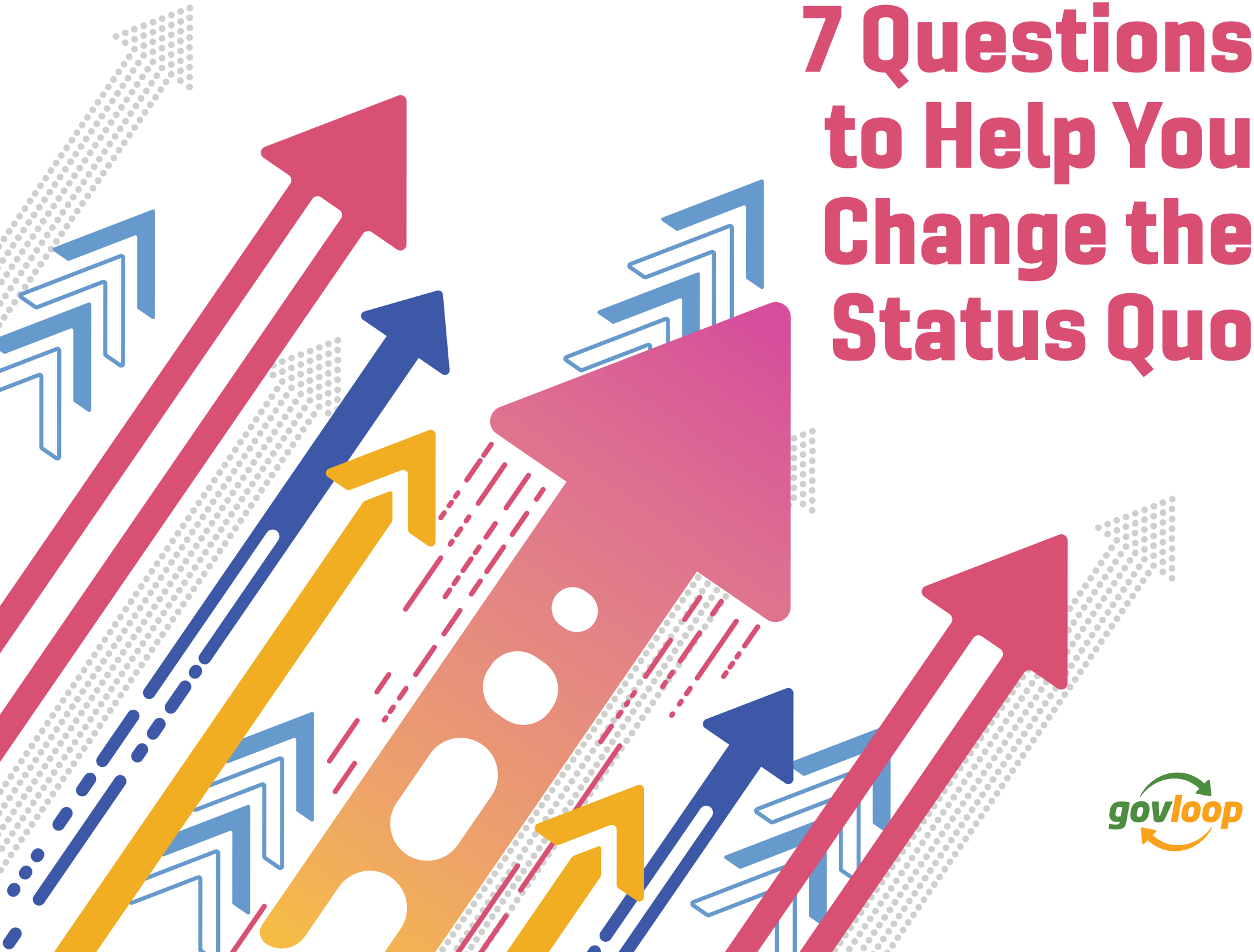
7 Questions to Help You Change the Status Quo



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Introduction

During GovLoop's first in-person event in three years, government experts offered practical tips for growing skillsets and careers and excelling in the government of both today and tomorrow. Speakers at the multi-panel event — "The Future Is Now: Trends Powering Your Career, Team and Mission Forward" — explored workforce, technology and professional development trends and gave pointers on strategic planning. And they posed seven questions to help you change the status quo:

1. **Does everyone feel at home in the hybrid workplace?**
2. **Do you have a handle on your team's data literacy?**
3. **Do your data experts understand your goals?**
4. **Do your leaders have your back?**
5. **Do people understand the rationale for your cyber policies?**
6. **Is it time to give the workplace a makeover?**
7. **Do you take training seriously enough?**

Speakers



Jennifer Franks
Director, IT and Cybersecurity, U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)



Taka Ariga
Chief Data Scientist and Director of the Innovation Lab, GAO



Amy Hamilton
Visiting Faculty Chair, Department of Energy, National Defense University, College of Information and Cyberspace



Ryan Korn
Senior Cloud Architect and Product Manager, Data Solutions, Bureau of Industry and Security, U.S. Department of Commerce



Diana Burley
Vice Provost for Research and Innovation, Department of Public Administration and Policy, American University



April Harding
Director of User Experience Services, Internal Revenue Service (IRS)



Wayne Rodgers
Forrester Zero Trust, Department Zero Trust Lead, Information Assurance Services, Office of the Chief Information Officer, U.S. Department of Education



Joseph Berwind
Digital Data Strategist, Office of Online Services, IRS

QUESTION #1

Does everyone feel at home in the hybrid workplace?

Before the pandemic, people who commuted to an office each day might have been less inclined to embrace technology as easily as new, and especially younger, employees do, said GAO's Franks.

"As we start to discuss coming back into the workplace, and some of us are probably very excited to…we have to start having real conversations and recalibrate what the new normal is," she said. It must be equitable for all key players, she added, "because we can never go back to what it was."

Talk with your colleagues and ask, "How can I meet you at your level?" Franks suggested. Do they need different technology? Would they benefit from culture-building activities? What will help them meet expectations?



QUESTION #2

Do you have a handle on your team's data literacy?

Korn, with the Commerce Department, believes in meeting users where they are to understand and satisfy their data needs.

For instance, an analytics unit in his bureau had a "weird, indirect, weekly pull of data" that involved analysts "cleaning and massaging" the data themselves, he said. That raised quality concerns, was repetitive and amounted to, in Korn's words, "just a total waste of time."

So, his team gave the unit direct access to the data, a new virtual desktop and 20 tools. Now, "they're off to the races," he said.

But some staff need only a simple, interactive dashboard that can tell them information such as how many licenses a division approved that week. "It's a spectrum," Korn explained. "Understanding what those user needs are…defines the experiences you want to try to create for each of your different…communities."

QUESTION #3

Do your data experts understand your goals?

"Data by itself doesn't mean much," said Harding, with the IRS. "It has to provide you insights and information, and I think that starts with the business goals and strategy that are defined up front."

That's especially important when agency staff have different talents and job functions. Harding's team includes user researchers, visual designers, and data scientists and analysts — three groups with very different perspectives.

"Personality traits aside, their roles require them to be thinking in totally different ways. We all need to come together and understand what we're trying to do," Harding said.

Ask questions such as, "How do we know that our project achieved its goal?" she said. Having a clear roadmap and measuring progress helps everyone communicate better and gain insights faster, she believes.

QUESTION #4

Do your leaders have your back?

Projects often live or die by agency leaders and getting them on board can be a "monumental problem," said Berwind, with the IRS. He suggests engaging someone who's conversant in change management to work with leaders because this is an issue that's "not necessarily something the data and analytics team can solve on its own.... It's something of an art and a science," he said.

Korn offered one option: Start small with early adopters of the change, then build out with another wave and another. "It's only a matter of time before the leader comes along and says, 'Well, wait a minute. We've got this basically functional thing here. Why are we [supposed to be working] the old, old way?'" he said.

QUESTION #5

Do people understand the rationale for your cyber policies?

There's a simple truth, according to AU's Burley: "As security teams and professionals, it's our job to communicate why we're asking folks to do [something]." In other words, explain what difference a new policy makes and how new tools interface with others that protect the organization's data and systems.

Once you explain that, you can provide tricks and tools to help them follow through, she said.

Rodgers, with the Education Department, echoed the need for outreach. "We make sure everyone knows, and we make sure that everyone is OK [with the] rules that we've developed," he said. Doing that helps prevent users from relying on unsanctioned workarounds.

For instance, when implementing a new policy recently, Rodgers' team explained to the entire department what was happening and worked with system owners and administrators to learn who needed to access what. The outreach allowed his team to develop "zero-trust network access policies [that would] lock down the network in a way that's not going to harm the administrator or even the general user," he said.

QUESTION #6

Is it time to give the workplace a makeover?

Hamilton, with the Energy Department, said office buildings were designed for paper-based work.

"Modern office buildings were created for a human being to sit there and do work alone, with a bunch of people around them," explained Hamilton. "Is that the future of work, though? Is that where we're going to be going?"

"We have an opportunity to change the paradigm," she said. "We are no longer dependent on paper."

Today, all the "wonders" of working in a remote space can be combined with the benefits of a physical one, she said. And to make employees happier and more productive, the goal should be work/life *cohesion*, not work/life balance. Technology options such as coworking — in which people work together virtually with their cameras on for a set amount of time — can help achieve that.

But remember that "there is meaning in [physically] coming together," Hamilton said.

QUESTION #7

Do you take training seriously enough?

Training helps individuals become the best versions of themselves, but it can make employees anxious — "If I request training, will my boss think I don't know enough?" — and managers might worry about cost and other concerns, said Ariga, with GAO.

He thinks of training in two ways. First, he considers a training's purpose, its ultimate outcome. At GAO, they envision training as a "T" shape, he explained. The vertical line represents the direct knowledge you need to do your job, "but more and more, the way that we interact with technology requires tangential awareness [of other issues], and that's the horizontal part," he said.

Second, Ariga thinks about how someone plans to use their training in a meaningful way. Taking designated classes with lots of PowerPoint presentations may be fine, but short, on-demand courses that people can watch as they need the information could be more helpful. It's more contextualized, in other words.

People no longer work in information silos. The question, Ariga said, is what is the depth and purpose of the training you receive?

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