



# The Government's New Breed of Change Agents

*Leading the War on Terror*

By Daniel P. Forrester



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- **Dr. Thomas P.M. Barnett**, former Naval War College professor and author of The New York Times Best Selling book, *The Pentagon's New Map*
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- **Gary Foster**, former Deputy Director for Planning and Coordination, Central Intelligence Agency; now Director of Studies on a Government project supported by MITRE
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For details about the study methodology and interview protocol, please see Appendix A.

### Contact Information

For comments feedback or inquiries regarding this paper please contact:

**Daniel P. Forrester**

Director

Sapient Corporation

1515 North Court House Road

Arlington, Va 22201

p: 703-908-2509

email: [dforrester@sapient.com](mailto:dforrester@sapient.com)

## **Introduction:**

### **The Urgency of Terrorism Speeds Transformational Change**

World War II brought forth a generation of leaders within the US government who had scarce resources and global enemies to combat. Some of the most difficult battles in that war, such as D-Day, featured political, military, and civilian leadership pushing down the decision-making and authority to those closest to the enemy and the problem. This “over” authorization gave rise to decentralized decision-making, innovative leadership, transformation of operations, and, most importantly, victory in war.

The War on Terror has created urgency for innovative ways to protect the American people and spawned a new breed of government manager to lead that innovation. Such dramatic change is happening so quickly because the government is undergoing the largest reorganization since World War II. And just as the Greatest Generation brought forth the Best and Brightest to serve the government at a time of need, a new leadership profile is emerging within the Intelligence Community (Intel), Department of Defense (DoD), and burgeoning Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Professor John Kotter of Harvard Business School has found that 50 percent of change initiatives fail because the urgency rate isn't strong enough to get people out of their comfort zones. Based on his extensive studies, he believes that 75 percent of an organization's management must genuinely believe that business-as-usual is totally unacceptable in order for change to occur.

September 11, 2001, was a “forcing function,” according to Dr. Linton Wells, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense and the Department of Defense's Chief Information Officer. That horrific set of events triggered government executives and legislative leaders to believe that “government as usual” was no longer acceptable. It created the urgency and the budgetary freedom to pursue ideas that had been developed prior to that event, but lacked the “force” to get them off the white board and into the real world.

Seeing this renewed sense of purpose and drive for change among our government clients, Sapient embarked on a seven-month study to better understand the profile of these emerging government leaders in the War on Terror. We call these managers change agents. Our goal: to pinpoint the management practices that these leaders are using to create innovative security approaches, business processes, collaborative inter-agency frameworks, and, most importantly, organizational change.

*“A change agent has a very clear focus on what he wants to get for the organization. He realizes that processes and culture have to change to achieve the objectives. He assesses the situation, sees what’s at stake, finds the significant issues, and focuses.”*

— Dr. Pete Rustan, Director, Advanced Systems and Technology, National Reconnaissance Office

We interviewed 24 diverse senior leaders from the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, the Intelligence Community, and academia and asked 10 questions. (See Appendix A for methodology and protocol.) Based on the analysis of these in-person and telephone interviews, this study:

- Uncovered six management practices used by change agents in the War on Terror
- Developed the first profile of government change agents making change happen in the War on Terror
- Pinpointed six ways that change agents measure their success

### **A New Breed of Government Leaders: Change Agents in the War on Terror**

The emerging new breed of government managers leading the War on Terror are true change agents. They are in formal leadership positions as well as functional specialties; all are doing things in radically new ways toward a common vision. They’re certainly not your father’s bureaucrats. Rather, they know how to enact innovative ideas by working within existing bureaucratic hierarchies and by injecting a sense of passion and purpose that brings along the more risk averse.

“Change agents see what is and see what ought to be,” said Scott Hastings, CIO for the US-VISIT program at the Department of Homeland Security. “You come into the senior executive service government ranks because you see a problem and are willing to take risks to fix it.”

*Change agents attribute their success to these six key management practices:*

- 
- 1. Challenge the status quo**
  - 2. Frame a clear, compelling vision**
  - 3. Focus on new outcomes vs. process**
  - 4. Realign and lead within bureaucracy**
  - 5. Uncover the right talent**
  - 6. Listen intently**

### *Challenge the Status Quo; Frame a Vision*

Change agents see new possibilities and know how to create and communicate a clear, compelling vision.

“Change agents don’t accept the status quo. They push the envelope for solutions,” stressed John Sindelar, Deputy Associate Director of the General Services Administration’s Office of Government-wide Policy.

“You must establish a vision, understand at a very core level why you are critical to that vision, assemble the right team, and then be able to articulate the vision within the group so that everyone embraces the vision and the priorities to achieve that vision,” said Greg Rothwell, Chief Procurement Officer, Department of Homeland Security .

Retired Vice Admiral Art Cebrowski, a man who clearly had a vision for changing the underlying assumptions of the DoD when he served as the Director of the Office of Transformation, provided this advice to leaders stepping into positions of power:

- **Be bold.** Don’t try to do it unless it looks impossible. You have to pick up the things that look really hard. Other people will have done everything else.
- **Be fast.** No transformational leader ever looks back and regrets moving too fast.
- **Be specific.** If you lack specificity, your subordinates will be able to change your message to suit their own purposes.

*“Stay out of the weeds.  
Focus on the problem and  
threat. Terrorists change  
much faster than us.”*

— Gary Foster,  
CIA’s former Deputy Director  
for Planning & Coordination

### *Focus on Achieving Outcomes; Beware of Business as-Usual*

Government leaders often translate their visionary ideas into a blueprint, or “Concept of Operations.” (CONOPS). But Charlie Allen, the CIA’s Assistant Director of Central Intelligence for Collection, bluntly warned that “CONOPS is not easy.” The change agents interviewed stressed that translating vision into strategy requires a more flexible, adaptive approach to traditional CONOPS. And, they said strategy must reach down to the business process change level.

CONOPS strategy documents can redefine everything from how an agency shares data for decision-making to defining new paradigms of warfare. The documents (or their agency equivalents) are the source of endless ideas and debate around organizational change. Wary of how effective CONOPS are in the Department of Defense, Priscilla Guthrie, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, advised change agents not to get bogged down in detailed CONOPS around IT, but, instead take a more innovative approach.

“In IT we’ve learned to talk about spiral development in CONOPS because it’s difficult to predict how large environments are going to behave,” she explained. “We need to adopt a more adaptive approach and get away from the ‘tyranny’ of the predictive. This frees people to operate within broader constraints. My advice is to write as little as you can for a short horizon. We shouldn’t write detailed CONOPS for what we can’t predict.”

Mark Forman, the Office of Management and Budget’s former Administrator for E-Government and Information Technology, looked at CONOPS from another perspective. He stressed that change has to be driven at the business-process level, where tremendous resistance often occurs.

“To drive transformation and affect the business issues, you have to be able to affect business process change,” he said. “Without change on that level, success is unlikely.”

*“Be nice to secretaries and gate guards. If you don’t play by the rules, the system will come back to haunt you.”*

— Linton Wells ,  
acting Assistant Secretary  
of Defense

#### *Leading within a Bureaucracy*

Change agents know how to engage the bureaucracy around them with care and detail.

“The key to a change management strategy is first analyzing the likely winners and losers,” said the General Services Administration’s John Sindelar. “Determine the decision-makers and the power holders behind the visible power symbol. Collaborate to influence both winners and losers. Align incentives as catalysts for support. Create as many win-wins as possible, and be willing to ‘sacrifice’ and be satisfied by getting part or most of what you want.”

“And remember,” he added, “that a carefully thought-out communication strategy is a must. It requires overt messages as well as a more tactical, offline strategy.”

Former US Navy Under Secretary Jerry Hultin said that it’s important to look at the bigger picture within the agency or department and recognize how much change and innovation others are capable of digesting.

“You have to remember where you are in the system and you have to know your range of innovation,” he explained. “Change agents focus on what should be done and figure out how to be innovative in accomplishing that goal. But pick your targets. You don’t want to be innovative in everything. Apply the 80/20 rule; 20 percent should be focused on innovation.”

Lynn Torres, United States Navy, Office of Naval Research Industrial and Corporate Partners Program, also emphasized the value of understanding where you are in the bureaucracy and the potential ramifications that policy plays in enacting a vision or agenda.

“While all potential change agents have a great vision, they will eventually brush up against the infrastructure,” said Torres. “A successful policy interpretation or policy/law change, with willing participants from a spectrum of disciplines, will be required to push the vision from a pilot program to long-term change.”

#### *Uncover the Right Talent*

Enacting organizational change requires an astute ability to pinpoint talent, get people to buy into vision, create the right teams, and set high performance standards.

“Technology and education don’t make the difference. People make all the difference,” said Pete Rustan of the National Reconnaissance Office. “What we are going to be able to do 30 or 50 years from now depends on the people that we have right now.”

Trust and diversity of indepth skills were cited as particularly important in assembling teams.

“Surround yourself with smart people you can trust, especially if you don’t have the background,” advised an anonymous Chief Technology Officer from the Intelligence Community. “Also, quickly understand as much as you can about the internal politics, what drives and motivates people. I’m less political and more technical. It’s important to understand the outside politics. Also, you’ve got to learn how stakeholders view your organization. Those are the most important things.”

The team skills most frequently cited by study participants include:

- Leadership skills
- Interpersonal relationship skills
- Science and technology background
- Knowledge of federal processes
- Thorough knowledge of the business and agency mission
- Program management disciplines (e.g., risk management, earned value management)
- Acquisition and contract management skills

*Listen More*

A subtle but important area that came up repeatedly was the importance of listening.

“Leaders who don’t listen will not lead in the long run,” said Jerry Hultin, former Navy Under Secretary.

“You have to be able to shut up and listen. You need to listen to other people’s dialogues instead of creating your own,” said Art Cebrowski.

The Navy’s Lynn Torres explained that she “listens with her ears and eyes.” By listening with her eyes, Torres was referring to the ability to read people’s faces and gain an understanding of what they are not saying in words but expressing or even suppressing.

Scott Hastings of the Department of Homeland Security is so keen on listening that when he’s delivering a presentation he will often designate a staff member to listen with “eyes and ears” to what’s going on in the room. Hastings recognizes that when he gets immersed in delivering content and messages, he may not listen as fully as possible. Hence, he assigns an active listener.

Dr. Paul O’Connell, a professor and Associate Dean at Iona College points to the Compstat system of police management that was used with great success by William Bratton and the New York Police Department. He notes, “Sometimes you need to use an existing mechanism or create a new one to standardize the listening function and the ability to view and understand the entire organizational landscape.”

## Profiles in Leadership: The DNA of War on Terror Change Agents

Four distinct change agent character traits and models of operation emerged from the research, as did four subsets of change agents.

While academic definitions of the term “change agent” vary and are difficult to pin down (see Appendix B), almost all of the study participants viewed a change agent as a person who knows how to set a big vision and achieve it. Some of the participants’ definitions included:

- “A Change Agent is someone who is helping to either bring about a different condition (change), but more often it is someone who is leading in the transition that results from change.” — Greg Rothwell
- “Someone who identifies a future state or goal and then puts the systems in place to get it done.” — Jerry Hultin
- “A change agent effectively redirects the capacities of individuals or organizations to achieve either better results for a traditional mission or new outcomes based on another assignment.” — Tom Ridge
- “A change agent is the person who carries the flag of a need. Usually not a generally recognized need.” — Gary Foster
- “A change agent is any catalyst that alters the status quo. It could be: a person, group, an event, or policies.” — Louis Andre

### Change Agents:

Given that there was not a single common definition of the term change agent, we define a change agent in the War on Terror as:

***A forward-thinking and -acting person who is able to deliberately and tangibly impact the mission and organizational direction of a bureaucracy from its status quo into an integrated, future state capable of contemplating and ultimately thwarting security threats, including natural hazards that might befall The United States of America.***

#### Self Confidence

Demonstrate great self-knowledge and self-assurance

#### Relationship Builders

Build relationships par excellence across agencies and well beyond

#### Effective Communicator

Communicate well to crowds or in one on one

#### Sense of Service

Are driven by a limitless sense of the good that government can do



#### Executive Support

Receive sustained top-down executive support and authorization

#### Horizontal Thinkers\*

See things in the context of what it can be

#### Professional Experience

Have deep reference points for success and failure

#### Clustering

Cluster together and attract other change agents to their cause

\* Thomas Barnett first evoked the idea of horizontal thinking in his best selling book, *The Pentagon's New Map*. In our interview with him he said “change agents are horizontal thinkers in a vertical world.”

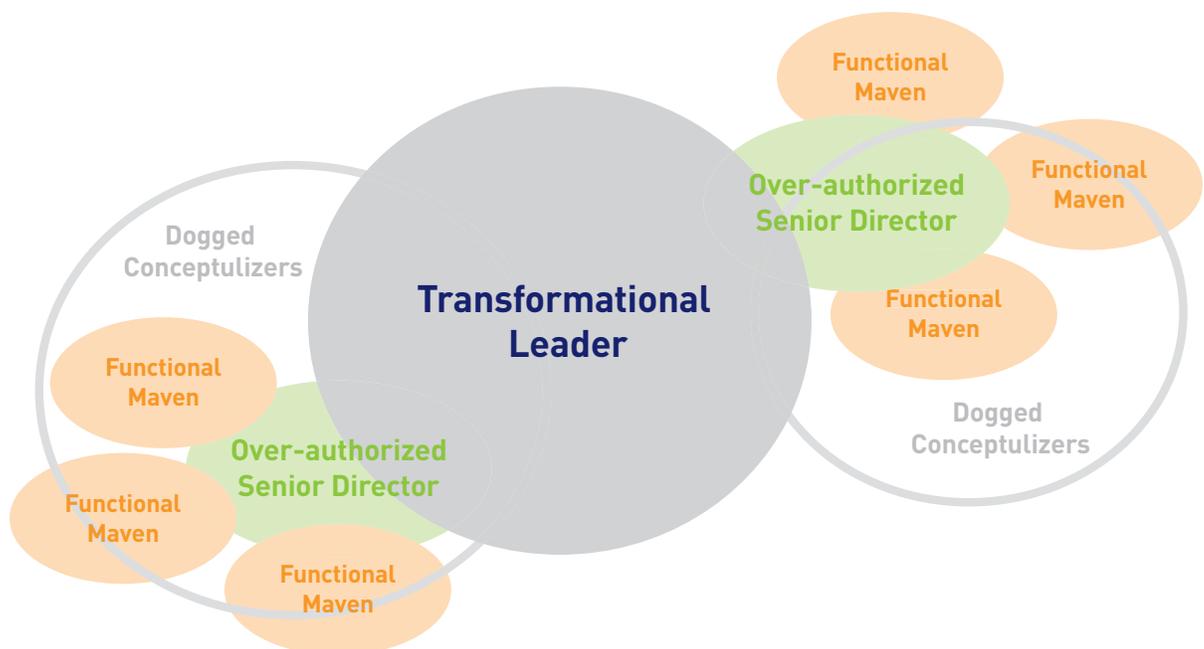
*As with DNA, No Two Change Agents are Exactly Alike*

Digging deeper into the change agent profile, four specific types of change agents emerged:

- Transformational Leaders
- Over-authorized Senior Directors
- Functional Mavens
- Dogged Conceptualizers

These types of change agents are sometimes found in isolation within a bureaucracy but often cluster together in a sort of chemical interaction that can bring about profound change within these tumultuous government agencies. Transformational Leaders, Over-authorized Senior Directors, and Functional Mavens complement one another's competencies and are more likely to cluster together and be interdependent. Dogged Conceptualizers, however, tend to be alone rangers, big thinkers who often work with the other change agents, but act as individual contributors rather than as managers or program owners.

**The Landscape and Chemistry of Change Agents**



	Character Traits	Modes of Operation	Examples
<b>Transformational Leaders</b>	Bold visionaries and often senior political appointees	Forceful, focused, tenacious, seasoned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mark Forman, former Administrator for E-Government &amp; IT, Office of Management &amp; Budget</li> <li>- Vice Admiral (ret) Art Cebrowski, Director, Office of Force Transformation, Department of Defense (ret)</li> </ul>
<b>Over-authorized Senior Directors</b>	'Make it all happen' major program managers	Collaborative, manage up, down and inter-agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bob Stephan, former special assistant to Secretary of Homeland Security</li> <li>- Jerry Hultin, former Under Secretary US Navy; now Dean of The Stevens Institute</li> </ul>
<b>Functional Mavens</b>	Deep subject matter experts with critical cross-agency inputs to change and transformation	Seek to innovate functional expertise within context of a common vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scott Hastings, Chief Information Officer, US-VISIT Program, Department of Homeland Security</li> <li>- Greg Rothwell, Chief Procurement Officer, Department of Homeland Security</li> </ul>
<b>Dogged Conceptualizers</b>	The big idea people who act patiently and know intuitively that "every good idea has its day"	Independent operators who powerfully feed concepts to Transformational Leaders, Over-authorized Senior Directors, and Functional Mavens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keith Herrington Sr, IT Specialist, Defense Intelligence Agency, Department of Defense</li> <li>- Thomas P.M. Barnett, former Naval War College professor and author of The New York Times Best Selling book, <i>The Pentagon's New Map</i></li> </ul>

*“If you are going to be a visionary leader, then think of yourself as a drill bit. You will be used up and then thrown out, but you will make progress through the rock.”*

— Linton Wells ,  
Acting Assistant Secretary  
of Defense

## **Transformational Leaders: The Bold Visionaries Behind Big Change**

Transformational Leaders are the senior most government leaders, often political appointees, and always the major impetus behind substantive change. “Change is not sufficiently precise to describe what change agents in the government really do,” explained retired Vice Admiral Art Cebrowski. “It’s about transformational leadership.”

According to several other research participants, these very senior level government executives create visions for their organizations that are fundamentally different from what they inherited when they started the job. They also tend to have short tenures.

“These people argue themselves out of jobs,” said Thomas Barnett, former Naval War College professor and author of *The Pentagon’s New Map*. He explained that once these change agents’ new concepts and vision are adopted, they appear less relevant for steady-state operations.

## **Transformational Leaders**

<b>Character Traits</b>	<b>Modes of Operation</b>
Seasoned, well-credentialed leaders	Move very quickly to attack problems
Bold visionaries who have relentless focus on alignment around a future state	Secure the authority and funding necessary to change the entire direction of the programs and people they must now manage
Forceful communicators who make their “vocal opponents non-vocal and their non-vocal proponents vocal.”*	
<p><b>Attract and surround themselves with other change agents</b></p> <p><b>Adopt new language in order to define the future state</b></p>	

*\*Mark Forman supplied this quote during his interview.*

## A Look at One Transformational Leader: Mark Forman



Mark Forman, the first Administrator for E-Government and Information Technology within the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), was a bold visionary who quickly engaged the bureaucracy around innovative technology approaches at a federal level. Forman secured his authority by enabling legislation that he sometimes helped author, and by gaining the budget and people he needed to enact his vision.

“Mark’s vision and his tenacity in sticking to that vision was extremely strong,” explained his friend and colleague John Sindelar, deputy associate administrator of the Office of Government-wide Policy at the General Services Administration, in the magazine *Washington Technology*.

Forman oversaw more than \$45 billion that the executive branch spends annually on technology, including President Bush’s top priority E-Government initiative. His leadership would have implications for many aspects of the War on Terror, including how agencies leverage common technology assets, how agencies share data, information systems security, adherence to common enterprise architecture vision, and IT acquisition.

As with other Transformational Leaders, Forman sought first to ensure that he had the requisite authority and resources to enable change. Unlike many in government, Forman questioned whether the government was spending too much money when he first landed in the job. “There wasn’t a need for additional money. Do we have too much money was the question,” he said. “The game was to get existing IT spending under control. In fact, there was an over investment in some areas.”

Early in his tenure Forman also went out and established relationships with Chief Information Officers (CIOs) and other departmental technology leadership across the federal government. This early relationship building helped Forman later engage these managers in the type of massive collaboration needed to achieve his federal IT vision.

As he reflected on his tenure in Government, Forman remembered that 40 percent of those he met with thought his vision was on target, although they pushed back and forced him to explain his thinking. “Another 30 percent didn’t get it and had to be replaced. The other 30 percent were leading the charge and they took ownership of the vision as it matched their views,” he said.

As Forman’s program within OMB matured, he created a series of Quick Silver initiatives that cut horizontally across agencies and required significant business process redesign. To achieve his goals, Forman surrounded himself with other change agents.

“When we did the Quick Silver Task Force we looked for change agents who wanted to be involved in major transformation, who were senior managers (GS-14 through first level executives), and who were career appointees,” he explained. “We unleashed career employees to drive the change. We didn’t realize there was so much energy at the career level that wanted so much change.”

## The Over-authorized Senior Directors—the Line Managers of Transformation

Over-authorized Senior Directors (OASDs) understand that they must not only be authorized by Congressional or Executive Orders, but that they must be hyper-empowered by leadership above them. Like movie directors, these senior executives miss little in their spheres of influence and understand who they need to surround themselves with in order to enact organizational change.

While these types of change agents can exist on their own within DHS, DoD, and the Intelligence Community, they are never as effective in implementing change as when they report to Transformational Leaders who give them extreme authority and autonomy. Hence, the definition of these change agents as “over” authorized. To be most effective, Over-authorized Senior Directors need transformational leadership above them to be successful.

These change agents project what Charlie Allen of the CIA calls “a force of personality” when they speak in front of audiences; they’re extremely clear about the change they intend to make and the authority that is backing them to make it.

*“Sustained top-down support must come with the role or it will fail.”*

— John Sindelar, GSA

Over-authorized Senior Directors believe that the leadership above them is supportive even in the face of extreme criticism. They are people who have the presence and ability to speak and listen but never rely on the name of the Transformational Leader above them to command the respect of those they are trying to win over. Their authority, perceived or real, enters the room before them and leaves a few minutes after they physically depart. It is important to note that these change agents are not reckless in their use of the authority entrusted to them. Rather, they act boldly and are aggressive in enacting change and achieving a vision at a programmatic level.

Dr. Thomas Barnett, whose strategic thinking has captured the imagination of the defense community, explained that “change agents are over-authorized; they do things and then ask for forgiveness later.”

Art Cebrowski, to whom Thomas Barnett reported at the Office of Force Transformation within the Dept. of Defense, said, “If Barnett did not have over-authorization from me, or if I did not have it from Rumsfeld, I would have resigned. There is no sense in doing the work if you’re not over-authorized.”

Almost all of the study participants shared stories that illustrated the concept of over-authorization or echoed the idea itself. Jerry Hultin said it best when he described change agents as “people who act as though there is no one above them.”

Over-authorized Senior Directors are much closer to the day-to-day operations of large programs and they work at a lower level of detail than the Transformational Leaders above them. If Transformational Leaders supply vision, then Over-authorized Senior Directors supply the steady day-to-day management to move the vision forward. Without the authority they yield, their impact and ability to change people’s behavior would be severely compromised.

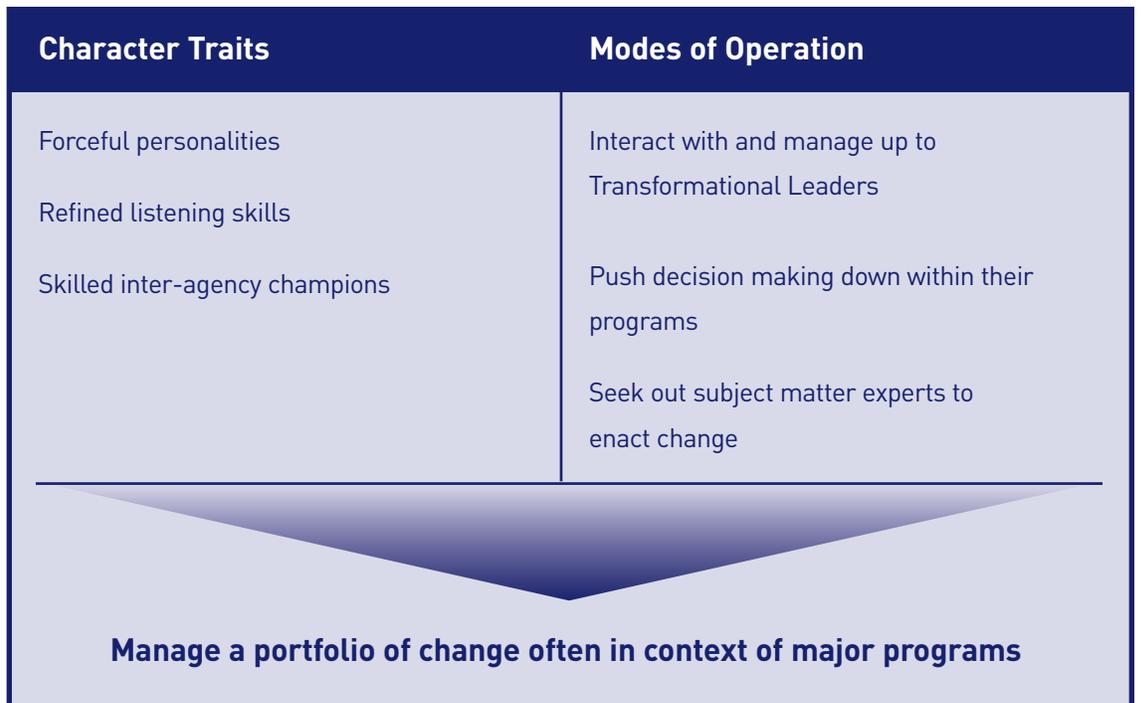
Over-authorized Senior Directors in the War on Terror see that interagency collaboration and integration is more important than fighting for turf within their agency. When not going deep on the portfolio they are entrusted to manage within their program areas, they consider the inter- and cross-agency implications of their actions, plans, and programs.

In fact, because War on Terror government programs within DHS, DoD, and the Intelligence Community do not exist in vacuums, Over-authorized Senior Directors often lead programs where multiple constituencies have vested interests in their success and potential failures.

“These people see value in enterprise-wide thinking versus stove pipes,” explained Keith Herrington of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

## Over-authorized Senior Directors

*Given authority to enact change from Transformational Leaders*





## Meet Bob Stephan, an Over-authorized Senior Director

*In the post Katrina environment the following example may seem misplaced.*

*What Secretary Ridge calls out through this mini case is how he over-authorized Bob Stephan to drive consensus around the initial National Incident Response Plan. The plan itself was clearly not adopted during Hurricane Katrina but that has little to do with how Stephan worked in inter-agency settings to arrive at a plan that could scale over time. In the post September 11, 2001 federal environment, not all of the new rules, technologies, plans, and concepts proposed by change agents will be embraced on their first iteration. Thus, Stephan's example remains one for other change agents to consider as they will often find themselves proposing solutions to complex interagency (horizontal) problems.*

Then-Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge tasked Bob Stephan, a former special assistant, to assemble a unified all-threats National Response Plan.

"We needed someone whose vision included the development of a prototype that the state and locals would use in response to a terrorist event or a natural disaster or a horrible accident," explained Ridge.

"Bob had operational experience in the Air Force and drove the consensus needed to create the National Incident Management System that now exists in this country. This system could be imbedded down at the county level, with everybody singing off the same sheet, preparing and responding in a similar way with some variations. This is a huge sea change.

"Several national response plans pre-existed our effort to have just one that everyone bought into. Bob had the foresight, the energy, and the vision to amalgamate them, bring everybody in and build a consensus around those documents. This was huge change below the radar screen. It wasn't sexy; it wasn't going to be written about much,

but it was exciting to the emergency management professionals who recognized that this change would materially and positively affect our ability to respond and recover from a natural disaster or terrorist event."

In explaining the management competencies that made Stephan successful in leading change, Ridge further reinforced the profile of an Over-authorized Senior Director.

"Bob had a sense of urgency that was reflected in a work ethic. He has a huge intellect and could affect change because of the clarity of his vision, the inclusiveness of his approach and the constant pressure he put on the system to get results. Everybody embraced his vision because he was so inclusive. Everybody's finger prints were on the initiative. Ideas weren't mandated top-down, like many departments do."

What Bob Stephan was able to achieve through inter-agency collaboration and in pushing inside and outside DHS speaks to the tenacity of Over-authorized Senior Directors.

## The Functional Mavens: Innovative Subject Matter Experts

The DHS, DoD, and the Intelligence Community are filled with a third type of change agent: Functional Mavens, the subject matter experts (SMEs) in areas ranging from weapons systems (technology) to human resource policy development.

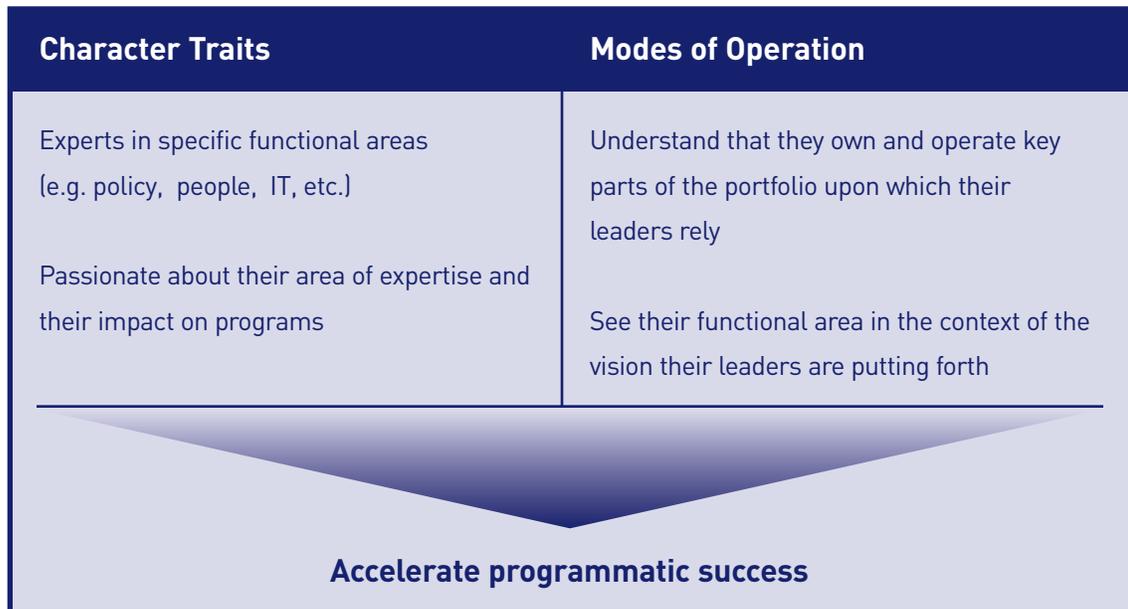
Functional Mavens play a horizontal role within their organizations, and usually need the cooperation of Over-authorized Senior Directors in order to be successful. Similarly, Over-authorized Senior Directors can't be successful unless Functional Mavens integrate well with them and help to accelerate process and functional change.

When Over-authorized Senior Directors are surrounded by Transformational Leaders, the Functional Mavens can have even greater impact. Mavens bring a passion to their functional areas and understand that they own and operate key parts of the portfolio upon which Over-authorized Senior Directors and Transformational Leaders rely.

Mavens can and do exist in organizations as change agents in the absence of Over-authorized Senior Directors and Transformational Leaders. When they are not in the presence of these other leaders, the change that they can enact is incremental versus transformational. In many ways the ability of a Functional Maven to be successful is akin to a chemical compound linking with other compounds to form new things. In the presence of just other functional experts, Mavens are just Mavens. Yet in the presence of Over-authorized Senior Directors and Transformational Leaders, Functional Mavens are energized and excited to align their functional skills with the broad vision proposed by the other change agents.

### Functional Mavens

*Provide subject matter expertise within functional areas that are part of the program portfolio*



“Policy Subject Matter Experts (SME) can help you steer clear of land mines,” explained the GSA’s John Sindelar. “They provide you the inventory of the current landscape by which you can evaluate the proposed policy change. They help anchor your vision to reality and help determine implementation strategy and timing. There is nothing better than to have a recognized SME become your policy advocate, proactively supporting your change.”

Functional Mavens tend to build relationships with other mavens (if they are present) and push the boundaries of their function to optimize for the better of the organization. It is rarely about them; it is about the success of the Over-authorized Senior Directors and the role that Functional Mavens play in accelerating that programmatic success.

**Functional Mavens Live Throughout Program Portfolios**



*The diagram above depicts a typical program portfolio that exists within the Intel, DHS and DoD communities. Programs within the War on Terror are complex entities where change takes root. The portfolio gives rise to Functional Mavens who have deep knowledge of their functional area (e.g. technology or policy) and understand their unique role and how they complement other mavens within the portfolio. The entire portfolio is managed by Over-authorized Senior Directors.*

## **The Dogged Conceptualizers: The Big Idea Horizontal Thinkers**

Dogged Conceptualizers don't own, lead, fund, or lobby to keep programs. They generate concepts that, under the right circumstances can become the basis for startling programmatic and government-wide change. Their ideas fuel Transformational Leaders and Over-authorized Senior Directors. If enacted, their ideas will ultimately have major implications for Functional Mavens.

In fact, when Transformational Leaders, Over-authorized Senior Directors, and Functional Mavens are clustered together you usually find Dogged Conceptualizers. Several study participants noted that when multiple Dogged Conceptualizers are found in an agency, it's often a sign that particularly massive change initiative is in the making at that agency.

The Dogged Conceptualizers' concepts can range from recommending the reorganization of an agency to developing paradigm shifting ways for their organizations to consider the problem set posed by the war. While Dogged Conceptualizers don't question everything, they ask the most questions and challenge the status quo. They help people and organizations frame situations in new contexts, which opens up innovative thinking and problem solving. They develop concepts for new models and methods. They eschew small problems.

The word dogged aptly describes these change agents because, while they are never at a loss for a new idea, they also realize that major shifts in thinking within DHS, DoD, and the Intelligence Community takes time to set in and be acted on. Several research participants noted that ideas with major horizontal and inter-agency implications can take two to four years or more to develop. Tenacity and persistence are the hallmarks of these change agents. They brief in front of small and large audiences over and over, until the concept is outright rejected or hopefully absorbed.

## Inputs and Outputs of the Dogged Conceptualizers

**Stealthy Salesmen** Position their product (concept) in the minds of those who can resist it and/or embrace it

**Doggedness and Determination** Patient and willing to watch their ideas morph sometimes for years before being adopted

**Communications** Visual thinkers and story tellers who can communicate succinctly and often invent new language

**Wildly Over-authorized** Protected by and challenged to think by Over-authorized Senior Directors and Transformational Leaders

**Think Factory**

**Think horizontally**

**Shift the paradigm**

**Bend the frame**

**Ideas with Horizontal Impact**

*New Rule Sets*

*Technology Solutions*

*Business Processes*

*Concept of Operations*

A common Dogged Conceptualizer competence is the ability to succinctly describe a concept that they want to sell. Many are visual thinkers who recognize that a picture can tell a thousand words when selling new ideas

“The best way to convince someone of a new concept is with a visual pitch on an 8.5” by 11” piece of paper. If you can’t convey it in that form, you don’t have it right,” explained a Dogged Conceptualizer from the Intelligence Community who wished to remain anonymous.

However, when presenting their ideas, Dogged Conceptualizers rarely presuppose a specific solution based on their concept. Keith Herrington, Senior IT Specialist in the Department of Defense’s Defense Intelligence Agency, noted that when he’s in multi- and cross-agency settings, as Dogged Conceptualizers often are, he is careful not to talk about a solution too early, even if he knows intuitively that his concept may be right. Rather, he lets conversations unfold and allows consensus to build around a desired end state (or concept).

## How Gary Foster, a Dogged Conceptualizer Changed the CIA's Mindset About Change



At the end of the Cold War, then-CIA Director Webster tasked Gary Foster with refocusing the mission and activities of the entire CIA. The problem Foster helped to solve is one of the most strategic and pressing that agencies within the War on Terror may face today. The way Foster approached the problem, and the organizational design and reorganization concepts that emerged from his vision, constitute a great example of a Dogged Conceptualizer in action.

In the early 1990s, the CIA was struggling with its relevancy in a post-Cold War setting and how it would manage the significant budget cuts from Congress, cuts that were referred to as “end of the Cold War savings.”

With a very small staff and the full authority of Director Webster, Foster pulled together a Strategic Planning Working Group comprised of the second in command senior officers of the CIA's four directorates. He devised a program to rapidly assess the future of CIA through the lens of 22 studies commissioned by his office and the working group. The forward-looking recommendations for the realignment of the CIA mission that resulted from these studies were given to CIA senior leadership.

Reaction to the studies was mixed, with some of CIA's four Deputy Directors easily aligned with the need for change and others protesting that Gary and his team—comprising their own deputies—were attempting to meddle in 'their business.'

To gain broader leadership acceptance of the urgent need for the CIA to change, Foster conceived a series of innovative workshops with the Agency's top three tiers of leaders. An early, critical three-day workshop was held offsite in a large conference room from which Foster's team had removed all tables and chairs.

The 85 most senior managers entered and had to mill around, unable to seat themselves in natural affinity groupings. They were issued sticky notes and pens, and were asked to deal with large issues of change posed by titles taped to the walls. They were to record their ideas and reactions on the notes and then attach them to the walls under relevant theme titles. The participants discussed their ideas during the first hour of the conference, with everyone standing together as a group.

Foster then gave them a coffee break, during which he and his team set up the room for an exercise that he hoped would get these senior officials to see the need for change throughout the CIA. When people came back into the conference room Foster directed them, including Judge Webster and his principal deputy, to line up on the large oval line he had taped on the perimeter of the room's floor, positioning themselves between five numbered signs set around half of the oval.

Sign one indicated a belief that little organizational change was warranted. Sign five stood for belief in significant and immediate change. Spaces between any two signs indicated plus or minus the closest value. Using the oval shape meant that those in favor of greatest change ended up standing directly opposite those who saw the least need for change.

The initial alignment was mainly between signs two and three-and-a-half. Interestingly, there were more above three than below two, though all numbers had stalwarts.

A member of Foster's staff then asked if anyone on the line wished to say why he/she had picked their spot. Nobody would speak. They were fairly belligerent in their silence. Foster signaled for a junior member of his staff to approach someone in the group they knew, and discuss their thinking

right at the line denoted in the room. The junior member adroitly stretched out their hand to someone they knew trusted them and, as though they were in private conversation, talked about their views on change. That small act made it safe for others to talk, and one by one people began to explain their views about change until nearly all had spoken. There was much intra-group chatter and good-natured haranguing across the near boundaries of each group.

After about 45 minutes, Foster invited people to relocate to a new number if they wished to do so, and within minutes a significant majority was standing from three-and-a-half to five, the sign for the strongest belief in change. The 'least change' advocates barely budged, but came to see themselves as out of step and at risk of being isolated.

Foster described this as "a powerful moment." Those likely to be most affected by change were selling themselves and their colleagues. There was little need for Foster to oversell his concepts for change.

After this exercise, the next two days' discussions took on new meaning and intensity. There was a recognition and consensus for change. Foster, the Dogged Conceptualizer had helped many to see the need for horizontal change.

## Measuring Success: The Change Agents' Perspective

All study participants were asked how they assess their success as change agents. Four intuitive success metrics emerged, as did two interesting and atypical views of success.

### *Intuitive Measures of Success*

- Deploying functionality and capability—deploying systems on time and on budget with functionality that will be adopted by end users. “Every three months, push out a product set. If you’re not doing that then you will be left behind.” —Deborah Diaz
- Maintaining or increasing funding and resources. “Vision without resources is a hallucination.” —Louis Andre
- Revamping business processes with deeper interagency connectivity. “You have to affect business process change to drive transformation.” —Mark Forman
- Securing policy changes. While it is rare that change agents actually write policy, their actions, energy, and concepts inform policy in meaningful ways. “Every change agent will either have policy on their side or know how to change it.” —Lynn Torres

*“The last thing we do is sit around and ask, ‘What if we will fail?’”*

— Charlie Allen, CIA

### *Atypical Measures of Success*

- Generating complaints throughout the bureaucracy you are attempting to change. “You have to drive enough change to drive complaints.” —Mark Forman
- New language is adopted with the agency. Change agents often invent new language to define a future-state concept or vision. Therefore, they know they are successful when their language is adopted, both in and outside their agencies, and especially by those who dislike their ideas. “Language conveys culture. In order to change the culture you must change language. You cannot expect old language to carry new ideas.” —Art Cebrowski

## The Future of Transformational Change in Government

While 9/11 sounded the alarm for government change, subsequent events like Hurricane Katrina have underscored the dire need to further transform government processes, systems, and organizational frameworks to better protect the American people. This paper has only addressed one of the many challenges heaped on our government through the dawn of the War on Terror. From rethinking performance evaluation across the federal government to helping private sector executives successfully transition into key roles within the federal government in the War on Terror, there is much more left to discuss and act upon.

At the outset of this paper, we recalled the decentralized management approach employed during WWII and how it ultimately led to victory. Juxtapose WWII and the over authorization felt through out the government at that time with the layers of bureaucracy that change agents often have to address in the War on Terror. Given this new style of enemy who are wickedly prepared to enact their agenda, the question for our government becomes, what are we doing to enable and “over authorize” change agents to enact the government-wide transformation that is required to defeat this enemy?

As this study uncovered, there are many types of change agents in this new style of war and they are most effective when they think and act in the presence of other change agents; it is a chemical interaction of people that can bring about substantive change and transformation. As we further discussed, change agents must have the “over” authorization from leadership for change if substantive progress is to be made. Aspiring change agents should also carefully consider how they assemble their teams, measure success, and adopt the best practices presented by their peers within this paper.

The trust of the American people is vested in the change agents in the War on Terror. Their decisions, actions, and thinking will impact all of us for generations to come. In short, we need them to be wildly successful in their roles and in growing other change agents who will see this war through to the end.

### *To Current and Aspiring Change Agents, We Say:*

- Cities are relying on you to engage them in the dialogue and ensure that state, local, and municipal preparedness is met with excellence
- Soldiers are relying on you to ensure that they have the tools, technologies, and training to succeed on the front line of this atypical war
- The country is relying on you to execute your missions and intuitively cooperate with interagency partners
- Families are relying on you to quickly envision a successful end state for the War on Terror and ultimately ensure that a lasting peace takes root.

## Research Methodology & Protocol

### *Background and Context*

Since September 11, 2001 (9/11), there has been massive criticism leveled at the government for the “stove piped” decision-making and analysis that preceded the attacks on America that day. Yet prior to 9/11, and long after the last day of the War on Terror, Americans will find a group of dedicated, diligent, action-oriented federal government executives who strive to be the antithesis of all their critics. These high-performing senior federal leaders earn the title change agents. They have spent thousands of days of their lives working to rethink how our government can better protect her people and they have spent countless hours sometimes lobbying but often forcing their peers, teams, colleagues, and opposition to understand the benefits of the inter-agency and cross-agency future state that they know will aid in winning this war. In many instances, these executives existed within our government before September 11, 2001. But, now perhaps more than ever, our country needs these and future generations of change agents.

This paper emerged as Sapient conducted 24 interviews with senior leadership from throughout the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, and the Intelligence Community. Our efforts in interviewing these leaders were to:

- Understand the profile of change agents
- Describe how they behave within their organizations
- Decipher lessons that managers inside and outside of the federal government can learn from

### *Study Methodology*

We interviewed 24 senior officials from throughout the DoD, DHS, and the Intelligence Community and analysts and academics over the course of seven months, February through August 2005. The sample of interviewees came after creation of an abstract followed by conversations with industry analysts, Catholic University of America, peers and research and review of secondary sources of content around the War on Terror.<sup>1</sup> All of these sources were inputs to defining the target list of change agents to interview for the paper. Change agents are known to cluster together, and thus several of the research participants led Sapient to interview other colleagues or even more senior management as the project evolved.

A common questionnaire protocol was employed to guide all of the interviews and ensure that a common data set could emerge. The setting for each interview was small and intimate with each of the participants speaking to Sapient either alone or with an aid to monitor the conversation given the security sensitivities of the research participants. All participants but two agreed to be quoted “on the record.” For the off-the-record interviews, the author agreed not to name the interviewees, but we could quote them and restate their insights within the larger context and findings of the study.

As discussed below, domain expertise among the study participants spans from research and development roles to information technology and large-scale program leadership. Yet there are clear commonalities among the study participants in that each has served in the government (through political appointment or working their way up to senior positions) for long periods of time (here defined as 15 years or more).

<sup>1</sup> Sources included web logs, newspapers, magazines, Government Accountability Reports, Inspector General Reports, The September 11 Commission Final Report, and the Senate Intelligence Commission final Report on Weapons of Mass Destruction within Iraq.

The study participants are, as one change agent described, “well credentialed” in terms of projects and programs that they have been associated with throughout their careers. The majority of the study participants are currently serving in the Government and for balance we interviewed several participants who had recently left the Government after having served for long periods of time. We engaged academics and industry analysts to share initial findings and help to validate our approach. By design, all of the participants are playing or recently played roles within the Government that frequently intersected with execution of the War on Terror.

The Catholic University of America (CUA) played a unique role in enabling this research to take root. Dr. John Kromkowski assembled a group of professors and graduate students from the Department of Politics and the Life Cycle Institute to: review target list of participants, preview the interview protocol, and vet and sharpen some of the key findings within this paper. Sapient is thankful to CUA for supporting our efforts in creating knowledge that should be useful to students considering roles within our Government in the War on Terror and beyond.

Sapient is indebted to the study participants for giving us their precious time to share their insights and lessons learned. Well over 30 hours of interviews (face to face or via conference call) were supplied by past and current senior executives from throughout the Government. Without their seeking organizational approval to participate in this study and giving so generously of their time, the content and insights from this paper could not have been derived.

*Study Interview Protocol— Note that interviews were conducted with this protocol as a guide and not a template for the dynamic discussions we engaged in.*

1. Please give us your definition of the term “change agent.”
2. What are the levers within Government that change agents must be familiar with in order to be successful?
3. Who has shown the most agility in enacting significant change within DoD, DHS, and the Intelligence Community? Why have they been successful?
4. What management approaches have you seen employed within DoD, DHS and the Intelligence Community to help align stakeholders and get them to organizationally change behavior?
5. What advice would you give to other potential “change agents” who are entering jobs within Intel, DoD, and DHS?
6. What are some of your lessons learned about change management in the context of information technology initiatives within DoD, DHS, and the Intelligence Community?
7. Can you discuss how you give briefings? What formats and tools do you use and why? What communications skills are most important?
8. Can you discuss the idea of being well credentialed and over-authorized, and what that means to enact change?
9. What do you believe has been your impact on the Government’s efforts at winning the War on Terror?
10. How do you know you have been successful enacting change?

### Definition of Change Agents

The term “change agent” has been a part of business and government vernacular for many years, yet in researching the words we were unable to find a formal definition or the first scholarly citation.

We queried well known management and organizational change academics to define the term.

John P. Kotter, expert on leadership at the Harvard Business School, explained, “The term ‘change agent’ goes way back. I can remember Ed Schein and Dick Beckhard using it when I was in graduate school in 1970. It may have begun there, or a bit earlier with Warren Bennis, or still earlier (1940s) with Kurt Lewin. Warren would probably know.”

Advisor to four presidents and change management thought leader Warren Bennis told us that he wasn’t sure when or how the term “change agent” was coined.

“It may have been in a book I co-edited and co-authored, *The Planning of Change*, with Ken Benne and Bob Chin,” he said. “We may have been the first (1961) to write about change-agents. But the phrase was ‘in the air’ and I’m not sure who coined it.”

Kurt Lewin, German social psychologist who wrote about group dynamics died in 1947. A survey of his work did not point to first reference for the term change agents, thus our efforts to find a root definition came to an end.

It is interesting that despite a universally accepted definition of the term “change agent,” the words themselves are deeply embedded in the minds of managers inside and outside of government.

Given that there was not a single common definition, we crafted our own definition of this person. Numerous interview participants pointed out that for someone to be a change agent in the War on Terror they must have dollars and people in sufficient quantity as a baseline. Therefore, we did not see dollars and resources as a differentiator for change agents, but rather these pillars are simply table stakes. With this in mind, we defined a change agent in the War on Terror as:

A forward-thinking and -acting person who is able to deliberately and tangibly impact the mission and organizational direction of a bureaucracy from its status quo into an integrated, future state capable of contemplating and ultimately thwarting security threats, including natural hazards that might befall The United States of America.

For comments feedback or inquiries regarding this paper please contact:

**Daniel P. Forrester**

Director

Sapient Corporation

1515 North Court House Road

Arlington, Va 22201

p: 703-908-2509

email: [dforrester@sapient.com](mailto:dforrester@sapient.com)



**About Sapient Government Services**

Sapient strives to make change agents successful throughout the Government, including the Department of Defense, National Institute of Health, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Marine Corps, and the U.S. Navy.

**About Sapient**

Sapient, a business innovator, helps clients achieve extraordinary results from their customer relationships, business operations and technology. Leveraging a unique approach, breakthrough thinking and disciplined execution, Sapient leads its industry in delivering the right business results on time and on budget. Sapient works with clients that are driven to make a difference, including BP, Essent Energie, Harrah's Entertainment, Hilton International, Janus, National Institutes of Health (NIH), Sprint Nextel, Sony Electronics, the U.S. Marine Corps, and Verizon.

Founded in 1991, Sapient is headquartered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and operates across North America, Europe and India. More information about Sapient can be found at [www.sapient.com](http://www.sapient.com).

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