Innovation in Government: Leading Change in Education Systems

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract: Innovation might be viewed as some as a buzzword that is used by private companies to seem cutting edge. However, innovation when viewed as a scientific method can truly make an effective change in multiple places. The education system is a system that has traditionally lacked innovation. Through providing insight to my experience innovating at the Department of Education I hope to provide insight on innovative methods' place in the education system. An additional review of instances of innovation in government was provided as a further justification for what I have suggested.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Gary Pavlechko who helped me to attain my internship in Washington D.C. and supported me as I worked on this paper.

I would like to thank my parents who have supported me in everything I have done. Finally, I would like to thank Jim, Emily, Irene, and Bonnie who helped me to adjust to a new environment when I was at the Department of Education.
In the spring of my freshman year I gave a presentation on instructional design with Gary Pavlechko. The presentation was given to Mahesh Daas' graduate class on Design Thinking and Innovation Methods. Based on the connection I made with Mahesh and the extent to which I enjoyed the discussion in the course I decided to enroll in this graduate course in the spring of my sophomore year. This course prepared me to consult companies on inefficiencies within their company and use innovative processes within meetings. In the summer of the same year I took an internship in the Office of Innovation and Improvement at the Department of Education. I went into the summer expecting to find a governmental leader in Innovation. When I got there I found disengaging meetings and tired employees filing papers. I was inspired to ask my boss if I could attempt to introduce these innovative methods I had learned at Ball State into the work being done in the Office of Innovation and Improvement.

**Innovation in Government: Leading Change in Education Systems**

A culture of innovation could help the United States Department of Education (ED) move from a reliable agency to an agency that adapts to changes faced by the education environment. Innovation is the key to leading in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century and some of the most successful companies such as, Apple and Google have embraced a culture of innovation. My argument is that creating a culture of innovation within the entire government structure of education environment will raise achievement in the classroom. The goal at ED is to raise achievement in the classroom, yet sometimes traditional work practices can get in the way. Leveraging the ED workforce to adapt to changing circumstances is vital at ED. **The time is now.**
ED can become just as innovative as any company, there just has to be a willingness to make a change to create a culture of innovation.

**A Culture of Innovation: Innovation Team within ED**

A commitment to a culture of innovation would require some major changes. A team would need to be created with the following characteristics:

- **Create-** A small innovation team with work load fully devoted to innovation within ED would have to be created within the Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) and given assistance in facing the barriers that are expected with attempts to change within government. This team would need to be selective so that it is staffed with energized employees. Team membership needs to be capped at 6-8 people. The team must be interdisciplinary and contain members from all grade scales so that ideas are coming from all ends of the spectrum. This team must be willing to work with all other members of the organization. This team must have a short (1 to 2 year) time limit for membership. This will create a sense of urgency to do good and measurable work. The rotation of these valuable methods back into the workforce will foster an innovative workforce in OII. Finally, the team will always have the fresh energy required to make changes.

- **House-** This team would need a unique space in which to analyze, brainstorm, and prototype ideas. This space would have plenty of whiteboards for drawing out ideas, and it would not contain cubicles. These cubicles prohibit working together and the sharing of ideas.
• **Direct**- This team would need to use the work of a team like Organizational Assessment (OA) to identify areas of inefficiency, so that the team could work toward innovative solutions. Ideally, the OA team could then work toward implementation of solutions and study the effectiveness of these solutions. This team must be trained in innovative processes and methods, explained below in the section headed Innovation Process and Method.

• **Support**- This team would need to have the support from senior leadership to explore these areas of inefficiency that have been predetermined as problem areas in the workplace and then implement the solutions. Otherwise, the team’s work will be wasted.

• Finally, this team’s products must be seen as scalable to the entire organization within ED. This can be done by utilizing technology like IdeaEngine, a program that allows employees to point out problem areas and provide solutions online, and adding a well-documented solved problems page that includes a scalability function. Additionally, the work done by these teams needs to be looked at as the office-wide standard. The goal of this team would be to work on single problems affecting all of ED in many places and create scalable solutions that can solve these problems across the entire organization. These concepts were developed in a conversation with the director of the Office of Innovation and Improvement, Jim Shelton.
The ideas and concepts in this document could work in other large structures or school systems facing difficulty in ways to confront bureaucracy and bring about change. These ideas are not ways to avoid the structures that stand in the way of change, rather to prepare the best solutions to problems within systems. The more attention given to the following concepts the better the solutions will be in the end. I will provide a case study on my successes and failures in implementing these ideas over a seven week internship at the Department of Education, and I will highlight contemporary research that discusses the feasibility of these ideas. More importantly, I will show the results of the work that I put forth while at the Department of Education. These were skills that I learned in Mahesh Daas' class on innovation methods and hope to carry with me into my professional career.
Innovation process and method:

This framework is a way of thinking about any complete innovation process. (Dubberly, 2008). It is my own restructuring of the Analysis - Synthesis Bridge Model, which helps one to discipline creativity by guiding work from the two leftmost quadrants (thinking about the problem) toward the two rightmost quadrants (creating solutions to the problem). The more energy placed into work within each of the four quadrants, the better job a team has done as an innovative force. Innovative methods are applied to each of the quadrants so that a team can expand into the quadrant with their work. Listed below are each of the quadrants
containing: a timeline in which work should done by the innovation team, the importance of
the quadrant, and an explanation of a few methods within each quadrant.

1. **Learn**: (1 week): To Identify an area of inefficiency at work. In this quadrant one
develops a well-organized understanding of the problem space. This is the research
question and the “what is” of the problem. The OA team could do most of this work,
identifying the most relevant area of inefficiency, briefing the innovation team on
statistics regarding the problem, and connecting the team to important contacts that
have experienced the problem.

2. **Experience**: (1-2 weeks): To collect information, identify patterns and gain insights on
the information you have collected. This is the research analysis and question asking
portion of the project. The innovation team would begin to ask questions regarding
manifestations of the problem. The team would utilize their networks and do research
to find existing solutions to the problem, whether the solutions are interior or exterior
to ED. Methods include:

   i. **Interview Analysis**: This process is used to gain understanding about a
      process via interviews. These outsider questions can be useful to change
      thinking of employees familiar to the process.

   ii. **Flow Analysis**: Create a work flow of process to point out areas of
       inefficiency. The outsider opinion can help to guide questions about
       things that have “always been.”
iii. **Network Analysis**- gain understanding of how other people have solved similar problems in the past. In this process rather than re-invent the wheel, make it better.

iv. **“Why” interrogation**- Ask why as many times as necessary to arrive at the root barrier of the problem.

3. **Talk**: (1-2 weeks): To gain participation of others to collect relevant information from others about your project. This is the brainstorming and collaborative part of the project. The team can meet people experiencing the problem and think out loud about all solutions. Initially, this is not the time to flesh ideas out; rather, it is a time to compile a vast quantity of solutions to later be prioritized. Methods include:

   i. **Stand-up Meetings**- develop a sense of urgency within the meeting space. People are eager to share competitive ideas. Standing up prevents people from getting comfortable and tired in their chairs.

   ii. **Brainstorming**- can be used to generate multiple solutions to problems. All ideas are valid. Multiple ideas on the table can cause people to think differently.

4. **Create**: (1-2 weeks): To develop a prototype of designs to evaluate your proposed designs. This is the cheap and low risk testing portion of the project. This low risk procedure allows one to fail multiple times before implementation of a product. Work processes are prototyped using paper or work processes are acted out by persons.
involved in the meeting. This allows one to truly pursue multiple solutions and in the end combine them all to form one well-thought-out solution. Methods include:

i. **Customer Acting**- Try to think like the customer as you try a prototype of a solution. This process works to identify customer problems before they occur.

ii. **Body Storming**- in this process people act as if they were important groups or components of the process. This process is used to experience process as a part of the process, as it would occur if implemented. Also, this identifies areas of inefficiency and areas for follow up.

5. **Implementation**: (Immediate, excluding clearance process): This process, when completed by the innovation team will have created a well-developed, well-thought-out solution. At the time of implementation leadership must be on board. People who were not involved during the process should not be allowed to add their comments at this time. The innovation teams designed solutions should have some sort of expedition through the clearance process.

This process can be completed quickly. If the team takes weeks to complete this stage the team is wasting time and they are getting too many people involved in the decision making process. This innovation process and the methods included within it are necessary to make a well-developed effort at changing processes. The ordinary decision making process in the workplace looks like this: learn about a problem in work process, talk to people about solutions, and
implement solutions. Instead, find a balance between creativity and discipline and use the innovation process to facilitate the change of work processes.

**Impact:**

I believe that a team like this within OII could show the rest of ED that it is possible to change the way things work in the government. If this team were given a clear enough path through red tape it would be able to make well researched and designed changes in any work process. The solutions produced by the team could be published for scalability across all of ED. This team could be a pilot for a team that works on problems throughout all of ED. If ED works from within to become more efficient these changes would lead to better investments for achievement in the classroom. Finally, when ED develops a team that works toward productivity, school systems across the nation will be able to look toward ED in the development of teams focused on productivity.

**Innovation Report: Design for Continuous Improvement**

**Background:**

Arne Duncan’s “New Normal” speech placed an expectation on school systems nationwide: Become more productive, while receiving less funding, and do this while our expectations for your (school) performance are on the rise. My first question after a few weeks in Washington was: What is the Department of Education (ED) doing to become more productive? (Arne Duncan, 2010) The creation of a culture at ED that is more innovative will, in turn, create a
culture that is more productive, efficient, and adaptive. The work environment at the ED could then become a beacon for schools to learn about productivity. That is, school leaders could visit the unique, innovative style of office structure of ED and take it back to their schools. These processes are needed because they are scientific ways of change that could be utilized in schools that have trouble changing. I capitalized on my seven weeks, utilizing my background in design thinking and innovation methods. I experimented with the innovation process and experienced the barriers and finally the rewards of an innovative culture.

The initial experimental plan was for implementation of the innovative process for all of the Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII). I had many meetings to receive the approval of Office, Program and Grant Level leadership. We decided that my seven weeks were more realistically spent on working toward the improvement of the Annual Performance Report (APR) for the Teaching American History (TAH) grant team. This project was completed so that program and office level leadership could then implement this process across the rest of the programs. This process was completed in my seven weeks and proves the value of design thinking and innovative methods within ED.

Definitions (Italicized words in prior paragraph):
- **Design Thinking**: Creatively and positively thinking around problems and arriving at solutions.
- **Innovative Methods**: Disciplined creativity, which enables one to: 1) Develop an entirely new idea. 2) Adapt proven ideas in new contexts. 3) Improve on a current process. (Innovation in Government, pg.4)

- **Innovation process**: Working from a problem space to an area of product implementation utilizing analytical methods, brainstorming methods, and finally, prototyping methods.
Purpose:

The purpose of this process was to help the Teaching American History grant team become more productive and efficient in their APR processing. Efficiency in the APR process will create a faster processing time and smarter data collection. Faster and smarter data enables the team to focus more of their time on technical assistance with grantees and reporting to Congress on the status of the grant.

An overarching purpose of this project was to provide a platform for the TAH team members to be able to practice analyzing problems and synthesizing solutions in a creative, positive way. These methods and processes should be used by leadership at all levels ED to give groups a unified voice and make career staff excited about change.

I. Analysis and Brainstorming

June 15, 2011

Analytical Method: Interviewing the team members separately proved a good method for identifying inefficiency within the APR process. Drawing flow charts of the APR process, following the narration of team members, provided an excellent diagram of the current APR process. The team’s understanding of the reason for the APR processing was consistent; however, there were differences in interpretation of the APR process workflow. Some highlights from the interviews were:

- Team members had already thought of ideas on how the APR process could improve.
- Team members remarked that they loved having their ideas heard.
• Team Members believed that someone was honestly trying to help them think about and improve their work.

Part of my effectiveness was the lack of knowledge I had going into these meetings. I was not able to turn down fresh ideas, because I did not know what was realistic. As an interviewer I used a workflow analysis method, compiled the results of interviews, and developed a diagram that explained the APR. Furthermore, I was able to compile a list, based on overlaps within the interviews, of team goals for improvement of the APR process.

June 18, 2011

**Brainstorming Method:** Following the interviews, I held a one hour brainstorming meeting with the TAH team. I stuck strongly to this agenda. Included here with my comments:

1. **Show APR Workflow and goals: (5 minutes)** - This diagram of the APR process workflow and goals for improvement (below), proved to get the team talking together about the APR process.

   ![Diagram of APR Workflow and Goals]

   TAR Grantee

   TAH January / February / March / April / May / June / July / August / September / October / November / December

   School

   Grantee

   School

   Vacation

   APR review

   Takes 60 days

   and possibly longer

   Based APR results on feedback

2. **Talk about APR Goals (10 minutes)** – Everyone spoke up. Although goals were based on the individual interviews, talking openly about the goals proved important. The team members each had identified alternate solutions to the problem, but now they could
identify the problem the same way. This may seem counterproductive; however, this was a vital conversation to support group realization of the problem. To insure productivity, I allotted a shorter time for this identification of the processes problems.

3. **Brainstorm solutions (20 mins)** - Dividing the group of 6 people into two groups of three, was a method which doubled the amount of solutions the team created. I divided the team, mixing authoritative personalities and the softer spoken personalities to create an environment where ideas were shared comfortably. The groups were encouraged to stand up physically. This concept was something that was brought to my attention by a TAH team member that was a member of the military. He said they used this technique to keep people engaged. The standing created a comfortable sense of urgency for sharing thoughts and ideas, instead of a more relaxed and uninvolved sitting. Every idea was accepted to create a positive environment. Ideas were written on pieces of paper.

4. **Present solutions (10 minutes)** – Each group was given 5 minutes to present the solutions they had brainstormed to the other group. These short presentations enabled ideas to be shared quickly and without debate. Both groups were standing which maintained engagement.

5. **Define work plan (15 minutes)** - The entire team cut up the pages and then placed them into folders that were labeled by grouped solution areas. (i.e. grant administration, technical assistance, etc.) The team then decided the next step was a meeting to define goals of the APR process and see how these solutions can fit within their goals. I
compiled the solutions, grouped them, and sent them to the team as a word document.

**Together, the team moved from problem space to solution space.**

**Barriers:** These are not insurmountable problems, just things that could be streamlined. Some examples were:

- **Time:** This was difficult because team members were not used to having a weekly meeting on their schedule. There should be an organized process that enables the team leader to easily find a time that all members are available and create a mandatory meeting.

- **Team members are used to moving to the solution space before analyzing the problem space:** This is easy to iron out by sternly directing people toward thinking about the problem or area of inefficiency versus the solutions.

- **Team Attendance:** One team member who seemed excited prior to the meeting was forty-five minutes late and another was present for only a few minutes.

- **Debating the validity of the solutions:** This took up precious time. However, with simple direction during brainstorming the team focused on quantity of solutions rather than quality.

- **Team Leadership:** We did not have a leader in the meeting observing what was going on. The team leader tele-works and dropped the call after a few minutes.

Overall, this meeting went great. Team members were excited and engaged in thinking about the APR process. We had fun, but aside from me, the team lacked leadership.
II. Brainstorming

June 30, 2011

**Brainstorming:** A meeting was held in which the team’s goals were discussed for the APR process. The happenings of the second meeting are as follows:

1. **Why do we do the APR process? (5 minutes)** - I showed the team a Prezi presentation (image below). I then separated the team into groups and related their work interests to the work that needed to be done on the APR process. This method led to conversation interest in working on improving the two distinct parts of the APR process: grant administration compliances (Collecting data on what the grantee is doing with the money) and Technical Assistance (Making vital connections with the grantee to aid struggling grantees and disseminating best practice). The third group of team members had an interest in both. I separated these groups based on information I gathered from individual interviews with each member of the team. This visual illustrates that the team is on the same page, and that if they agree to work together they could improve the APR process.

2. **Discussion (10 minutes)** - Team members were encouraged to share information about the work they wanted to do on the APR. The “pass the hat” method was used and gave each team member one minute to talk about their vision for the APR. The passing of the hat makes each member limit and find a sense of urgency in their response. A stress ball was passed around the standing group and the person with the ball was the only one...
allowed to talk. Through this conversation about the APR the team could identify persons within the TAH team that they wanted to work with on the APR.

- Measured progress and valid information about whether or not grant is helping students in the classroom.
- Valid information regarding best practice, to be shared with grantees.

3. **Prioritize Solutions (15 minutes)** - The team split up into two groups: Technical Assistance and Grant Administration. The groups prioritized the now sorted solutions from the prior meeting and thought about who could do what. The groups highlighted goals that seemed realistic within this year, circled goals for next year, and crossed out solutions that did not make sense. The groups then prioritized solutions that would be most logical to work towards this year.

4. **Back end goals (10 minutes)** - The team generated a mission statement to follow up on as they moved forward with streamlining the APR process. The mission statement is as follows: “To revise and streamline the APR process so that we can collect consistent
data across the program to determine project status and provide the appropriate technical assistance.”

5. **Work Plan (20 minutes)** - This part of the meeting was supposed to be used to set benchmarks or realistic goals that could be accomplished within this grant cycle and plot them on a calendar. The team leader was not available for a teleconference at this meeting. The team was left with a lack of guidance.

**Barriers:** Unfortunately, in this meeting there were a few more barriers. These are certainly things that can be fixed quickly with the appropriate amount of effort from the team. The barriers are as follows:

- **Time/Attendance:** The team had no time within this week in which every member could be available for a meeting. There should be an automated process for team leaders to create mandatory meeting time. Two people showed up on time. The other two were a couple minutes late, and one person missed the meeting entirely, this was the same team member who was forty-five minutes late. Another team member left halfway through the meeting. If there was serious buy-in from the team to work on the APR, they would attend the meeting. I also was unable to get the team leader who works from home on the phone. I felt this was vital for setting up benchmarks to make progress.

- **Frustration:** I became frustrated with the lack of attendance, and was unable to keep a positive attitude going into the beginning of the meeting. This unfortunately rubbed off on the team.
• **Leadership Information:** We were unable to get the team leader on the phone, and the program director attended the second half of the meeting. There was no one to hold them accountable to the work, and no one to set a benchmark time line for progress on the work the team thought about. The team was left feeling positive, yet unguided in their work. The team had done a lot of hard work and now they were again stagnant and seeking direction as to where to move next.

Overall, this meeting was a success. There were some significant hurdles to overcome to achieve buy-in from the whole team and leadership. The process is working; it is just a matter of getting the people involved to want the end goal. The team is excited about innovating; two members visited another office (Office of Post-Secondary Education) to witness how OPSE collected the APR information using the internet. Now, they are interested in implementing this process for their team.

**III/IV. Teaching American History:**

Analysis and Rapid Prototyping

July 5, 2011

I was unable to attend meeting number 3. The team talked about the following:

1) APR milestones and deadlines
2) How to track these milestones
3) Scheduling with supervision

4) Establishing training to create team consistency in the APR process

5) Standardization of the APR feedback form

6) Defining administration vs. technical assistance

I was informed that while many positive things were said in this meeting that some members of the team were unwilling to commit to doing the work necessary to move forward as a team. I became discouraged. It seemed that the APR improvement process met a serious barrier.

July 8, 2011

Prototyping: I made the quick decision not to get upset by the happenings of the meeting that I missed. The team needed someone from the outside that could continue to positively drive their progress.

1. Flow Chart Analysis (15 minutes) - The team proposed a work flow, including ideal days for APR processing time (right). This image is now the target that the team wants to meet. This process has the potential to take APR processing time from an average 5.4 months (averaged sample of 10 random APRs from 2010) to 45 days, a 300% increase in efficiency due to time saved! And the team believes the entire process could eventually be automated to take two weeks.

2. Group Thought (15 minutes) - Each member of the team had the original APR review sheet with their comments. I asked each team member to take a moment to present their thoughts on how the APR review form could be redesigned to fit this work flow.
3. **Prototype Body-Storm (15 minutes)** - A paper prototype of an imagined APR was prepared. The team stood up around the prototype and as a group made decisions on one sheet. The team’s ideas were documented on a sheet and were then prototyped again for comment.

4. **Work Tasks (15 minutes)** - At the end of the meeting the team was asked to self-assign a work task that they would like to have done by the next week to drive this process forward. The team leader was absent and the meeting had gone over in time so this did not happen. The team already had ownership of their ideas.

**Barriers:** This meeting was a real “yes” moment for the team. There were so few barriers, I have to list how prior barriers changed.

- **Attendance:** All eight team members were present for the first time and remained engaged for the entire meeting.

- **Engagement:** The team was on fire as they moved the process forward and often looked to me for instructions on which method to use where. They were respectful and engaged in others opinions just as much as they did their own.

- **Leadership:** Unfortunately, the tele-working leader was again unavailable. The team really needed an authority to set benchmarks for progress.

**Moving Forward:** Each member of the team has made comments on the reviewed APR prototype. A final copy of the form has been developed and presented to leadership. The new APR review will be sent out in an email and will contain information that will be drawn into a database. The form was sent out this year and it took only two weeks as opposed to five
months. The form being made electronic saves the Department of Education time and resources in that they no longer have to print and manually record the responses from grantees. Additionally, the program support specialists can focus more of their time on aiding and assisting grantees with best practice measures. This form is now in the works to be spread across all of the POCs within the Office of Innovation and Improvement. When this process is completely automated, not only will it be quicker, but the data in the database can be aggregated and printed into a form to show program status. This form would be vital for reporting on program status to Congress. Attached on the next page is an APR sheet on which one of the TAH grant team members made comments. The form was later made into an interactive Microsoft InfoPath document which was sent via email and aggregated the data live as it was filled out by the grantees. This move forward is not only a time saving solution, but it will help OII make the jump into cloud computing in the next five years.
Teaching American History
Annual Performance Review
Performance Period 7/1/10 – 6/30/11

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**PROJECT IMPACT:**

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**PROJECT STATUS:**

- **II. Major Accomplishments**
  - Professional Development Activities Provided:

- **III. Problems or Issues**

- Promising or Innovative Practices, or solutions to common problems:
  - **Define Innovative Practice**
  - **Project Success and Success Fuel Impact**
Innovation’s Place in Current Government Structure

Innovation and design thinking is a trend that has become popular in large government structures. Some of the largest problems in the education system are a product of stagnation and lack of willingness to change things because they are afraid to alter from the way, “things have always been done. An altered perception of how regulations and systems exist within an organization can allow these rigid systems to be seen as more fluid and ever changing. Innovation in other government systems coupled with design thinking methods has aided this change in thought processes in some existing government systems. Additionally, there is existing theoretical research that highlights additional benefits and challenges facing implementing a culture of innovation in a rigid government system. By reviewing other cases in which innovation and design thinking were implemented successfully in government systems we can begin to develop an understanding of how realistically these processes can introduced and utilized across educational institutions. If these concepts of innovation could be introduced at a widespread level the hope would be that formerly rigid bureaucracies could become ever-changing and simultaneously ever-improving systems. This would enable the education system to more easily introduce newer technologies and keep up with the times better than ever before. An introduction of design thinking and innovation could lead school programs into the future. The Partnership for Innovation in Education includes in their mission statement, “We believe promoting innovation will accelerate academic achievement, workforce readiness and economic development” (Partnership for Innovation in Education, 2010).

NASA is one sector of the government that has really embraced innovation as a new form of making changes in their system. They have formed X-teams which operate as observers
at other external private companies. Additionally, this team has used their expertise and exclusive networks to work as a consultant like firm for the Department of Defense. This “X-Team” is not only given free reign outside of NASA headquarters but, they are given extreme execution abilities within NASA. That is to say if they have come up with a tested and well-aimed solution, they are spared a lot of red tape to jump through. X-teams have also been used at large for profit firms such as Merrill Lynch, Microsoft, and Proctor and Gamble with much success. Margaret Mead says about X-Teams: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has” (Ancona, 2007). That is the essential message and truth behind X-teams and we must embrace this culture across education culture. X-teams are very similar to the proposal I left with the Department of Education in fact much of our success was because a member of our small innovation team worked in another team within ED. She used this connection to help us find processes that worked on the APR and cut down a lot of time on the approval process.

IDEO a design thinking and innovation firm which is based in 12 countries around the globe and has worked with large companies such as Google and Apple. They have recently started initiatives in which they worked at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. While their findings have not exactly been scientific in nature they have been successful on many accounts. They succeeded in an initiative to make it cool to work for government again. Additionally, their unconventional methods matched some of the findings I found. Things as simple as treating people as people in meetings could make a big difference. They also found as I did that keeping meetings less regimented and more interesting raised attendance. “They trotted out Post-it notes, mini tables, and mock-ups, and soon, ‘everyone was sitting with
everyone,' IDEO's Fred Dust said. ‘The dynamic shifted quite radically. We also had the problem that everyone wanted to come to the meetings’” (Labarre, 2011). I found that the monotony of meetings at the Department of Education really took a toll on people, so changing up that dynamic was really a great way to get attention in a meeting. It seems that this simple thing could really go a long way. The education environment is famous for having meetings that are disengaging and take teachers away from the work they could be doing planning for classes. IDEO’s design toolkit for educators, “offers new ways to be intentional and collaborative when designing, and empowers educators to create impactful solutions” (IDEO, 2011). This toolkit has been distributed to teachers for free with hopes that school systems implement them to change the norm in school meetings.

Clayten Christenson’s latest book “Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns” argues basically that leveraging technology and customizing education for the individual learner are some of the innovations that we need in our school systems to help each student succeed.

The ideal education is different for each individual, encompassing both scholastic and empirical knowledge, taking place over a lifetime in multiple modes, with time spent out in the field, working one-on-one with teachers and mentors, batting ideas back and forth with peers, and immersed in solo research and concentrated creative problem solving (Christensen, 2008).

This and other new concepts can come about more easily if a system of innovation was introduced at the school system level. A system of innovation and more innovative leaders can
foster an era of change that education needs to keep up with modern technology and demand for knowledge. A nationwide system of innovation led by initiatives at the Department of Education could effectively test and source working solutions to the nation. I believe that it is up to the Federal Government to become a beacon for school systems across the nation to introduce design thinking and innovative methods into their organizations and more importantly their day to day work processes.

While I have certainly done my best to make Innovation in Government sound like the be all end all in aiding our education system it certainly has its limitations. First, innovation and the methods surrounding it have to be taken on by the leaders of every system. If people do not buy in it will likely fail. Second, there is no guarantee that a shift in the way education is governed will change results for the students and their achievement. While innovative methods certainly make it easy to introduce new things there is no guarantee a more expedient system will foster better results. Finally, the Partnership for Public Service would add:

Even with a solid record of innovation in government, the unfortunate reality is that our government employees too often succeed in spite of—not because of—their agencies’ policies and procedures. Government systems and structures are fundamentally different than those of the private sector. Namely, our government is designed to perform reliably, not to adapt to changing circumstances (Partnership for Public Service, 2011).

This partnership has worked for years to bring innovative processes to the government. They have found that government by its very nature is not meant to change quickly. However, I
remain young, idealistic, and impatient and believe that because of the prior reasons and the
success I had in my case study innovation in government could make a significant impact.

**Reflection**

My time in Washington was one of the most eye opening experiences of my life. The things I saw, the people I met, and the things I have learned will be a part of me from here on out. I learned to be a professional, work hard in an office setting, and that office politics do exist. The most important lesson I learned was how our nation’s capital runs and how the Department of Education works. I was met with a couple challenges along my way, but I felt very comfortable on my own in a large city. My time in D.C. has truly inspired me to spend the next couple of years seeing different places while I am young. I truly believe that the experiences you have in your life teach you much more than what you can read in a book or learn in a classroom. My time in D.C. and the surrounding area was a time filled with very new experiences for me a person and I know the events of my seven weeks have helped me to formulate a majority of my opinions on the Education system and on what I would like to do to impact things in it.

My time at the Department of Education was definitely split in two ways. The first being meeting amazing people and experiencing new places, and the second was working against a tough bureaucracy. The people at the Department were so welcoming and made me feel right at home in my work. After just a few weeks I was allowed to spearhead my own project focusing on innovative methods and there place within the Department was a true display of their trust in my abilities. I was able to see Gettysburg, Lincoln’s Cottage and the Cincinnati Reds play at Camden yards thanks to the hospitality of my co-workers. Also, in my work as an
ambassador for the Teaching American History grant team, I was able to see Monticello, Montpelier, Mount Vernon, and the Building Museum. It would take a long vacation to take in all of these places and after seeing a place like Gettysburg I truly have a better understanding for the things I learned in American History. All of this aside, it was hard to do a lot of the work asked of me at the Department or at least a lot harder than it needed to be. Often times when I was working on a project I was asked to get the input of ten people. Everyone’s input was so very different that I often times felt like I was running in circles trying to please everyone. More importantly everyone being pleased by the outcome of a certain project was not the goal of the project. The bureaucracy made things like going to electronic filing of documents impossible, because employees that did not know how to use that software had a loud voice in keeping it out of their workload. This was so counter intuitive, even in my summer jobs as a waiter; I would expect to be fired had I not accepted the new computer system for inputting orders.

Accountability in a bureaucracy was also a major issue; people arrived to work hours late and took way to long on projects. There were never really any consequences, deadlines would just be extended and people would just be talked to.

The experience of living in a large city was simply exhilarating. There was always something to do and I frequented the free concerts that were given at 6p.m. each night at the Kennedy Center. Each night I was lucky enough to be able to run to the Lincoln Memorial and then around the Washington monument, passing the World War two and Viet Nam memorials on my way. I loved that each and every day there seemed to be different people in the places I traveled. The Metro was an amazing experience, it was always so filled with people heading to and from work, it made me understand just how many people lived and worked within the D.C.
area. The food trucks were also a very interesting experience. Each day at about eleven o’clock
Trucks with foods of different ethnicities would line the streets. I tried African, Indian, and
Portuguese foods all which were very different and very amazing. I know that after living in
such a metropolis that, I want to move to another large city for some time after I graduate.

Blog containing additional reflection: http://bobbymoran.wordpress.com/category/tourism/

Works Cited


