge freely, (2) communicate openly, and (3) collaborate with internal and external stakeholders so that we all benefit from the collective intelligence of a greater network of individuals and institutions. Diverse, creative thought will spur innovation, improvements, and stakeholder satisfaction.

By sharing information widely and through collaboration, OPM's role, mission, and strategic goals will be clearly understood by internal and external stakeholders alike. As such, there will be an increasing appreciation of OPM's decisions related to boundaries on data release; therefore, stakeholders will less likely view the Agency's decisions as arbitrary and capricious. Likewise, employees will be empowered to clearly communicate factual information with internal and external stakeholders in their subject-matter expertise: they will be knowledge workers who will speak with confidence in pursuit of accomplishing the mission.

As noted, technical subject-matter expertise is important to the accomplishment of OPM's mission; however, collaborative leadership skills must be highly valued as well. We will need to make regular assessments of leadership practices and policies that support two-way information sharing and accountability, participation and engagement, and collaboration internally and externally, all while executing the law, respecting privacy, and ensuring security.

We will enjoy an increase in public engagement. Multiple media will enable us to connect with and listen to a broader range of stakeholders, and the public will have easier and more effective means to collaborate with OPM, participate in policymaking processes, and play a part in implementation. The information that we provide will be accurate, easily accessible, timely, and easy to understand. We will release information before it is requested (i.e., without the need for a FOIA request) wherever feasible, and we will publicly disseminate internal directives wherever appropriate. In short, we will operate under a presumption of openness with all stakeholders.

Finally, we will become skilled at knowing when collaboration is appropriate and likely to work. We will consistently seek to determine with whom to partner, why, and for what desired

outcome to make honest determinations regarding whether we should seek to collaborate on a particular problem, project, or initiative (Pardo & Cresswell, 2010).

Organizational Silos

Organizational silos will be diminished at OPM. There will be mutual trust among political appointees, executives, managers, supervisors, and staff. We will enjoy a virtuous cycle in which trust will enable collaboration, which will build trust. Sharing information and distributing resources – for example, training, space and talent – equitably will be the norm. Collaboration across organizations and with the public will be commonplace, enabling OPM to seek innovative ideas through diverse perspectives to solve complex, Agency-wide problems. Through collaboration we will recognize our interdependencies and work together to speak in a single voice – “One OPM” – becoming an agency that gives prompt, consistent answers to questions. This will only be possible once we all share a holistic view of our stakeholders and understand that OPM’s stakeholder group is much larger than the sub-group a particular organization within the Agency is designed to serve.

Training, Education, and Continuous Learning

OPM will continue training and become a learning organization that develops knowledge workers through continuous learning; training and career development will be Agency priorities as we seek to prepare leaders of the future. Employees will be excited about learning: they will be eager to gain new knowledge through inquiry and reflection. Resources – tools, informal and formal training, and challenging learning experiences – will enable ongoing individual and team development and enhance opportunities for career growth. Moreover, OPM’s Open Government Flagship Initiative – *Knowledge Management and Collaboration Tools* – will provide easy access to and sharing of agency information (data, policies, procedures, processes, and training) for internal and external stakeholders alike, wherever they may be working. Thus, collaborative learning within and outside of OPM will be ongoing.

Performance Management

OPM will have a performance culture in which proactive, high-quality customer service will be common, expected, and rewarded. Clear expectations for performance that include collaboration internally and externally, responsiveness, and innovative and strategic thinking to support continual improvement will be communicated, measured and recognized. All of OPM, not only parts of the Agency, will be a consistently high-performing organization that will exercise influence over stakeholders in positive and appropriate ways: our responsiveness and the quality of our work will be apparent, and others will trust us. In this environment, employees will understand their role in OPM and be clearly aligned with the mission of the Agency. This cultural change will be supported by an openness competency measured in each person’s performance appraisal. As a result, we will be able to measure and assess progress toward

openness in the daily routine, as well as success in recruiting, retaining, and honoring a world-class workforce to serve the American people.

Sustainability

Openness will be sustained through ongoing review, creation, and updating of policies, processes, and procedures. This foundation coupled with good performance management will enable OPM employees to appreciate openness, take ownership of their work, and enjoy recognition for doing so. Performance management and the policy construct will together help weave openness into the fabric of the Agency to reinforce sustainable behaviors.

VI. THE GAPS BETWEEN THE CURRENT CULTURE AND THE FUTURE CULTURE

This section focuses in abstract terms on what OPM needs to move from the current culture to the culture we envision. Specific recommendations appear later in the document.

The gaps between where we are and where we desire to be fall into three overlapping and interdependent categories addressing contextual, organizational, and individual factors.

Contextual Factors

Inter- and intra-agency barriers to communication and collaboration hinder progress for OPM and other agencies in their efforts to: (1) share and receive information; (2) collaborate with one another to generate ideas and suggestions for needed products, services, policies, procedures, and initiatives; and (3) maximize the use of limited resources by decreasing duplication of efforts Government-wide.

Likewise, public stakeholders need to engage in OPM's activities to feel that they have a voice in their government and specifically at OPM. For example, one key OPM stakeholder group is job seekers, who may view employment with the Federal Government negatively if they are not engaged with our agency. Thus, as long as potential employees are hesitant about Federal employment, we will not fully meet our mission. Based on the above contextual factors the gap between the current and future culture is: robust civic engagement in Government disclosure, decision making, and policy implementation.

Organizational Factors

Two gaps related to organizational factors are evident. The first pertains to policies and procedures. A collaborative and transparent process engaging stakeholders in the creation, implementation, review, and revision of policies and procedures is lacking. Currently the creation of policies and procedures is not data driven but rather formulated internally or in response to Congressional request or change in law; we tell stakeholders what policies and procedures we believe they need with relatively little input from them.

Secondly, how we approach the notions of change, risk, and distribution of resources needs revision:

- Organizational change must be viewed as a process rather than as episodic or a short-term event. Change is a continuous process that enables organizations and the individuals who comprise organizations to remain refreshed and nimble in meeting the Agency’s mission;
- Across OPM, our culture must embrace an approach that consistently encourages leaders to provide a safe and comfortable environment for taking risks. Managers and employees must be empowered to take ownership of their work, think creatively, share knowledge internally and externally, learn and collaborate with others across organization and with the public, and build upon each others’ ideas; and
- There must be an equitable distribution of resources (training, talent, and space) across organizations to resolve Agency-wide challenges.

Individual Factors

Finally, at the individual level, the gap lies largely in the perception of OPM’s performance culture. To achieve openness at OPM, the Agency must have a performance culture that aligns employee development to organizational needs and promotes mutual accountability, communication, employee engagement, and continuous learning.

The following figure illustrates the relationship among the current and future states and gaps. For a more complete view, please see Appendix I. Appendix II illustrates how the three levels of factors are related; cultural transformation is a complex process that affects all levels of an organization’s functioning.

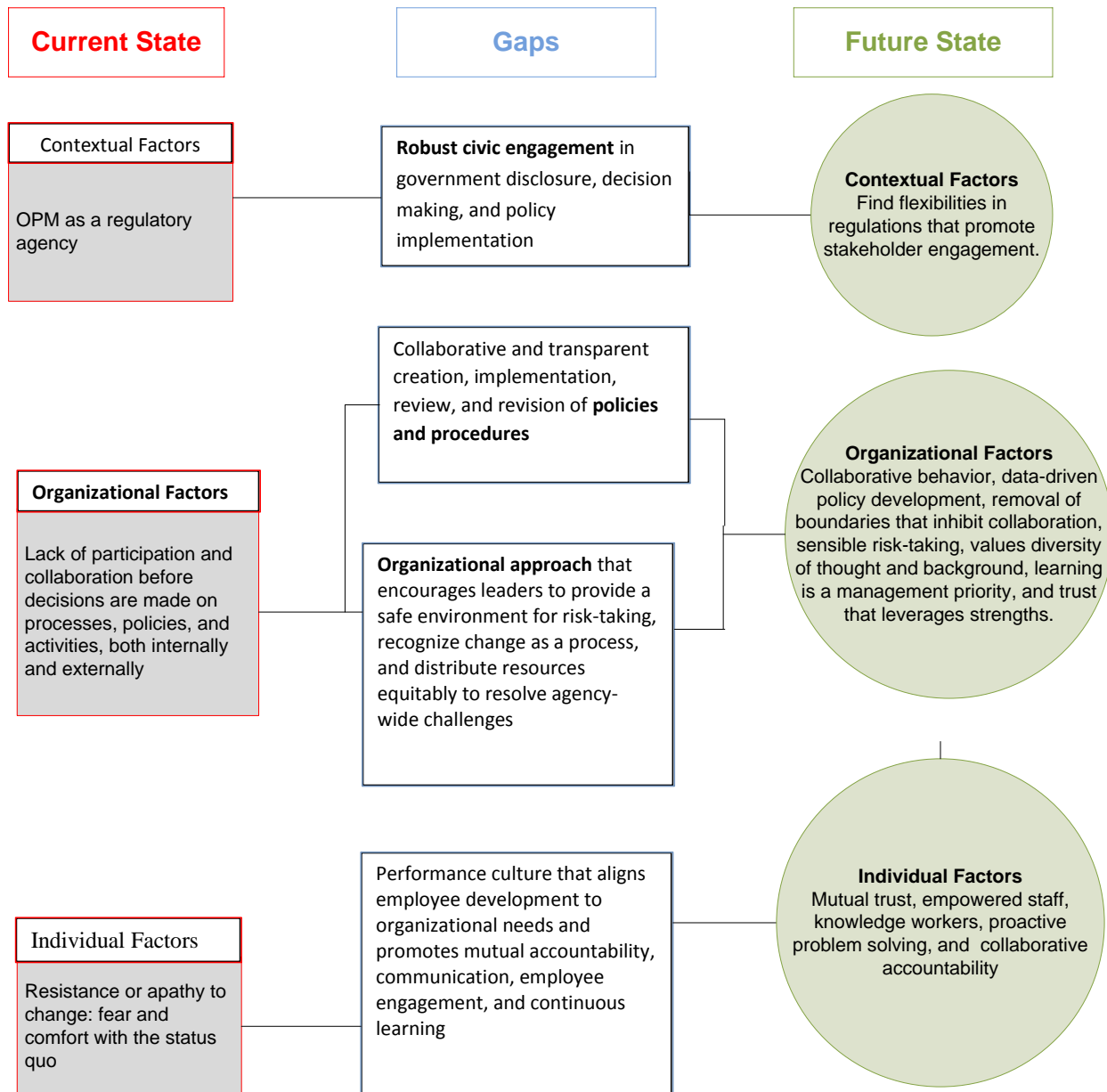


Figure 1: OPM Culture: Current State, Future State, and Gaps

VII. THE CHALLENGES IN CREATING AN OPEN AND COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Moving to an open and collaborative environment is a large and complex undertaking. This is an organizational change in which embedded models and practices must undergo radical reform. Great rewards can result from a positive change to an organization's environment, but moving through this transformation can present serious challenges as listed below. This change is possible, but it is a job to be shared by many.

On a practical level, for OPM's Flagship Initiative, we will face the challenge of collecting large amounts of information across the Agency as well as organizing, and maintaining that information over time. The **complexity** of the Flagship and of achieving openness more broadly at OPM should not be underestimated.

Four other sizeable challenges await us:

- **Resistance:** for any initiative to be successful, buy-in across the organization is essential and initially difficult to achieve. Since Open Government will require wide-ranging changes to work processes and behaviors, it will be particularly important that our leadership act confidently, consistently, and collaboratively to create a vision of, impart sense of urgency around, and serve as models of openness. In an ongoing process, we will also need to understand the reasons for resistance to change when it first occurs and identify ways to mitigate that resistance;
- **Organizational silos:** the collaborative leadership needed to combat resistance is also needed to work across organizational boundaries to create one OPM that distributes resources to meet the Agency's needs and mission more effectively. If we are unable to reach across these boundaries, we will not communicate effectively and will never achieve openness internally, let alone externally;
- **Accountability:** if we do not hold each other accountable for being open – in a two-way relationship, from the top to the bottom of our hierarchy and back up – we will enable resistance and allow the silos to remain; and
- **Sustainability:** on an individual level, the more resistance we encounter and the less skillfully we navigate the complexities of achieving and maintaining openness, the more quickly we will grow fatigued and ourselves begin to resist openness. On an organizational level, OPM will need to be constantly vigilant to ensure that proper and meaningful incentives for openness are in place and that changes in the political landscape or in priorities do not jeopardize our ability and will to remain open internally and in the delivery of public services.

The following section presents recommendations for action, always with these challenges in mind.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENABLING OPM TO MOVE TO AN OPEN CULTURE

The following broadly-stated ideas cut across the six themes in the current and future culture. They are largely about change, but they are also about communication, collaboration, learning, breaking down organizational barriers, performance, and sustainability.

Engage and serve external stakeholders better

The quality of interactions with external stakeholders is both a primary driver for an organization's image and at the heart of the notion of openness within the Federal Government. OPM must define and communicate what it values as exemplary customer service and educate employees regarding what behaviors are and are not acceptable. Only then will OPM be able to develop Agency-wide customer service standards and integrate them into all employees' performance standards, from the Senior Executive Service (SES) level down.

While traditional customer service is essential, OPM interacts with its external stakeholders in other ways as well. We must continue to engage external stakeholders in discussing and shaping openness at OPM, including but not limited to the Agency's Flagship Initiative. As we reach out to an ever-wider range of stakeholders, we need to listen carefully to what they tell us and analyze lessons to identify new areas where their input is most needed. After all, like change, openness is more a process than an end state.

Focus on leadership, management, and performance

Openness must flow from the Agency's values. Seeing to it that middle managers and senior leadership discuss the meaning and expectations of our espoused organizational values will provide common understanding and clear expectations of performance and behavior. Likewise, each manager can do the same in developing core values within his or her respective team. This common understanding and practice of core values throughout the organization will transcend changes in administration and enable employees to see the important role they play in OPM's culture. Empowerment and increased trust will be the outcome.

While senior leadership must support and encourage openness, leadership in Open Government will be found across grade levels and throughout the Agency. We need to identify those leadership resources, best leadership practices, and employees with intrinsic motivation to support an open culture to enable OPM the opportunity to leverage these examples and role models to lead the cultural transformation. OPM must position itself to develop a new generation of leaders capable of embracing the complexity of change and leading the Agency through fostering and stimulating ongoing employee learning (Watkins & Marsick, 1999).

Modeling exemplary performance and professional behaviors should be understood as essential to career development. In order for this modeling to occur, managers must be empowered to lead by example.

If this leadership team supports openness and incorporates collaboration into its work, openness and collaboration will permeate the organization, and once openness is part of the organizational fabric, employees will support an open culture as an important reason to work for the Federal Government.

Besides values and strong leadership in openness, OPM needs greater accountability among its components and employees, whatever their position in the Agency's formal structure. All staff within this culture should feel that they are accountable – to supervisors, to supervisees, to colleagues, and to clients. This level of mutual accountability requires both regular formal and informal communication, as well as a strong, equitable performance culture. Along with the accountability inherent in a performance culture come the benefits of autonomy in decision making, mastery, ownership, and purpose in one's work.

Foster continuous learning and accept failure as part of the learning and change processes

It is vital that OPM treat learning and change as the ongoing processes they are and not one-time events. As we place a priority on continuous learning, we can create a culture that quickly identifies problems and works collaboratively to solve them, takes calculated risks to advance innovation, and learns from mistakes.

It is important to acknowledge the social nature of organizational learning: “individual learning is only part of the organizational capacity to generate knowledge. . . .organizational learning is much more process oriented and highly dependent on the dynamic social forces within an organization” (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000, p. 31). One way to develop employees is through communities of practice and networks that connect employees across departments to support informal learning in a continuous loop, help identify gaps and manage emergent knowledge for rapid utilization, and facilitate information sharing and collaboration (Müeller-Prothmann, 2006; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). OPM should utilize network development processes that emphasize early, open dialogue and examination of assumptions and expectations rather than rushing forward with a fixed solution in mind. The result will be a more effective OPM that is better able to be proactive rather than reactive.

In order to build a learning organization, OPM may wish to consider collaborating with stakeholders from academia to develop a more robust training and development program. This program should include a wide range of competencies and might offer accreditation.

Revisit policies, processes, and procedures

Through the Flagship Initiative, we will collect, document, and make available OPM’s policies, processes, and procedures. Policies may not change right away, but creating a process for rapid feedback to identify policy roadblocks is necessary to prevent policies, processes, and procedures from growing outdated. Gathering feedback helps to create consensus around the key issues that the organization needs to address, which will make change easier. Not all change initiatives require legal modifications; sometimes altering the internal operational and management policies of an organization can enable the desired change.

Over the longer term, keeping our policies, processes, and procedures up-to-date and introducing needed innovation will require ongoing attention and dedication. One approach OPM might consider to foster such an atmosphere of continuous improvement is to create a fund for innovation proposals that re-invent the way the organization does business – proposals that look beyond small business process modifications to new ways of thinking about our work.

Understand, explain, embrace, live, and reward openness

Before we can expect stakeholders to understand openness at OPM, we must be sure that they are aware of OPM’s role and mission. It is therefore essential that OPM have a simple, effective educational program that ensures existing and new employees and partners receive clear communication and education on the roles and mission of the organization. Indeed, an internal and external marketing campaign designed to communicate and disseminate the roles and mission of the organization in plain language could even raise OPM’s profile in the eyes of the public. Such campaigns would need to be ongoing or periodic to remain fresh and provide for continuity of messaging.

Once stakeholders understand what OPM is about, we can communicate the value of openness at OPM to constituents through a model. This model will describe a collaborative and open initiative in terms of how, when, where, what happened, and who was involved; it will help people understand what “open” and “collaborative” mean in their daily work. We need to ensure that Open Government successes and accomplishments are shared in real time.

It is important to incentivize openness by recognizing employees who lead the way in transparency and collaboration. OPM could, for example, explore the use of contests to encourage participation and peer awards to recognize open behaviors. Innovation and entrepreneurship are typically considered private-sector mindsets but are relevant to the culture of public service. The environment at OPM must encourage imagination, innovation, and an entrepreneurial spirit so that all staff feel consistently challenged to explore new, more effective, more efficient, and more rewarding approaches to our work.

Use the people, knowledge, and skills we already have

OPM’s employees are knowledgeable, skillful, and giving individuals. Furthermore, the organizations within the Agency hold a wealth of knowledge and expertise. In order to achieve openness, we will need to engage OPM employees and encourage them to take ownership of their learning as well as an active role in the cultural transformation (Illeris, 2003). People want to be a part of an exciting initiative, they will support the change, and as a result, leaders will emerge.

IX. NEXT STEPS

The Open Government Core and Component teams will guide the following next steps; however, this effort will require the participation of many. The Teams will:

- *Develop a communication plan* to engage stakeholders and help them understand Open Government, its benefits, and how it makes a difference in terms of their respective roles and responsibilities. This plan will help them answer the question, “What does openness mean for me?” Understanding and being an active participant in the initiative will enhance acceptance of change, create excitement, and increase the likelihood of sustainability;
- *Model collaboration across boundaries* to gather information such as data, policies, procedures, and processes to develop a baseline inventory. Also review and revise outdated items, as well as document any unwritten policies, procedures, or processes. Work together to develop a process for ongoing policy development that includes public engagement and two-way information sharing;
- *Develop a comprehensive evaluation approach* to measure OPM’s success in openness – transparency, participation, and collaboration;
- *Develop a data release plan based on the inventory* (including all OPM quantitative data, policies, procedures, and processes);
- *Continue internal and external collaboration* with members of the various stakeholder communities;
- *Enhance responsiveness to our customers and speak in one OPM voice:*
 - Continue to analyze feedback and metrics
 - Establish baselines that capture current performance
 - Follow up on the communication and call center approach needed to enhance service and support the new telephone system implementation

- *Develop requirements for the Knowledge Management and Collaboration tools to support a complex learning organization; collaborate with other internal and external workgroups on related efforts.*

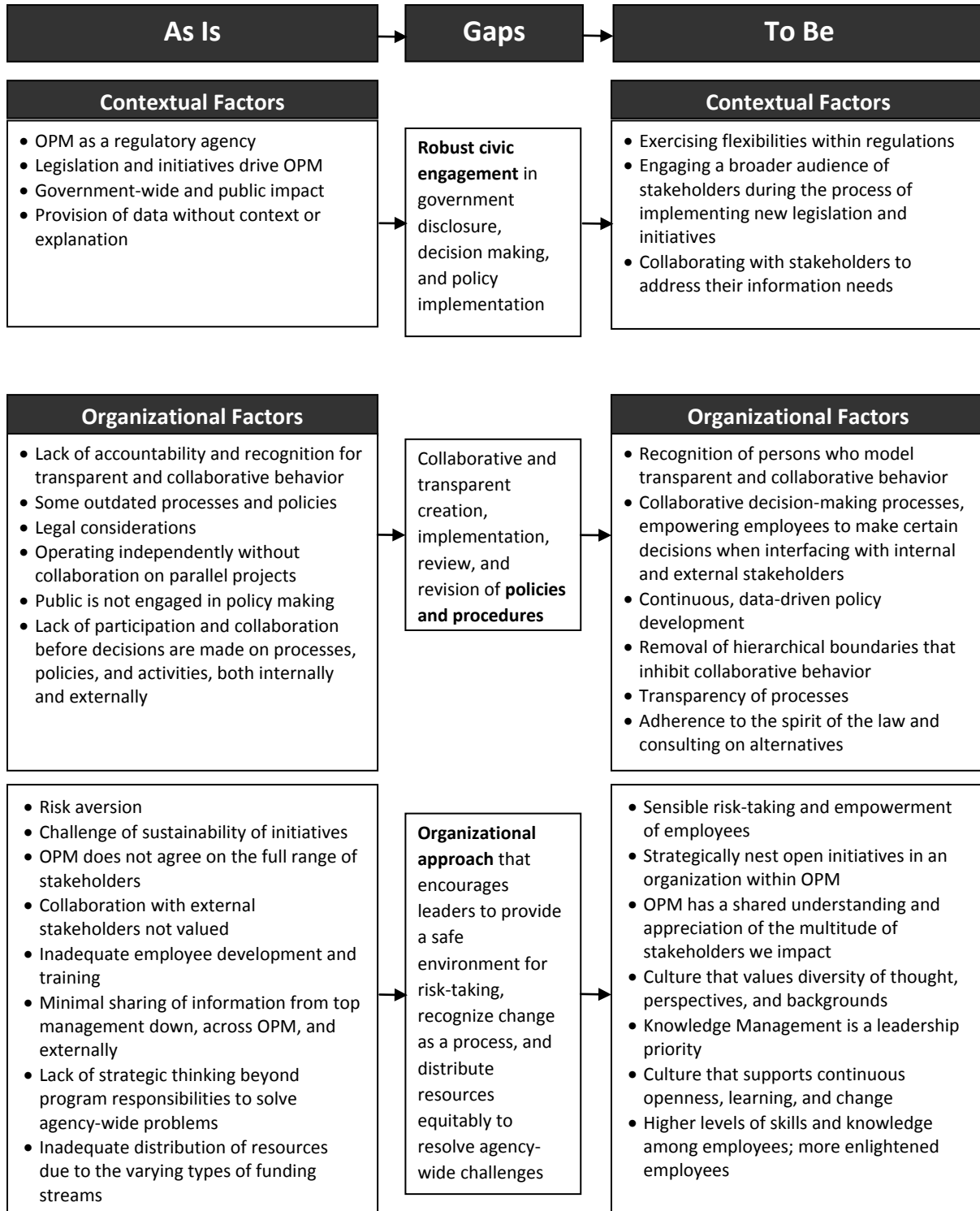
X. CONCLUSION

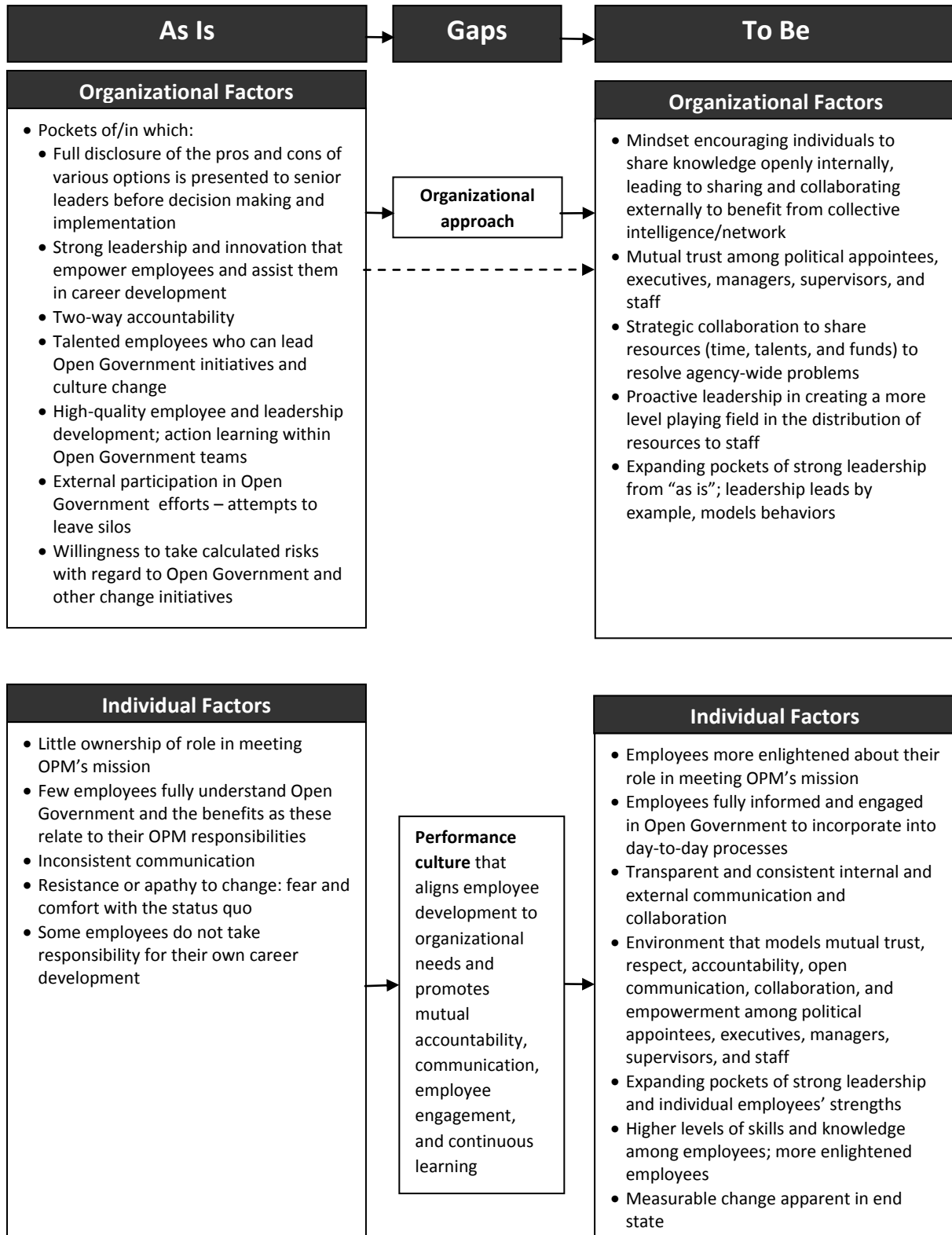
This document represents the collective work of over 50 individuals from various segments of American society and organizations within OPM. Moving forward, openness will take the hard work and effort of many more people and the dedication of the Agency as a whole. While this work will at times be tiring or frustrating, it will result in improved customer service, higher morale among employees who will view OPM as a good place to work, and an Agency that will be ready to take on new challenges as they arise. These outcomes will serve as the foundation for other initiatives, be they system implementations, telework opportunities, work/life efforts, or any other future OPM endeavors.

XI. REFERENCES

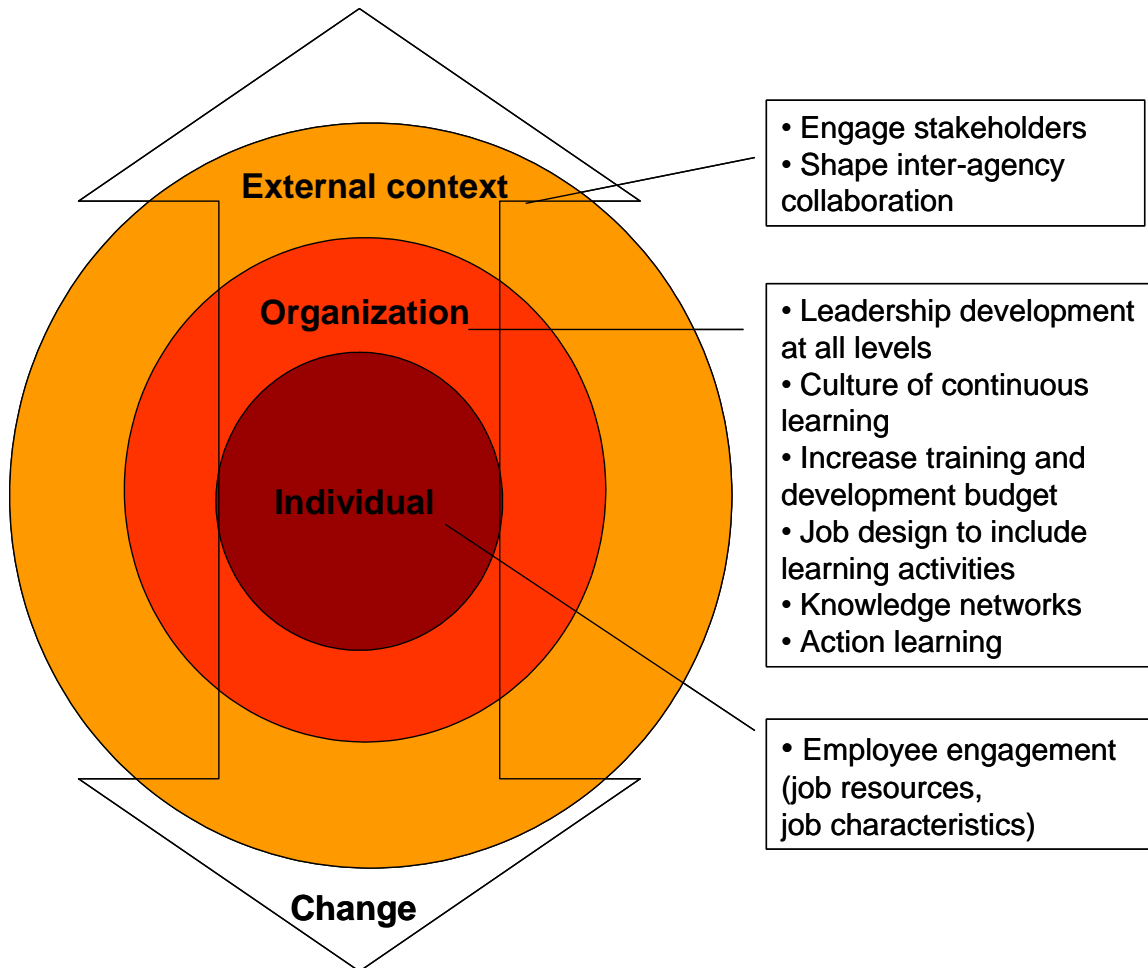
- Illeris, K. (2003). Workplace learning and learning theory. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 15(4), 167-178.
- Pardo, T. A., & Cresswell, A. M. (2010, Spring). A core capability for 21st Century Government. *Intergovernmental Solutions Newsletter: Government by Collaboration*, 20. Retrieved September 28, 2010, from http://www.usaservices.gov/pdf_docs/Government_by_Collaboration.pdf.
- Rogers, E.M. (1962). *Diffusion of innovations*. New York: Free Press.
- Marquardt, M. (1999). *Action Learning in action*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publication.
- Müller-Prothmann, T. (2006). Knowledge communities, communities of practice and knowledge networks. In E. Coakes & S. Clarke (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of communities of practice in information and knowledge management* (pp. 264-271). Hershey – London: Idea Group Reference.
- Schwandt, D. & Marquardt, M. (2000). *Organizational learning: From world-class theories to global best practices*. Washington, DC: St. Lucie Press.
- Watkins, K. E., & Marsick, V. J. (1999). Sculpting the learning community: New forms of working and organizing. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, 83, 78-87.
- Weick, K. (1979) *The social psychology of organizing*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Wenger, Etienne. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, Etienne, McDermott, Richard, & Snyder, William M. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing.
- Winerman, L. (2006, April). Have you heard the latest? *Monitor on Psychology*, 37(4): 56. Retrieved September 29, 2010, from <http://www.apa.org/monitor/apr06/latest.aspx>.

Appendix I: OPM’s CULTURE: CURRENT, FUTURE, AND GAPS





Appendix II: MOVING TO THE OPEN CULTURE



Appendix III: 2010 EMPLOYEE VIEWPOINT SURVEY QUESTIONS (CITED)

Question #1: I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization.

Question #10: My workload is reasonable.

Question #18: My training needs are assessed.

Question #26: Employees in my work unit share job knowledge with each other.

Question #27: The skill level in my work unit has improved in the past year.

Question #30: Employees have a feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work processes.

Question #32: Creativity and innovation are rewarded.

Question #47: Supervisors/team leaders in my work unit support employee development.

Question #51: I have trust and confidence in my supervisor.

Question #56: Managers communicate the goals and priorities of the organization.

Question #58: Managers promote communication among different work units (for example, about projects, goals, and needed resources).

Question #59: Managers support collaboration across work units to accomplish work objectives.

Question #64: How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization?

Question #67: How satisfied are you with your opportunity to get a better job in your organization?

Question #68: How satisfied are you with the training you receive for your present job?



UNITED STATES
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Chief Information Officer
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415