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I had a personal health emergency last month. At the risk of sharing too much information, let me give this brief synopsis—I did not feel great when I went to bed Saturday night, and felt less great when I woke up Sunday morning. By noon, I had severe abdominal pain, and at 1:00 my husband called for an ambulance. I had a CAT scan by 3:00, was in the OR by 5:00, and was home without my appendix by 8:00 that evening. Many thoughts crossed my mind during those seven hours in the hospital, but the one feature for which I was, in retrospect, most grateful was speed. The ambulance crew arrived in less than 10 minutes; the CAT scan was conducted and read in less than an hour; the surgeon arrived from home in under 30 minutes; the operation itself only took 45 minutes. The entire system functioned fast and effectively, even on a weekend...in this case, speed saved.

I would like to suggest that we are experiencing an analogous crisis regarding the health of the practice of public administration, and that we must fundamentally address the speed at which our systems of governance respond, lest our patient perish.

Much has been made about the speed of technological innovation. Moore's Law, first postulated in 1965, observes that the speed and computing power of microchips doubles roughly every 18 months while the costs are halved. That continued exponential rate of change has brought us in the twenty-first century the power of a mainframe computer in our mobile phones. The ubiquitous availability of those mobile phones and the instant communication they enable have brought with them fundamental global societal change. And yet, the government systems and processes that we depend upon to mediate and moderate that societal change remain firmly mired in the previous century. We have long presumed that slow government, executed through deliberate, incremental change equaled safe government. Looking forward, the opposite may be true—deliberate, incremental change may actually harm us by leaving us vulnerable to advances in technology that proceed faster than, and separate from, the regulatory environment.

Change today is different from the change captured by Moore's Law in 1965 half a century ago. Dov Seidman, as quoted by Thomas Friedman, explains, "The world is not just rapidly changing, it is being dramatically reshaped—it is starting to operate differently" in many realms all at once. "And this reshaping is happening faster than we have yet been able to reshape ourselves, our leadership, our institutions, our societies, and our ethical choices."¹ Friedman goes on to add, "Indeed, there is a mismatch between the change in the pace of change and our ability to develop the learning systems, training systems, management systems, social safety nets, and government regulations that would enable citizens to get the most out of these accelerations and cushion their worst impacts. This mismatch...now constitutes probably the most important *governance* challenge across the globe."²

¹ Thomas L. Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 28.

² Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late*, 28.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office specifically addresses in its Strategic Plan for 2018-2023 the governance challenges inherent in the advances of technology. “The U.S. government and the public at large have not yet resolved ethical considerations and other risks posed by technological advances like genome editing and brain-computer interfaces. How these issues are resolved and, in particular, how government agencies incorporate regulation as a component of attempts to address these issues could affect the development of these technologies. These *governance* complexities could impede the federal government from cost-effectively serving the public and achieving results.”³

Both Friedman and the GAO use the term “governance” to communicate the challenge of exercising some amount of control over what seems to be uncontrolled chaos created by technology that continues to press on and breach every boundary. They also adopt the term though to emphasize the basic function of a government, to execute governance. Wikipedia defines Public Administration as a “field of inquiry with a diverse scope whose fundamental goal is to advance management and policies so that government can function,” but this hardly addresses the complexity faced by the field today. We as public administrators need to redefine our profession in light of the changing nature and speed of technological developments. As Bruce Katz states, “Twenty-first century problem solving is essentially taking place amid twentieth century financial and institutional arrangements that are antiquated and inadequate.”⁴ We must be aggressive in responding to the challenges that threaten the relevancy of our profession. I propose that we must radically rethink at least four aspects of public administration for the twenty-first century so that we can govern at the speed of technological innovation.

We must address institutional design. We understand the federal structure of national, state, and local governments. Yet, many of today’s innovative governance solutions develop outside of these defined boundaries through multidisciplinary, multi-sector alliances at the ground level that transcend geographical borders. These alliances may include local governments, private sector firms, philanthropic organizations, charitable non-profits, and universities that come together to address particular shared problems, and may or may not persist. The field of public administration must imagine and help create governance structures and processes that are flexible, responsive, technologically adept, accountable, replicable and scalable in order to respond rapidly to urgent and fast moving challenges.

We must update our training and education programs for public administrators. Public administrators must be as innovative in governance as scientists and engineers are innovative in technology. They must have the imagination of entrepreneurs in understanding not only how existing bureaucracies function, but also where and how those bureaucracies can be flexed and stretched to develop rapid and responsible solutions. They must be conversant with the sciences in order to anticipate both the potential for good and for harm in new technologies in order to shape their impacts on public welfare. They must know how to build and lead multidisciplinary, interagency, intergovernmental teams to address today’s complex governance challenges. We must prepare them to be adaptable, proactive,

³ United States Government Accountability Office, *Strategic Plan 2018-2023: Trends Affecting Government and Society* (Washington, D.C., 2018), 28-32.

⁴ Bruce Katz and Jeremy Nowak, *The New Localism: How Cities Can Thrive in the Age of Populism* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 2017), 4.

and nimble, for their world will be changing ever faster and will require ever faster government response.

We must consider issues around the control of and access to data, and the commensurate issues around privacy. As artificial intelligence and sensors pervade more and more of the public space, the boundaries of this question become harder to comprehend. As an example, *Politico*, in its July/August 2018 issue claims that “a truly smart city stands to radically increase the amount of data collected on its citizens and visitors, and it puts into sharp relief the responsibility a local government—and the contractors it would inevitably hire to manage some of that digital infrastructure—would have to both hold and probe that data.”⁵ The article points out that these conditions convert “a technological question to a fundamentally civic one” over the control and legality of data usage when “a truly smart city runs on data and algorithms rather than civic decisions made by humans.”⁶ Future public administrators may have to decide how much privacy we will trade for speed.

We must reengineer our social safety net programs to address the reality of economic dislocation in the twenty-first century. We cannot anticipate the particular impacts of each new technology, but we know that entire categories of work will disappear, others will change, and still new ones will emerge. Failure to address the certainty of disruption in this new economy will only exacerbate existing inequities. Public administrators must be adept at experimentation and program evaluation in order to identify and share best practices, address equity as a policy objective, and develop solutions that scale effectively so that support through dislocation includes rapid preparation and even retraining for new forms of work.

The Atlantic Council summarized all of these challenges in their recently released report titled “The Global Innovation Sweepstakes: A Quest to Win the Future.” The authors state, “The world is on the cusp of an unprecedented technological revolution, one that will have far-reaching social, economic, and geostrategic consequences. This tech revolution will change the way we live, work, manufacture goods, fight wars, and communicate” with a “convergence of technologies, the melding of the digital with the real economy...How the United States and other major actors position themselves as innovators and *adaptors* of emerging technologies will determine their economic fate and geostrategic standing...In this century, the world’s most advanced countries will be those best positioned to create and *adapt* to new and disruptive technologies...The technologies discussed in this report are racing ahead of *standards, rules, and regulations to govern them*, and at a troubling rate...”⁷

Public administration is not often thought of by outsiders as a dynamic, adventurous field—this needs to change! Given the challenges facing nations around the globe, public administration may be the most urgent and necessary set of skills imaginable. It is through effective public administration that we address the standards, rules, and regulations that allow us to adapt and to govern effectively, to survive.

⁵ Nancy Scola, “Google Is Building a City of the Future in Toronto. Would Anyone Want to Live There?” *Politico Magazine*, July/August 2018, 49.

⁶ Scola, “Google Is Building a City of the Future in Toronto,” 45-49.

⁷ Robert A. Manning and Peter Engelke, *The Global Innovation Sweepstakes: A Quest to Win the Future* (Washington, D.C.: The Atlantic Council of the United States, 2018), 47.

We must be able to innovate in governance at a speed that matches technological innovation. The National Academy of Public Administration is preparing to launch a year-long conversation about Grand Challenges in Public Administration to facilitate this transformation. Slow government is no longer safe government. It may harm us instead.

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