

## Reflections on Mobility: Case Studies of Six Federal Executives



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## The PricewaterhouseCoopers Endowment for **The Business of Government**

### **About The Endowment**

Through grants for Research, Thought Leadership Forums, and the SES Leadership Program, The PricewaterhouseCoopers Endowment for The Business of Government stimulates research and facilitates discussion on new approaches to improving the effectiveness of government at the federal, state, local, and international levels.

Founded in 1998 by PricewaterhouseCoopers, The Endowment is one of the ways that PricewaterhouseCoopers seeks to advance knowledge on how to improve public sector effectiveness. The PricewaterhouseCoopers Endowment focuses on the future of the operation and management of the public sector.

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May 2000



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# Foreword

May 2000

On behalf of The PricewaterhouseCoopers Endowment for The Business of Government, we are pleased to present this report by Michael Serlin, “Reflections on Mobility: Case Studies of Six Federal Executives.” This is the second in our “Revitalizing the Public Service” series.

The Serlin study builds upon previous work of the Endowment. The June 1999 Government Leadership Survey of federal executives found that less than 20 percent of the Senior Executive Service (SES) members responding to the survey felt that “movement of staff between agencies” would be “very helpful.” Over 50 percent of the respondents, however, felt that government would push for increased mobility in the future. Mark Huddleston’s Endowment report, “Profiles in Excellence: Conversations with the Best of America’s Executive Service,” found similar mixed feelings toward the concept of mobility among SES members.

In this report, Michael Serlin takes on the issue of SES mobility. As a follow-on to his longtime interest in the issue of mobility, he decided to talk to six SES members whose careers have been characterized by constant movement among agencies. Based on their collective experience, he concludes that mobility can be a positive force for enhancing the individual capability of SES members and their contribution to their agency.

Over the next several years, we believe that the Senior Executive Service will come under increased evaluation as it enters its third decade. We trust that this report, along with previous Endowment reports, will contribute to an important dialogue about the future of the Senior Executive Service.

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# Executive Summary

In an era of changing public expectations of government and rapid technological change, career public servants with broad experience are a necessity. The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (PL 95-454), which established the Senior Executive Service, envisioned a corps of top administrators who could be transferred to senior positions in various agencies based on government need. In the 22 years since, transfers among agencies by career senior executives have not been widespread, but the belief that it almost never happens is untrue. Many senior executives have worked for more than one agency.

This report reviews the careers of six successful and highly mobile current senior executives who have worked in 11 of the 14 cabinet departments and 12 independent agencies during their careers. It describes the circumstances surrounding their changing agencies and the techniques they used to become effective in their new agencies, and provides examples of ideas they introduced from their prior experience that broadened their impact on improving public service. Each of the individuals profiled was asked to identify factors that enhanced or inhibited their ability to move among agencies, and to offer their thoughts on actions that might help to increase the mobility of others.

The six executives interviewed for this report are:

- June Gibbs Brown, inspector general, Department of Health and Human Services
- Carson E. Eoyang, professor of management, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California
- Dennis J. Fischer, commissioner, Federal Technology Service, General Services Administration
- Robert A. Knisely, director, Analysis Service, Office of Student Financial Assistance, Department of Education
- Eileen T. Powell, associate deputy assistant secretary for financial operations, Department of Veterans Affairs
- Myrta (Chris) King Sale, deputy to the chair and chief financial officer, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation

The profiles offer stories behind their agency transfers and identify some common characteristics, among which risk taking and flexibility are prominent.

To increase interagency mobility among federal executives, the report recommends that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) take the following actions:

- Establish and maintain a complete and current Internet-accessible database on the careers of all Grade 15 and Senior Executive personnel.
- Explore ways to maximize cross-training value for employees who may move in and out of federal positions among the public, private, and non-profit sectors.
- Research ways of ameliorating increasing differences in pay and benefit systems among agencies to ease transfers.
- Establish a well-staffed and knowledgeable reimbursable executive search office to assist agencies in filling key positions.
- Have current federal career executives who have worked in several agencies speak to each class at OPM's Management Development Centers and the Federal Executive Institute.
- Strengthen the follow-up programs for Presidential Management Interns, including identifying them for interagency task forces, to begin the process for executive mobility in future years.

In addition, independent of any OPM actions, several recommendations are made for individual agency program and human resource managers:

- Change the search and selection process for executive vacancies to broaden the criteria for selection to attract applicants from outside the agency, and include an individual from outside the agency on the selection panel.
- Increase the number of opportunities for all agency executives to work together with executives from other agencies on joint projects, task forces, or conferences.
- Insure that anyone promoted into an executive position attends residential leadership training within two years of appointment that includes non-agency personnel.

In addition, the appendix offers nine suggestions regarding career advice for individual career executives who seek broadly based public service careers.

The paper concludes by pointing out that a number of surveys and research studies have been conducted and are continuing, and that no single study can develop a perfect solution for the large and diverse federal government. It urges that changes to some of the current policies and practices, as suggested in this report, should be tested for their effectiveness without waiting for the elusive all-encompassing solution.



# Introduction

In an era of changing public expectations of government and rapid technological innovations, inter-agency cooperation and broadly experienced career public servants are a necessity. Yet federal careers within a single agency have been the norm, often leading to parochialism and bureaucratic turf disputes, rather than promoting the joint efforts and changes needed to enhance the level of service and keep costs down. True mobility by senior executives among agencies has been an oft-preached but seldom practiced phenomenon in the executive branch of the U.S. government.

The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (PL 95-454), which established the Senior Executive Service (SES), envisioned a corps of top administrators who could be transferred to senior positions in various agencies based on government need. Discussing development for and within the SES, the final legislation included the following provision:

“The Office of Personnel Management shall encourage and assist individuals to improve their skills and increase their contribution by service in a variety of agencies as well as by accepting temporary placements in state or local governments or in the private sector.”

In the ensuing 22 years, transfers among agencies by career senior executives have not been widespread, but the common wisdom that it almost

never happens is a myth. There are many federal career managers who could have been included in this study, but this limited sample of six senior executives includes people who have worked in 11 of the 14 cabinet departments and 12 independent agencies. Within the cabinet departments, several have worked both at the department level and within major bureaus or other component organizations of the departments. Although the majority of the positions have been in the Washington, D.C. area, three have held positions in federal field organizations at some point in their careers.

The six career senior executives in this study are June Gibbs Brown, inspector general of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); Carson K. Eoyang, professor of management, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California; Dennis J. Fischer, commissioner of the Federal Technology Service (FTS) at the General Services Administration (GSA); Robert A. Knisely, director, Analysis Service, Office of Student Financial Assistance, Department of Education; Eileen T. Powell, associate deputy assistant secretary for financial operations, Department of Veterans Affairs; and Chris Sale, deputy to the chair and chief financial officer, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). Chris Sale sometimes refers to herself as the “Poster Child for Executive Mobility,” but Bob Knisely, who has worked in seven federal departments and seven independent agencies, could give her stiff competition.

The profiled executives were interviewed for this report to identify the characteristics and experiences they have in common that have enhanced their ability to favorably impact a broad range of federal agencies with differing missions and cultures. The success of all six individuals is well documented in the numerous Presidential Rank Awards and other recognition they have received from different agencies. The new perspectives they brought and changes they introduced are outlined on the following pages.

# Case Studies

## **June Gibbs Brown**

June Gibbs Brown, inspector general (IG) for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), arguably is the most widely known and respected IG in the federal government. With a department that spends more than \$376 billion annually on such high-profile programs as medicare, Brown's prominence is inevitable, but respect is something she has earned. Serving as IG at HHS since 1993, she brought to the position the knowledge and experiences she gained while serving as IG at three other federal departments, a major independent agency, and a Navy component. She has consistently demonstrated a strong ability to lead people with differing areas of expertise to work together to achieve a common goal, a vital skill for responsive leaders.

### **Navy Department**

Brown did not initially plan a federal career; she raised a family while working during the day in real estate and later for a CPA firm, and went to college at night. The General Accounting Office (GAO) was recruiting accounting majors at her college, Cleveland State, and she was ready to accept a position with GAO when it had a hiring freeze. A GAO recruiter advised her that he had recommended her to the Navy Finance Center in Cleveland, which was hiring. As Brown recognized that she could make a difference by working in the federal government, and that the standard pay structure and benefits across all agencies meant multiple work opportunities, she signed on as a grade GS-9 accountant with the Navy. She was promoted to GS-11 the following year and subse-

quently became director of internal audit and quality control at the Navy Finance Center. Continuing her education at night, she received a master's in business administration from Cleveland State University in 1972 and ultimately a juris doctor from the Denver School of Law in 1978.

When she began working at the Navy Finance Center, the congressionally established savings program for all overseas Navy members had never been in balance, and teams of Navy and contractor accountants from Washington, D.C., had not been able to identify the problems. Working with the Cleveland staff, which had maintained meticulous records, she was able to identify several computer programming problems, reverse their effect, and reconcile the multimillion-dollar accounts to the penny within her first five months.

### **Interior Department/Initial Inspector General Position**

When her husband was transferred to Denver in 1976, Brown obtained a position as a GS-13 at the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management in charge of financial systems design.

As her career progressed, she discovered that most federal agencies have large chronic problems, and she developed a pattern of seeking them out and volunteering to tackle them. Although this involved risk, helping to solve long-standing problems increased her visibility and opened up new opportunities. In that regard, she applied for and was selected in 1979 as project manager at the Bureau

of Reclamation, which led the effort to consolidate the Department of Interior's seven separate pay and seven separate personnel systems into one consolidated pay and personnel system for the entire department. She was promoted to GS-14, then to 15 and 16 in the process. In fact, the effort was so successful that 18 years later the updated version of Interior's system, based on her original model, is being used by all of Interior's bureaus, the Social Security Administration, the Federal Trade Commission, and several other federal agencies and non-federal foundations.

When a 1978 law established IGs in 12 federal departments, Brown requested consideration for a presidential appointment, seeking and receiving support from the Denver area's congressional representative and both Colorado senators. She was already well known and highly regarded in the Department of Interior based on her leadership of the consolidated payroll/personnel effort. These factors led directly to her being selected as Interior's first IG, following 177 interviews (she kept count)!

The skills she had developed at Navy and in her prior positions at Interior, particularly in getting large numbers of people from different staffs to work together, were fully tested. As the first person in this new position, she comments, "I had to consolidate a number of independent auditing and investigative staffs and get them to stop debating who should be handling which jobs. I had to get them to concentrate their energy on developing appropriate and accurate work products that would be accepted and used within the department."

A criticism of many federal IGs has been that they spend their efforts on the less controversial nickel-and-dime issues, rather than on the more complex ones that could have bigger payoffs. A second criticism has been that their reports are disputed or even ignored by agency management. Brown concentrated on the major issues and worked with Interior's management to assure action, as exemplified by her development of the investigative audit, the "audigator" concept.

At the time she began service as Interior's first IG, Secretary Cecil Andrus was negotiating with a highly skeptical congressional appropriations committee regarding funding for a visitor center as part

of a larger rehabilitation project of Washington, D.C.'s Union Station. Secretary Andrus told the committee he would seek a review by the independent IG, and based on that review the committee could decide if the project was sound and deserved further funding. Brown met with the heads of the audit and the investigation staffs, determined that they could consolidate the results of numerous visitor center work products already completed, and monitored development of this highly visible report as it progressed. When the audit chief presented the final report on schedule, she personally delivered a copy to Secretary Andrus and to all committee members. The next day, to her astonishment, the head of investigations came to her with his separate report.

When Brown brought the head auditor and the head investigator together, they were surprised to learn that she had expected one joint report. Each had reasons why he couldn't accept the other's report as definitive. Auditors contended that investigative reports were filled with hearsay and did not follow rigorous standards, while investigators felt that audit reports were too generalized and lacked clear evidence necessary in cases where wrongdoing may have been involved. Brown says, "That was a defining moment in my career. It was clear to me that auditors and investigators needed to communicate. Because they hadn't in the past, Billie Sol Estes had been better able to conceal his fraudulent activities, and wasn't that part of the history of why inspectors general were established?" It was clear to her that a new type of work product, an investigative audit, needed to be created for special situations.

She began to develop "audigators," auditors who would recognize and prove that some apparently innocent errors are made on purpose, or "with intent," and investigators who would recognize that problems detected in a specific case could exist elsewhere, leading to follow-up work and potential recommendations for system, policy, or legislative changes. This concept established an excellent precedent for those who followed in her footsteps at Interior, and Brown introduced the same approach at her subsequent agencies. In fiscal year 1997, audigator teams at HHS were instrumental in recovering \$750 million in fines, restitutions, and other settlements.

### **NASA/Private Industry/Return to NASA**

Upon taking office in 1981, President Reagan fired all federal IGs. Brown began to explore a law school teaching position, but she also reapplied for an IG appointment. Her reputation as the Interior Department's successful first IG helped her to land the IG position at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), where she served for four years. NASA accepted the IG role more readily than Interior. "There had been resentment at virtually all departments of the new congressionally mandated Offices of Inspector General. The culture at NASA was more accepting. Its scientific methodology (testing theories) encouraged these scientists to be open to criticism, and they appreciated professional work products," notes Brown. At NASA she earned the NASA Exceptional Service Medal following a major case which disclosed that a contractor had falsified X-ray documentation verifying the integrity of weld points. The space shuttle had to be "torn down" to assure the safety of the work performed by that contractor. Brown also was recognized for her "innovative leadership in introducing microcomputer technology within the audit and investigative disciplines of government."

In 1985, she left the federal government, accepting the position of vice president and chief financial officer at Systems Development Corporation (now part of UNISYS). She found the work more lucrative but less meaningful than her government service. It was during her time at Systems Development Corporation, with no relationship to NASA, that the Challenger disaster occurred. She wondered, like almost all who had ever been associated with NASA, whether she could have helped to prevent the tragedy if she had been there. When Dr. James Fletcher was asked to become the NASA administrator in 1986, he asked Brown to return as associate administrator for management. She jumped at the chance to return to the challenges of public service, notwithstanding a substantial pay cut.

### **Department of Defense (DoD) and Navy**

In 1987, to her surprise, she was informed that Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger wanted to speak with her about DoD's IG position. She ultimately accepted it and served as the DoD inspector general for two years.



**June Gibbs Brown**

1963 - 1968	Real Estate Broker, Northeast Realty, Cleveland
1970 - 1971	Staff Accountant, Frank T. Cicirelli, CPA, Cleveland
1971 - 1971	Asst. to Comptroller, S.M. Hexter Co., Cleveland
1971 - 1972	Graduate Teaching Fellow, Cleveland State University
1972 - 1975	Director of Internal Audit, Navy Finance Center, Cleveland
1975 - 1976	Director, Finance Systems Design, Bureau of Land Management, Denver
1976 - 1979	Project Manager, Bureau of Reclamation, Denver
1979 - 1981	Inspector General, Department of Interior, Washington, D.C.
1981 - 1985	Inspector General, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Washington, D.C.
1985 - 1986	VP and CFO of Systems Development Corporation, Washington, D.C.
1986 - 1987	Associate Administrator, NASA, Washington, D.C.
1987 - 1989	Inspector General, Department of Defense, Washington, D.C.
1990 - 1993	Deputy IG, then IG, U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii
Since 1993	Inspector General, Department of Health and Human Services

DoD provided a tremendous challenge, but also is illustrative of her approach to joining a new agency. As she points out, “Every agency has a different culture. You need to be sensitive to it. There’s no sense in going in to change it — you need to adapt and work within the culture, learning the language, including the acronyms.”

With large-scale, long-term procurements involving hundreds of contractors and subcontractors, DoD has historically had thousands of on-site auditors. Brown reviewed the levels of risk associated with various contractors and initiated a program in which her office produced “Contractor Risk Assessment Guides.” Contractors could follow the guide, an Internal Control Program, and the number of on-site auditors would be reduced. This self-monitoring objective was adopted by the largest and most progressive contractors, who developed their own forums on best practices.

When physical health problems dictated the need for a less stressful job, she applied for and was selected as deputy IG for the Navy Department’s Pearl Harbor based Pacific Fleet, where she was soon promoted to IG and served from late 1989 until 1993, when she returned to Washington for her current position at HHS.

### **Department of Health and Human Services**

Content as IG of the Pacific Fleet operating out of Pearl Harbor, Brown had not sought a job change when she was contacted by newly appointed Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, whom she had never met. Secretary Shalala, searching for an experienced person for the sensitive IG position, had received recommendations from several sources that she consider Brown, and the two quickly found that they had similar views on how an IG can be most effective. Their discussions went well and Brown returned to Washington, where she was confirmed by the Senate for another IG position, HHS, whose responsibilities then also included the Social Security Administration.

Brown’s non-IG management experiences at the Navy Finance Center, Interior’s Bureaus of Reclamation and of Land Management, her tenure as NASA’s associate administrator for management,

and her work in private industry — coupled with successful techniques learned or introduced at Interior, NASA, and Defense — have contributed to impressive results in her current position.

The massive \$200-billion-a-year Medicare program illustrates this point. When the Health Care Financing Administration staff were developing new regulations to reflect legislative changes in 1997, Brown and her staff were involved, at Secretary Shalala’s request, to help avoid creating loopholes in the regulations. The fiscal year 1998 growth of the Medicare program was \$3 billion instead of the previous year’s \$16.5 billion, and the error rate (improper payments) was halved between 1996 and 1998. The Medicare trustees’ recent announcement extending the likely solvency of the fund under current law by seven additional years, to 2015, was partly credited to the department’s anti-fraud and anti-abuse efforts, led by the IG’s office.

Brown has introduced at HHS a voluntary self-disclosure protocol, a program modeled after the one she introduced at DoD, publishing model compliance guidance programs for health-care providers. In return for self-monitoring and adopting a viable compliance program, entities are assured that if HHS auditors or investigators find problems, the sanctions will be less severe when a good faith effort to comply with laws and regulations has been demonstrated. This approach both saves taxpayer money and creates a more positive customer-oriented relationship.

As HHS Secretary Donna Shalala stated in a 1998 interview with *Government Executive* magazine, “I promised June she would be part of the senior management team, while I would protect and enhance her independence.” Brown, in turn, has developed a staff well drilled in the importance of gathering all the facts and presenting them in a balanced fashion. Recognizing the value of broadening experiences through interagency work, she encourages her staff to be active in professional organizations and to participate in interagency efforts. While she has lost some talented staff this way, many others have received offers and stayed; her office has gained a reputation as a place where many from outside HHS would like to work.

### **Interagency Leadership and Training**

Throughout her federal career Brown has been active in professional organizations and interagency groups. She served as national president of the Association of Government Accountants in 1985-86, then a 11,800-member professional organization which has since continued to grow and, while in Hawaii, served on the board of directors of the Hawaii Society of CPAs. She also is a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration.

Brown twice served as vice-chair of the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency (the PCIE — the Federal Interdepartmental Inspector General Council). Charles Dempsey, former vice-chair of the Council and former IG of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, credits her for being instrumental in setting up computer training for the IG community at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Graduate School. She also has chaired an interagency committee on information resources management and has served on several other interagency boards.

Brown's management and leadership training has been a combination of her work in obtaining her academic degrees, attending the 13-week Harvard Advanced Management Program in 1983<sup>1</sup>, and on-the-job observation of effective leaders. "The experiences of working with Administrators James Beggs and Dr. James Fletcher at NASA, Secretaries Caspar Weinberger and Frank Carlucci at Defense, and now Secretary Donna Shalala at HHS have been invaluable in learning models of effective leadership," she notes.

Brown's broad experience and seasoning across a variety of agencies, coupled with a departmental secretary who understands and values the inspector general role, is producing major dividends for taxpayers and for the professionalism of federal service.

<sup>1</sup> At the time she took the Harvard Advanced Management program, women represented about 3 percent of attendees in this highly competitive program. That was double the number in any of the previous 91 classes. Many, particularly those from countries where women were not considered for executive positions, resented the women's presence. She applied herself, worked on teams in the case study system, and by the end of the course was elected by the class to give the graduation speech. She received a standing ovation prior to and then again immediately after her talk. Professional pioneering has its perils, but also impact and rewards.

### **Carson K. Eoyang**

Carson K. Eoyang, professor of management at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, recently completed a special assignment to the Office of Science and Technology Policy in the White House. Eoyang has more than 25 years of federal experience, which includes teaching, research, consulting, and executive positions with the Departments of Defense, Navy, and Transportation, and with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. His extensive experience in both field and headquarters organizations, and continuous research in cutting-edge approaches to individual and organizational effectiveness, has earned him wide respect. He has been able to lead change in the agencies where he has worked, while also influencing changes government-wide.

### **Navy Department**

After receiving his bachelor's degree in physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and his M.B.A. from the Harvard Business School, Eoyang worked for three years at the McDonnell Douglas Astronautics Company in Huntington Beach, California. He subsequently returned to graduate school, obtaining a Ph.D. from the Stanford Business School, focusing on organizational development and design. His first federal position, in 1974, was as an assistant professor of management at the Naval Postgraduate School at a level equivalent to GS-13. He remained on the faculty for 15 years. During that time, he also had two tours in Washington, D.C., on the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), initially in 1977. He returned in 1983-1984, serving as a principal consultant in the Office of the CNO focusing on programs regarding organizational effectiveness, human resource management, equal opportunity, and leadership and management training.

From 1986 to 1989 he served in his first federal supervisory position as the second director of the Defense Personnel Security Research and Education Center in Monterey, at grade GM-15. He supervised a mix of civil service and contractor personnel. The center's numerous research efforts included a report indicating that gays in the military did not pose special security risks, a finding that differed from past Defense policies and practices. The report stirred intense controversy in the

Pentagon and resulted in various tensions, which complicated the research mission of the center.

### **NASA**

When a former student who had joined NASA encouraged Eoyang to apply for the position of director of human resources and organization development in Washington, he did so and was selected for his first SES position in 1989. He comments, "The vast majority of career SES appointments come from within the ranks of the appointing agency, and NASA was no exception. My immediate supervisor at NASA advised me that I needed to learn the NASA culture and traditions quickly and not rely excessively on my experience and connections in Defense. I followed this sage counsel." He found that his technical education and previous aerospace work experience helped in his assimilation into the NASA family.

During his tenure at NASA, Eoyang published a book with two of his earlier colleagues, *Citizen Espionage: Studies in Trust and Betrayal*, which was based upon their research on personnel security and reliability at the Monterey Center. As chief training officer, he led improvements in the quality of various training programs for NASA's 24,000-person workforce, leading to recognition by the Training Officers Conference and by OPM, which conducted a survey of customer satisfaction throughout government that showed NASA to have the highest employee satisfaction with training.

While at NASA, Eoyang was active in many interagency organizations. He served as founding co-chair of the OPM-sponsored Federal Human Resource Development Council; on the board of directors of the Training Officers Conference, an advisory group on federal training; on the board of directors of the American Society of Training and Development; and as the founding chair of the Asian American Government Executive Network. Also he received a Presidential Rank Award for his contributions to NASA and DoD.

Eoyang was recruited by Vice President Gore's National Performance Review to lead the team on "Rethinking Program Design" in developing the initial government reinvention report in 1993. The work of his team subsequently became a chapter in

the second edition of the *Handbook of Public Administration*, published in 1995. In addition to the report, Eoyang found the six months to be a valuable learning experience. "This short but intensive experience proved highly beneficial in terms of providing illuminating insights into the political dynamics at the highest levels of government. There was a great urgency for high-profile early results balanced against the need for fundamental changes, and managing expectations both within and outside government was important," he observes.

### **FAA**

In 1996 Eoyang was offered the opportunity to become the chief training officer of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), an organization with more than double the number of employees at NASA and five times the training budget. He helped transform the training function from a demoralized, shrinking bureaucratic function into a rejuvenated, entrepreneurial, customer-focused element of the agency's strategic reinvention. He chaired FAA's Subcommittee on Educational Technology, accelerating its investments and future direction to distance learning and computer-based instruction. Drawing on his previous experience in race relations and equal opportunity at Navy, Eoyang led the redesign of FAA's diversity training programs, working closely with the Office of Civil Rights to support the agency's commitment to developing a model work environment for the entire federal government.

A lesson he had learned in making the transition from Navy to NASA was also relevant to his transfer to FAA. Trust and acceptance were vital not only between newcomers and longtime employees in the agency, but also between headquarters executives and management in the field. At NASA he made special efforts to visit all 10 major field centers as an instructor, consultant, and program manager. He also held agency-wide conferences in the field, as well as at headquarters, to help reduce parochialism.

Similarly, following his start at FAA, he served as the acting superintendent of the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City for six months, commuting regularly from Washington, D.C., while the search process for a new superintendent was conducted. He directed the transition of the FAA Academy from a



centrally funded training center to a customer-oriented fee-for-service learning institution, with a congressionally authorized international training franchise and revolving fund.

Eoyang's experience as acting superintendent gave him direct knowledge of the core technical training essential to the FAA mission as well as exposure to key management and union personnel outside of headquarters. The close working relationship with the field was confirmed by Robert Igo, the deputy superintendent, who observed, "During Carson's time as the interim superintendent of the FAA Academy, he was able to deal firsthand with some of the unique projects and challenges at the 'worker level.' He was able to share the perceptions of headquarters organizations to which we provide training services. In turn, he was able to take back to Washington a better understanding and appreciation for the work, daily problems, accomplishments, and capabilities of the people conducting the FAA's training programs."

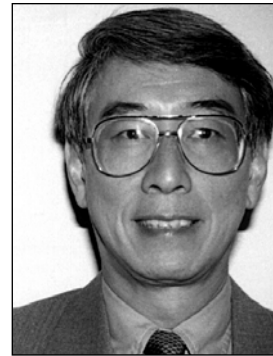
#### **Return to Navy**

In 1999, Provost Dick Elster of the Naval Postgraduate School persuaded Eoyang to return as a full professor to help transform the school into a graduate institution that would make full use of modern education technology and expand its distance learning programs. Eoyang believes that the impending revolution in education and training, stimulated by the explosive growth of the Internet, is creating enormous opportunities and challenges critical not only for the Navy, but also for the entire federal workforce.

#### **Interagency Leadership and Training**

To strengthen his understanding of the current state of the art and future trends in advanced distributed learning technologies, Eoyang arranged for a short-term detail to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy prior to reporting to the Naval Postgraduate School. In that capacity, he chaired an interagency working group responsible for implementing the requirements of a Presidential Executive Order on training technology.

Eoyang's experiences at a variety of agencies, coupled with several temporary assignments including



**Carson K. Eoyang**

- 1968 - 1970 Staff member, Office of Technical Manpower Planning, McDonnell Douglas Astronautics Co., Huntington Beach, California
- 1970 - 1974 Research Assistant, Graduate School of Business, Stanford University
- 1974 - (1989) Associate Professor, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California
- 1984 - 1985 Technical Assistant, Office of Chief of Naval Operations, Washington, D.C.
- 1986 - 1989 Director, Defense Personnel Security Research Center, Monterey
- 1989 - 1996 Director, Training and Development, NASA, Washington, D.C.
- 1996 - 1999 Program Director for Training, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Washington, D.C.
- Since 1999 Professor, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey

two at the White House level, have been invaluable in forging collaboration and partnerships among federal agencies in promoting greater use of educational technology and resources. His experiences have included teacher, policy analyst, researcher, and consultant. His varied contributions resulted in his being elected to the Cosmos Club of Washington, D.C., in 1999. The impact of his efforts will significantly affect all federal agencies over the next decades.

## **Dennis J. Fischer**

Dennis J. Fischer, commissioner of the Federal Technology Service at the General Services Administration (GSA), is the chief executive officer for information technology and telecommunications provided by GSA to federal government agencies, a \$4.2-billion business. His experiences in both financial management and information technology for three federal departments have been instrumental in his successfully initiating major changes at GSA, first as its chief financial officer and, since 1997, leading the Federal Technology Service. Throughout his career he has reduced the overhead cost of government through using new technology and leveraging industry competitiveness. Serving in a central management support agency for the past eight years, he has introduced major service improvements and cost reductions affecting all agencies.

### **Office of Education**

Fischer, with more than 35 years of federal service, worked in computer software and operational support for two commercial organizations prior to beginning his full-time federal civilian career with the then U.S. Office of Education in 1970 as a GS-14 systems manager. The financial condition of the private contractor for whom he had worked on a contract with Education was uncertain, so he decided to accept a position with the client.

### **Department of Health, Education and Welfare/ Health Care Financing Administration**

After almost three years at Education, Fischer was selected (and promoted to GS-15) as the project leader to develop an umbrella accounting system for the parent Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), designed to support all its regional offices. He later became chief of the Departmental Systems Branch in the same office, and he successfully implemented the regional accounting system and began development of a grants payment system for most HEW grants. In 1977 he tried but failed in an attempt to develop a new generation automated data processing accounting system on an interactive basis using a minicomputer. He served in department-level jobs for four and a half years.

Fischer transferred laterally in early 1978 to the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) as

director of its Office of Financial Management Services. Using lessons learned from his previous failure, he tried once again to develop an online minicomputer automated accounting system. This time he succeeded, developing the first ever implemented in the federal government in 1982. It resulted in better and more timely information and a 60 percent reduction in annual costs. The system was subsequently adapted for use by several other federal agencies and was the forerunner for a system now marketed by a commercial vendor.

Fischer was promoted to his first Senior Executive Service position (ES-2 level) 16 months after he joined HCFA. When HCFA created the Bureau of Data Management and Strategy to establish a focus for its information activities, he was promoted to ES-3 in December 1981, an opportunity that broadened his experience beyond financial systems. In May 1982 he was chosen as HCFA's director of the Office of Management and Budget, at the ES-4 level, encompassing the full range of administrative services. He held this position for two years until moving to the Treasury Department. It was during this time that he helped HCFA to reach a final agreement with industry on a uniform hospital bill that could be used for both Medicare and Medicaid, saving the Medicare program \$22 million and the hospital industry \$65 million in 1982, the first year of its implementation. He also gained experience in standing up as a careerist to internal political pressure. The general budget strategy at the time was to seek a balance in HCFA's various programs, yet the political appointee in charge of Medicare, which was diminishing at the time, was pushing for a larger share of the total HCFA budget. Fischer opposed him and was subsequently backed by the administrator. The lesson he came away with was, "You need to learn to tell your boss what you believe; don't be intimidated."

Fischer had worked for the Health Care Financing Administration for six years. He explains, "My general philosophy is that I owe any job about two years, but probably not more than about five. I've never left a job I didn't love, but I like to move on to bigger challenges." When HCFA was about to move its central office to Baltimore, Fischer contemplated his potential commute from his home in Reston, Virginia, and considered other options.

### Treasury Department: U.S. Mint

Fischer learned from his executive assistant, who was married to the personnel director of Treasury's Financial Management Service, that another Treasury bureau, the U.S. Mint, was looking for an associate director for policy and management. Unlike his previous transfers, in which Fischer had been asked to apply based on previous joint work with the organization, he applied and was selected (at the same SES level) without having previously worked with any of the Mint's management team. He served at the U.S. Mint for two and a half years, using his HEW experience working with industry and contractors to convert the U.S. Mint's operation from processing customer orders for products to a contract with a commercial bank. This cut processing time in half and saved the U.S. Mint more than \$1 million annually. He also instituted the use of credit cards in Mint sales programs, and directed start-up marketing for the sale of American Eagle gold and silver bullion coins, which raised more than \$1 billion for the Treasury in its first year of operation.

Fischer's previous unfamiliarity with the Mint management team and his acceptance as a transferee highlights his technique in joining a new agency. "My approach is to tiptoe in, talking in depth with my predecessor in the job, if possible, and to begin getting a sense of the people and where the points of power are in the organization. I try to assess the staff and make the most of the current people and organization, rather than coming in with a group of my own staff from a prior agency. If there has been an inside candidate who didn't get the job, I make an effort to work supportively with the individual."

### Department of Health and Human Services

Fischer's prior reputation at HEW, now renamed the Department of Health and Human Services, led to a new position in 1986. The staff of Assistant Secretary Anthony McCann suggested that Fischer be asked to serve as the deputy assistant secretary for finance. He accepted the position, receiving a promotion to the ES-5 level. With implementation of the Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act of 1990, he also was designated as the department's deputy CFO in 1991. While in this position he built upon the efforts initially begun at HCFA as he completed development of the Department of Health and



**Dennis J. Fischer**

- |             |                                                                                                                  |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1961 - 1962 | Jr. Accountant, Southern Bell Telephone Company, Atlanta                                                         |
| 1962 - 1964 | Systems Analyst (Commissioned Officer), U.S. Army, Washington, D.C.                                              |
| 1964 - 1964 | Accountant, Southern Bell Telephone Company, Atlanta                                                             |
| 1965 - 1966 | Systems Analyst (Commissioned Officer), U.S. Army, Washington, D.C.                                              |
| 1966 - 1970 | Systems Analyst; Project Manager; Ass't Department Manager, Aries Corporation, McLean, Virginia                  |
| 1970 - 1973 | Systems Manager, Office of Education, Washington, D.C.                                                           |
| 1973 - 1978 | Project Leader; Chief Department Systems Branch, Department of Health, Education and Welfare                     |
| 1978 - 1981 | Director, Office of Financial Management Services, Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), Washington, D.C. |
| 1981 - 1982 | Dir., Bureau of Data Management and Strategy, HCFA, Washington, D.C.                                             |
| 1982 - 1984 | Dir., Office of Management and Budget, HCFA, Washington, D.C.                                                    |
| 1984 - 1986 | Associate Dir. for Policy and Management, U.S. Mint, Washington, D.C.                                            |
| 1986 - 1992 | Deputy Assistant Secretary, Finance, Dept. of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.                        |
| 1992 - 1997 | Chief Financial Officer, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C. (Acting Administrator in 1993)        |
| Since 1997  | Commissioner, Federal Technology Service, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C.                      |

Human Services Payment Management System. This automated system pays all HHS grants and those of approximately 30 other federal agencies on a cross-servicing basis, accounting for \$100 billion annually in faster service to states, local governments, and universities while simultaneously providing significant cash management savings for the federal government.

During his time as deputy CFO at HHS, Fischer became increasingly active in several government-wide organizations, most notably as the civilian agencies' representative on the Steering Committee of the Joint Financial Improvement Program (JFMIP), a cooperative executive and legislative branch endeavor whose principals are the director of OMB, the secretary of the treasury, the director of OPM, and the comptroller general.

### **General Services Administration**

After learning from an ad in the *Washington Post* that the General Services Administration was seeking its first chief financial officer, Fischer applied for the position. He joined GSA as that agency's first CFO in 1992, achieving the highest senior executive level grade of ES-6. In addition to financial and budgetary responsibilities, he oversaw the agency's executive information systems and its strategic and performance planning process.

Upon arrival Fischer realized that the available funds for GSA to implement the CFO Act were insufficient. Familiar through his interagency work that the Department of Justice had legislative authority to carry over unexpended funds into the next fiscal year for financial and management improvement, he successfully sought the same authority for GSA. A major restructuring of GSA's financial management systems organization ensued. Results such as the exponential growth of credit cards for federal procurement and travel (making effective use of the federal government's buying power as well as competition among financial institutions for lowest prices and rebates) have revolutionized the way the federal government does business.

During a five-month period in 1993, Fischer was asked to be the acting administrator of GSA. A

careerist serving in any political position might find it to be a challenge, but serving as an agency head during a transition between political appointees can be especially daunting. Fischer comments, "I had no one to go to for answers, but I resolved not simply to tread water. I used the opportunity to get to know better all of GSA's functions and the people, and to position the agency for its transformation." In addition to the normal day-to-day operations of GSA during that time, the agency was called upon to provide logistics and administrative support to the highly visible National Performance Review led by the Vice President, which it accomplished smoothly and in record time.

Current GSA Administrator David Barram appreciated Fischer's work in helping GSA move more into the mode of a competitive provider of choice, and he found that they worked well together. When Bob Woods, commissioner of the Federal Technology Service, retired in 1997, Fischer was one of three possible successors Woods suggested to Barram; Fischer was appointed.

Since 1997 Fischer has not rested on his laurels. He spearheaded GSA's "seat management" program, where agencies can pay a fixed amount to assure that they have the most advanced hardware and software fully maintained for an annual fee per desk-top computer. This contrasts with traditional prior approaches, which were costlier and often left agencies with outdated equipment and periodic lengthy procurement efforts. He continually has found ways to lower federal overhead costs by consolidating the federal government's buying power, maximizing industry competition, and identifying technological trends. One example is telecommunications. While various companies advertise 10 cents a minute or five cents a minute for long distance business or personal calls, the U.S. government will soon pay one cent a minute under its latest contract.

### **Interagency Leadership and Training**

Fischer has been active in a variety of interagency groups and professional groups during his career. He is particularly proud of the role he played during 1994 in re-energizing the federal Chief Financial Officers Council, establishing an elective

structure of officers under the single legislatively mandated OMB deputy director chair. Fischer served as the first elected secretary-treasurer, and the Council has become a model for interagency cooperation. He currently serves on the government-wide Information Technology Services Board.

A tangible result of Fischer's interagency leadership is exemplified by his efforts to address travel reengineering in 1994, which resulted in a December 1995 JFMIP report "Improving Travel Management Government-wide." The report was developed by an interagency task force effort and resulted not only in agencies streamlining their own procedures, but also in the passage of laws implementing its legislative recommendations. The results are not only beginning to reduce government travel overhead costs, but also to reduce frustration levels among federal travelers.

Fischer's management and leadership training has included a three-week course in 1983 for senior managers at the John F. Kennedy School at Harvard. He feels that he has learned a great deal from the various managers for whom he has worked, singling out current GSA Administrator David Barram as the political appointee who has been the most willing to look at the long-term good of the agency over the short term, by moving managers into roles where they are not immediately expert but can offer fresh perspectives.

By working for agencies with large operational programs or central management support agencies, Fischer has been in a position to impact the overhead cost of the federal government significantly. He stays aware of technological changes, and is constantly updating his knowledge by meeting regularly with many people across the federal and industry spectrum. He encourages them to offer their ideas, shares his own insights, finds common ground, and then gets everyone working together in implementing improvements.

When he joins a new agency, Fischer is quickly accepted. When he leaves an agency, he leaves behind not only improved operations, but well-trained people to continue that agency's progress.

## **Robert A. Knisely**

Robert A. Knisely is the director of Analysis Service in the Office of Student Financial Assistance at the Department of Education. It is the federal government's first Performance Based Organization (PBO), patterned after Great Britain's "Next Steps" program, which gives executives greater flexibility to achieve contractual goals in return for less job security but potentially greater rewards. Education is the seventh federal department for which Knisely has worked since beginning a federal civilian career as an operations research analyst at the Navy Department in 1964. He also has worked for seven non-departmental agencies and spent five years in the commercial sector during the last 35 years. He has consistently been called upon for high-pressure, short-deadline special efforts in a wide variety of federal programs.

### **Department of Health, Education and Welfare**

Knisely was a 1962 graduate of Harvard University and subsequently earned a law degree from Georgetown University while working full-time. Knisely began his federal civilian career with the Navy Department as a grade GS-5 operations research analyst, subsequently participating in Navy's management intern program. He spent three years with the Navy, then joined the Office of Economic Opportunity's community action program monitoring staff in 1967. He had learned about the position from a fellow Marine Corps reservist. This subsequently led to his first promotion to a supervisory position, at grade 14 and later 15, as a branch chief at the Center for Community Planning under the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. He served as HEW's representative on the Urban Information Systems Interagency Committee — the USAC project — involving close coordination with the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Model Cities Program and with other agencies. This led to his becoming chairman of the USAC program, working for HUD as director of the Community Management Systems Division in 1972 and 1973. The project, sponsored by components of seven cabinet departments, the National Science Foundation, the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the Office of Management and Budget, used advanced information technology to build integrated municipal information systems.



**Robert A. Knisely**

- 1964 - 1967 Operations Research Analyst; Systems Analyst, Navy Department, Washington, D.C.
- 1967 - 1969 Community action program monitoring staff, Office of Economic Opportunity, Washington, D.C.
- 1969 - 1972 Chief, Evaluation and Urban Systems Branch, Center for Community Planning, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C.
- 1972 - 1973 Program Chair and Director, Community Management Systems Division, USAC Program, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, D.C.
- 1973 - 1974 Sr. Attorney-Advisor, Federal Energy Administration, Washington, D.C.
- 1974 - 1975 Deputy General Counsel and Staff Director, Presidential Clemency Board, Washington, D.C.
- 1975 - 1977 Director, Office of Program Evaluation, Commerce Department, Washington, D.C.
- 1977 - 1978 Director, Office of Planning and Budget Systems, Department of Energy, Washington, D.C.
- 1979 - 1981 Executive Director, Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, D.C.
- 1981 - 1982 Executive Assistant to the Director, ACTION, Washington, D.C.
- 1982 - 1984 Deputy Chairman for Management, National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C.
- 1984 - 1989 Senior Member, Systems Research and Applications Corporation (SRA), Washington, D.C.
- 1989 - 1991 Deputy Assistant Secretary for Budget and Programs, Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C.
- 1991 - 1992 Special Ass't to the Secretary and Director, Office for Drug Enforcement and Program Compliance, Dept. of Transportation, Washington, D.C.
- 1992 - 1999 Deputy Director, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C. (Acting Director in 1992 and in 1998)
- Since 1999 Director, Analysis Service, Office of Student Financial Assistance, Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

**Federal Energy Administration**

An acquaintance at OMB requested that Knisely be detailed in 1973 to an OMB energy task force, which led to his joining the Federal Energy Administration as a senior attorney/advisor, implementing the Mandatory Petroleum Allocation Act of 1973, contingency plans for gasoline rationing, and related issues. In 1974, a fellow attorney, Rick Tropp, who had worked with him on the energy crisis, asked Knisely to be detailed to the Presidential Clemency Board, where he served through 1975 as deputy general counsel and staff director. The staff of more than 600 detailees

(including 450 attorneys) to this White House board processed approximately 16,000 applications in less than a year. Knisely then organized the phase-out of this temporary board. "Virtually all my changes in jobs were initially by detail at the request of someone I had worked for or had worked with me, with an actual transfer to an agency following," Knisely explains.

**Department of Commerce**

Knisely's first position at the senior executive level (GS-16, prior to establishment of the SES) was with the Department of Commerce in 1975, where he

created and staffed a new departmental program evaluation office. He had been recommended for the position by Joseph Kasputys, for whom he had developed the federal energy regulations. He also operated the department's management by objectives (MBO) system for Secretary Elliott Richardson.

### **Return to Department of Energy**

With the change in presidential administrations, Knisely searched for a new position. Fellow careerist Bill Strauss, who had worked with him on President Ford's clemency board, told him of opportunities in the new Department of Energy. In 1977 he joined the department as its director of the Office of Planning and Budgeting Systems, where he designed, built, and operated a multi-year planning and budgeting system — all at the same time. As part of this effort, he designed the department's first multi-year planning process.

### **Consumer Product Safety Commission**

Responding to a job announcement at the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), Knisely served as its deputy executive director from 1979 to 1981. His earlier experiences in program planning and budgeting helped him to redesign the agency's management structure so that project managers could have greater control over staff and dollar resources. While at CPSC he concluded that the federal budget development process was analogous to a ping pong game in its various submissions, reviews, and appeals processes. It was important to provide the maximum number of iterations on a level playing surface so that each side — program people and the various levels of budget reviewers — felt the process had been complete and fair. A fair game clarified expectations and achieved the best results. This perception of fair play included assuring publication of a master budget calendar so that all could know each side's time commitments in advance. As Knisely admits, "A published schedule may not be met perfectly, but it can be altered in future years to reflect the actual experience." He brought this technique to future agency budgeting whenever possible.

### **ACTION/National Endowment for the Arts**

Knisely's previous experience closing the Presidential Clemency Board led to his interest in joining

the ACTION agency as executive assistant to the director for 10 months, directing a reduction in force of 247 employees and the transfer of 300 joint support staff to the Peace Corps. He accomplished this objective without challenge.

From 1982 to 1984 Knisely served as deputy chairman for management at the National Endowment for the Arts. He had been recommended for the position by Kasputys, his former supervisor at Commerce, who was then in the private sector. Knisely directed an effort to streamline the endowment's grant processing system, which reduced processing time almost by half. He also established cost centers and obligation tracking systems similar to those that helped improve operations at CPSC.

Knisely's graphs on grant processing time revealed in the middle of fiscal year 1982 that only one-third of the budget would be obligated by year's end. The graph revealed that the bottleneck was the chairman, who was interested in studying each grant application at his own pace. Instead of confining himself to talking privately with his boss, Knisely indiscreetly showed his charts to others, which eventually led to his job's abolishment.

### **Private Industry/Department of Transportation**

Knisely left federal service for five years to go with a commercial firm, Systems Research and Applications Corporation, returning to federal service in 1989 as the deputy assistant secretary for budget and programs at the Department of Transportation (DOT). The offer came about because he had joined a former fellow worker from the clemency board, Rob Quartel, on President Bush's transition team and caught the eye of the new transportation secretary, Samuel Skinner. While Knisely came in as a careerist on a civil service reinstatement, two years later Skinner wanted to fill the position with a political appointee; in 1991, at the request of the secretary, Knisely moved to the position of director of the Office of Drug Evaluation and Program Compliance.

That same year Congress approved establishment of the new Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS). Knisely had watched momentum for the new agency develop from his previous positions with Transportation and lobbied to become its first

deputy director. He held this position (and also served as acting director for much of the time) until 1999. Excerpts from his farewell message to his staff provide a sense of both his accomplishments there and his work philosophy:

“I am immensely proud of what we have accomplished at BTS since that frantic DOT press release in October of 1992. We have built a new national statistical agency, one of America’s top 10 principal statistical agencies, with a seat at OMB’s Interagency Council on Statistical Policy. We have created the 10th operating administration within the Department of Transportation. We have produced 30 CD-ROMs (115,000 distributed) and 78 publications (325,000 distributed). We have created a virtual National Transportation Library, an award-winning website.... To everyone’s surprise, in only six years we have become a presence in the world of American transportation and TEA-21 [the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century] increased our funding for the next six years by 107%....

“A recent *Post* article on a retired Marine Corps commandant described his father as a ‘five and dime setup man.’ His job was to go to a city, buy land, get a store built, stocked, and in operation, and move on to the next city. Looking back on my career, I have enjoyed most of the jobs in which I was a five and dime setup man. I’ve done it six times: first for the energy crisis, President Ford’s Clemency Board, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Energy, the National Performance Review, and the Bureau of Transportation Statistics.”

### **National Performance Review**

Knisely’s reference to the National Performance Review was to the task force work he had done in 1993 and 1995. For six months in 1993 he had been a member of the senior management team (one of three civil servants) that directed Vice President Gore’s National Performance Review, and he continued in an advisory capacity during subsequent years while working at the Department of Transportation. Accomplishments during these details included initial staffing of the 250-person six-month task force that wrote the original report;

bringing in presidential management interns to serve as members of the 20 separate teams to assist in cross-communication among the teams; and serving as a staff director in 1995 at the request of Vice President Gore to coordinate all the key agencies engaged in regulatory reform review. Savings from the regulatory changes were estimated at \$16 billion.

### **Department of Education**

In 1999 Knisely joined the first congressionally mandated federal Performance Based Organization (PBO) — the Office of Student Financial Assistance in the Department of Education. The chief operating officer selected to lead it, Greg Woods, had worked with Knisely at NPR, where Knisely had proposed a customer-service initiative to Woods. Woods had been leading the customer-service effort prior to his selection to lead the Office of Student Financial Assistance. He asked Knisely to join as the director of his Analysis Service.

After six months on the job, Knisely reports he has been assessing the weekly meeting of managers from all over the agency. This “program management” meeting brings together GS-13–15 managers to update one another, seeking to bridge the inevitable stovepipes in an organization of 1,200 employees who oversee \$50 billion annually in student grants, loans, and loan guarantees. This type of meeting has taken place for 20 years, sometimes monthly instead of weekly, with varying participants. Have they succeeded, in the face of constant changes in congressional direction and senior leadership? Not entirely, Knisely notes, but they have held the agency together through persistent, conscientious, wonderful leadership. He wonders where else in Washington such ongoing meetings can be found.

### **Interagency Leadership and Training**

Bob Knisely has consistently volunteered for difficult “startup” work, which is what he is doing now at the first PBO. In his prior position, the new national statistical agency that he helped build in record time earned awards, recognition, and respect from a large and diverse clientele. As part of his professional training, he regularly attends an annual conference on the strategic use of computers and telecommunications in the



public sector at Harvard's Kennedy School. Earlier work on the energy crisis, President Ford's Clemency Board, made significant contributions in a leadership role with the Vice President's National Performance Review, and a variety of other activities represent only a partial summary of his ubiquitous presence when a new issue is being faced and a volunteer executive to manage it is needed.

## **Eileen T. Powell**

Eileen Powell is the associate deputy assistant secretary for financial operations at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The jaw-breaking title provides only the vaguest hint of her actual responsibilities, which include directing VA's pioneering electronic commerce and entrepreneurial agency cross-servicing programs. She has been with VA since early 1998, having spent 10 years at the Department of Transportation and 16 years with the Treasury Department prior to serving in her present position. Her ability to bridge organizational suspicions and earn the trust of all sides in achieving common goals has been a consistent theme throughout her career.

### **Treasury Department**

Powell, a 1971 honors graduate of Virginia Tech in accounting, began working that year with the Treasury bureau — now named Financial Management Service (FMS) — as a GS-7 auditor. The bureau had a five-year internal rotation program in the accounting and budget fields, which she found provided an excellent grounding for her career. She was promoted to her first supervisory position in 1980 as the bureau's budget officer, then in 1983 broadened her experience when selected for the GS-15 position of deputy chief disbursing officer. This line management position involved supervising a headquarters and field organization of over 800 people responsible for issuing 700 million U.S. Treasury checks, direct deposit, and wire transfer payments annually for Social Security, veterans benefits, tax refunds, and other payment obligations of the federal government. After three years in this position, she then served for two years as the bureau's planning officer.

Among her experiences at FMS that would prove invaluable as she joined other departments was the development of closer collaboration between

Washington headquarters and field installations. At the time she became deputy chief disbursing officer, a decision had just been made at headquarters to replace the computers at the disbursing centers with those of a different manufacturer, and the field organization was strongly opposed.

With about half of the bureau's workforce located in the disbursing field offices, and no margin for error without media headlines (e.g., if Social Security payments were ever misdelivered or delayed), good communication and mutual trust between headquarters and field was essential. The environment encouraged considerable initiative in decision making while requiring thorough, timely, and accurate information at headquarters.

Powell stepped into the fray to help both sides find a middle ground of mutual trust and ameliorated the field concerns. The new machines were installed without serious problems or any disruption of payments during the five years they were in operation. She also implemented electronic certification as the first major payment vehicle in government to employ electronic signatures — a system that is still in use today.

### **Department of Transportation**

In 1988, on the recommendation of a former FMS colleague then at the Department of Transportation, she was asked to join Transportation on a lateral transfer as chief of the Working Capital Fund. After three years in this position, she was selected for her first Senior Executive Service position: deputy director of financial management for the department. She served in that position almost four years, and then in 1995 was promoted to director of financial management.

While at Transportation, her skills in ameliorating resistance to headquarters decisions, initially developed while she was deputy chief disbursing officer at FMS, were tested. The department sought to have a single Oracle Enterprise department-wide solution for financial processing and reporting. Normally each administration would fight the department to retain the system with which it was familiar, but her ability to listen, reach reasonable accommodations, and develop an attitude of mutual respect prevailed. Her experience and familiarity



**Eileen T. Powell**

- 1971 - 1973 Auditor, Bureau of Accounts, Treasury Department, Washington, D.C.
- 1973 - 1976 Accountant, Bureau of Government Financial Operations (after merger of two Treasury Bureaus), Washington, D.C.
- 1976 - 1980 Budget Analyst, Bureau of Government Financial Operations, Treasury Department, Washington, D.C.
- 1980 - 1983 Budget Officer, Financial Management Service (Bureau renamed), Treasury Department, Washington, D.C.
- 1983 - 1986 Deputy Chief Disbursing Officer, Financial Management Service, Treasury Department, Washington, D.C.
- 1986 - 1988 Planning Officer, Financial Management Service, Treasury Department, Washington, D.C.
- 1988 - 1991 Chief, Working Capital Fund, Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C.
- 1991 - 1995 Deputy Director of Financial Management, Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C.
- 1995 - 1998 Director of Financial Management, Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C.
- Since 1998 Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Financial Operations, Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.

with the budget and planning processes in her FMS positions enabled her to develop and institutionalize structured management of the Department of Transportation's \$150 million Working Capital Fund — improving billing practices from six months' delinquent to timely, establishing a planning and evaluation function, and keeping both fund customers and the board of directors fully apprised and involved through training, quarterly meetings, and reliable reports.

While reaching a compromise has been appropriate for many situations she has faced, there are times when Powell has taken a strong position and withstood pressure to change. One of her responsibilities was to ensure that travel policy was consistently implemented. In June 1995 the terrorist Unabomber had not yet been captured and had made threats to place a bomb at Los Angeles International Airport. FAA was publicly telling the nation that the airport and planes were safe when a member of the secretary of transportation's immediate staff decided to change the secretary's flight from Los Angeles to a train trip as a security precaution. Powell said, "No." The secretary flew from Los Angeles without incident, and the only repercussion was an increase in respect for her by others in the department.

**Department of Veterans Affairs**

When a vacancy through retirement occurred at the Department of Veterans Affairs for the manager of their financial operations, Deputy CFO Frank Sullivan asked colleagues whom they would recommend. Dennis Fischer, commissioner of the Federal Technology Service at GSA, whom Sullivan knew from work they had previously done together on the CFO Council and in professional organizations, recommended Eileen Powell. Bob Woods, director of the information technology program at VA, who had held a similar position at the Department of Transportation, also recommended Powell. She was interviewed and ultimately offered the job, starting in the spring of 1998. "I was surprised Dennis had recommended me, since I had only worked with him a few times on travel issues," she observes. When Fischer was interviewed for this report, he explained that he had been impressed by her leadership abilities and responsiveness in addressing the issues. She was

the top person he thought of when contacted for a recommendation.

Once again her communication skills (including those between field and headquarters organizations) were tested. She explains, "I was responsible for giving advice and counsel regarding the department's Franchise Fund finances and for marketing the overall fund. The Franchise Fund cross-serves other federal agencies in a competitive environment. I discovered that the six franchise business units, four of which are in the field, considered my Washington-based business office to be an unwanted burden. They neither needed nor wanted help from my office. I met and worked closely with each and am convinced they now realize the value added by the office." The Department of Veterans Affairs is one of the best managed of the six agency Franchise Fund pilots under the Government Management Reform Act, having received an unqualified opinion by a private sector accounting firm in its most recent audit.

Frank Sullivan, the deputy CFO for the department who hired her, commented, "The department's culture is very conservative and it takes a lot for someone to earn people's trust. I have been pleased and floored by how quickly, within just a year, she has become trusted."

### **Interagency Leadership and Training**

Throughout her federal career, Powell has taken the initiative to broaden her experiences both through training and interagency work. While at FMS, when she was selected for senior executive development training in 1988, she arranged for a training assignment outside federal service with Marriott Corporation. She did well in it (they offered her a job), but she was committed to a federal service career. Also, while at the Department of Transportation, she attended the Federal Executive Institute in 1991. She comments, "I learned a great deal about management and leadership from my various training courses and assignments, but I also learned a lot about what *not* to do as a manager simply by watching others."

While at DOT she was active in the interagency committee developing new travel policies. In addition to impacting all federal agencies through this work, one direct benefit to the department was

implementing a fully electronic travel management system that eliminated paper and reimbursed travelers' bank accounts within four business days of approval. Supporting a broad, government-wide view of agency accounting interactions, she currently chairs the Interagency Advisory Board on Intergovernmental Transfers.

Powell's 28 years of federal service have included a variety of staff and line management positions in the financial field for three agencies. She has brought to each position, knowledge and techniques learned from previous ones, gained additional knowledge, and brought that to bear on solving subsequent problems. Although the current department for which she works has a national image of old-line conservatism, it has been one of the leaders in the federal government in the use of electronic technology during the past decade. Powell's prior experiences in innovations wherever she has worked, coupled with a fast learning curve in new positions, offer the likelihood that the Department of Veterans Affairs will continue as a program agency leader in accelerating the electronic revolution in federal services.

### **Myrta (Chris) Sale**

Chris Sale is deputy to the chair and chief financial officer for the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). Her duties there include managing the FDIC's financial activities, its receivership and resolution functions, and its personnel and administrative programs. A unique requirement of the job is managing the investment of FDIC's \$40-billion insurance funds. Her career in public service includes management positions with a nonprofit organization and a state government as well as federal service. She exemplifies the career senior executive who earns the trust of political appointees by helping them accomplish key objectives in an innovative manner that brings forth an organization's best efforts.

### **Civil Service Commission**

After receiving her bachelor's degree in psychology from Boston University, she began her federal career in 1972 as a GS-7 budget/program analyst with the former Civil Service Commission, now the Office of Personnel Management. She spent eight years there, receiving frequent promotions. She was



**Myrta (Chris) Sale**

- 1972 - 1980 Budget analyst, Civil Service Commission, Washington, D.C.
- 1980 - 1982 Director, Financial Management, Peace Corps, Washington, D.C.
- 1982 - 1984 Director, Office of Budget and Management, State of Ohio, Columbus, Ohio
- 1984 - 1985 Vice-President, Finance and Administration, and Treasurer, National Public Radio, Washington, D.C.
- 1985 - 1989 Director, Finance Service, Veterans Administration, Washington, D.C.
- 1989 - 1991 Chief of Staff to Assistant Secretary for Finance and Planning, Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.
- 1991 - 1993 Executive Associate Commissioner, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.
- 1993 - 1997 Deputy Commissioner, INS, Department of Justice, Washington, D.C. (Acting Commissioner in 1993)
- 1997 - 1998 Chief Operating Officer, Small Business Administration, Washington, D.C.
- 1998 - 1999 Director of Management Initiatives, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Washington, D.C.
- Since 1999 Deputy to the Chair and Chief Financial Officer, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), Washington, D.C.

a grade 13, serving as the agency's acting budget officer (a grade 14 position) when she left to become director of financial management for the Peace Corps.

**Peace Corps/State of Ohio/  
National Public Radio**

A former OPM colleague, Nancy Kingsbury, had invited Sale to help the Peace Corps set up its new budget office as it was separating from the ACTION agency. The position was in the Foreign Service, effectively a promotion to grade 15. Over her two years there Sale assumed broader duties in finance and contracting and participated in the negotiations to administratively separate the two organizations.

In 1982 former Peace Corps Director Richard Celeste was elected governor of Ohio. Sale explains, "He was looking for someone with technical skills whom he could trust. He invited me to become his director, Office of Budget and Management. When I assumed the office, the state was projecting a \$500 million deficit; six months later when we closed the books, the state had a surplus of \$80 million." This remarkable turnaround occurred because the state legislature approved a plan she presented that defined the size of the problem, and — in a "burden sharing mode" — effectively reduced half the gap by increasing state taxes and fees and the other half by reducing appropriations. The state also took aggressive steps to increase federal matching funds.

When Sale took the job in Ohio, her husband, a Washington-based federal careerist, took a year's sabbatical, but not having found suitable work in Columbus, he needed to return to his job at the United States Information Agency. With two children to raise, they didn't consider commuting an option, so in 1984 she began inquiring about opportunities in Washington. Douglas Bennett, then president of the private, nonprofit National Public Radio (NPR), was a colleague of Governor Celeste and had become familiar with Sale's work at the time Celeste considered her for the Ohio position. Bennett offered her the position of vice president for finance and administration and treasurer of NPR.

### **Veterans Administration: Department of Veterans Affairs**

“After I had been with NPR a little over a year, I received a call out of the blue from Conrad Hoffman, controller at Veterans Administration, to become director of VA’s Finance Service, my first SES position. He had been one of the people with whom I had interviewed two years earlier when I was looking to return to Washington,” Sale explains. She served in the position for four years. During her tenure from 1985 to 1989 she helped lead VA into its initial pioneering efforts in electronic data interchange for business transactions, providing major cash management savings as well as operational benefits. Drawing on knowledge gained working for the state of Ohio and NPR, she also directed the first issuance of certified commercial-type financial statements by VA. This occurred almost a decade before federal agencies were required to do so.

The law that established the Veterans Administration as the Department of Veterans Affairs had the unintended effect of leaving her ineligible for what had become the deputy assistant secretary position, which she had been performing and helped to establish. In an effort to assure that the position would be filled by a career professional, the law required that the occupant must have five years of continuous federal employment immediately preceding the appointment to deputy assistant secretary. Sale was short by less than a year. She then spent several months as chief of staff to Anthony McCann, the first statutory CFO in the federal government, helping to establish the CFO office at VA and receiving the Secretary’s Exceptional Service Award for her efforts.

### **Department of Justice: Immigration and Naturalization Service**

The Justice Department was looking for a budget director for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). After calling various agency finance offices, Chris Marcy, assistant to the deputy attorney general, received a recommendation finance offices that she call Chris Sale at the Department of Veterans Affairs. “I gave her four alternative people to contact, and mentioned to her that if the budget director’s supervisor’s job ever opened up, I’d be interested,” notes Sale. Three months later it did, so

in the spring of 1991 she left Veterans Affairs and became the executive associate commissioner for management at INS.

At INS, Sale experienced some of the highlights of her career and some of the greatest frustrations. She served there over six years, first in her initial job, then as acting commissioner, and finally as the deputy commissioner when a commissioner had been confirmed.

As executive associate commissioner, she built the newly established office and a unified administrative support system, redesigned and validated the training curricula for law enforcement employees, and revitalized the information resources program. In January 1993 she began serving as the acting commissioner of INS, awaiting appointment and Senate confirmation of a new commissioner during the presidential transition. It took nine months before Doris Meissner was appointed.

As a career senior executive in a political position leading an agency that was regularly in the news, Sale dealt with accelerated boat migration from Haiti, the initial large-scale smuggling of Chinese on boats into the U.S., the World Trade Center bombing, and the shooting at the Central Intelligence Agency by a citizen of Pakistan. She testified frequently before Congress and represented INS positions at the National Security Council. In the fall of 1993 when Meissner was confirmed as commissioner, Sale became deputy commissioner and continued in that role for four years.

Both her proudest accomplishment and her most frustrating experiences happened at INS during her acting commissioner and deputy commissioner tenures. Each involved rapid increases in workload. The INS citizenship program, under heavy pressure due to growing backlogs, expanded sharply. Processing errors during that period improperly added many people to the ranks of U.S. citizens. Later, when the flaws in the program were highlighted in Congress and by the media, Sale paid the price, although she was a careerist. Her assessment of the situation was that a flawed existing system expanded with additional people and locations without providing adequate time to establish quality control and to absorb growth.

Sale's proudest accomplishment at INS has never received equivalent media coverage, but is likely to produce the longest-term beneficial impact. With a political mandate, the INS budget was doubled in just four years, from \$1.6 billion to \$3.2 billion (with staff increases from 19,000 to 27,000 people), to bring order to the most volatile areas on the southwest border and other extraordinary migrant flows. The border patrol actually tripled in size. She redesigned assessment tools for screening candidates for initial hiring and for promotions, improved the system for training, and required individual development plans. The results were a drop in the attrition rate from 25 percent to 5 percent, increased respect for the professionalism of INS law enforcement personnel, and no major scandals. INS's career development, assessment, and promotion programs are now being emulated by other federal law enforcement agencies. To understand the dangers avoided in this program of rapidly increasing the law enforcement staff, one need only look at the District of Columbia's experience in a similar rapid expansion of its police force 10 years ago in which hundreds of new officers were hired and significant numbers were subsequently convicted of felonies.

### **Small Business Administration**

As the focal point for criticism of the INS citizenship program, Sale felt it would be best to leave the agency, although Commissioner Meissner was reluctant to lose her.

Linda Gwinn, a former colleague at INS now with the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight, knew Sale was looking and also knew that Director Aida Alvarez of the Small Business Administration (SBA) needed an experienced chief operating officer. Sale joined SBA in the autumn of 1997.

Her INS management experience became immediately useful to SBA. At INS, Sale had each unit of the organization identify clearly the outputs it expected to achieve from a finite level of resources, then held quarterly meetings with managers in the field and made necessary adjustments. The process highlighted not only individual programs, but clarified the nexus among programs drawing on the same resources. When she joined SBA, Sale introduced a similar system to help meet Chairman Alvarez's aggressive set of objectives. The lessons

of program integration learned at INS helped SBA in developing its first plans under the Government Performance and Results Act.

### **Office of Management and Budget/Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation**

While at SBA, Sale was approached for a position at the Navy Department. When she began making inquiries at the Office of Management and Budget about the Navy position, G. Edward DeSeve, the former controller and deputy director for management at OMB, asked her to consider taking his former job, a political appointment requiring Senate confirmation. Prior to her receiving Senate confirmation, she was asked to speak to Chairman Donna Tanoue about becoming the CFO for FDIC. She did so and began serving in her current position in 1999. As with several of Sale's previous transfers among agencies, she had first met and impressed her new supervisor when asked to recommend people for several other positions for which the agency had been recruiting at the time.

### **Interagency Leadership and Training**

Throughout her career, Sale initiated or has been active in various interagency task forces. "While at VA I felt that there needed to be better coordination among agencies involved in large payment systems. I was active in a finance officers consortium which was a precursor to today's CFO Council." While at INS she sponsored and supported efforts to improve customer service at the nation's borders, bringing together the deputies for Treasury's U.S. Customs Service, Agriculture's Plant Inspection Service, and the State Department's Consular Affairs.

She obtained her master's in business administration in 1979 from American University while continuing to work full-time. Additional management and leadership training has been primarily on the job, observing others.

A native of Puerto Rico and fluent in Spanish, her experiences in quickly understanding the varying work cultures in a wide range of agencies, her willingness to listen carefully in considering alternative actions, and her wide range of friends and colleagues who have worked with her and have great respect for her professionalism have benefited both Sale and the agencies where she has been employed.

# Conclusions

## **Adding Value Through Prior Agency Experience**

All of the individuals featured in this report introduced approaches in the agencies they joined by building on past managerial experiences and knowledge. A summary of the techniques they used, or the results they achieved in one agency and successfully introduced in others, underscores this point.

June Gibbs Brown's experiences working with many different staffs in leading consolidation of the Department of Interior's pay and personnel systems were invaluable when she became Interior's first IG. She combined many independent audit and investigating staffs and got them to work together. Her development of the investigative audit ("auditor") concept at Interior was introduced in those agencies where she later served as IG, and has paid very large dividends to this day in Medicare and other HHS programs. Jack Mills, the former head of ABC Home Health Agency who is currently serving a seven-year prison sentence for Medicare fraud, stated after his sentencing, "I would rather face a punk with a gun than an auditor with a sharp pencil." Similarly, the voluntary self-disclosure protocol she initiated for health care providers, which has saved auditing costs and created a more positive relationship is patterned after her experiences with the Department of Defense program.

Carson Eoyang's experiences as director of the Defense Personnel Security Research and

Education Center and as a principal consultant to the Chief of Naval Operations on equal opportunity and management training were instrumental in helping FAA develop and implement much needed diversity training in order to establish a model working environment. Having worked with a high-technology and geographically dispersed agency (NASA), he built upon his skills to forge a closer relationship between FAA headquarters and field offices and accelerated the agency's investment in computer-based instruction and distance learning. He chaired an interagency working group on implementing a Presidential Executive Order on training technology and is now planning to further these efforts at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

After learning from his mistakes attempting to develop a new generation minicomputer-based online automated accounting system for the then Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Dennis Fischer successfully developed the first one for the federal government after joining the Health Care Financing Administration. Fischer used his HEW and HCFA experiences dealing with contractors to convert U.S. Mint customer orders for products to a contract with a commercial bank, thereby saving money and reducing order processing time in half. He also introduced the use of credit cards for these programs. At GSA, his leadership in expanding the use of credit cards for all agencies has had a profound effect on the manner in which the federal government now operates.

Robert Knisely's many experiences with starting new organizations, whether as permanent entities (the Department of Transportation's Bureau of Transportation Statistics) or temporary ones (the Energy Task Force, the Presidential Clemency Board, and the National Performance Review), have led to his being called upon frequently by careerists and political appointees from both parties. He currently is serving in his newest startup organization, the first PBO. In addition to bringing past experiences to bear, he has been instrumental in helping organizations refine their budgeting and performance systems, starting in 1975 when he operated the Commerce Department's management by objectives system.

Eileen Powell's experiences as deputy chief disbursing officer and bureau planning officer at the Treasury Department's Financial Management Service (FMS) helped her to develop skills in inspiring mutually reluctant headquarters and field organizations to appreciate the other's value and to work together. The Department of Transportation's single Oracle Enterprise system for financial processing and reporting and the Department of Veterans Affairs' field acceptance of the useful role of its Franchise Fund business office are direct results of her prior experiences. Improving billing practices from six months' delinquent to timely for the Department of Transportation's Working Capital Fund was an immediately transferable experience when she assumed responsibility for the VA Franchise Fund, a working capital fund for business-like cross-servicing operations completely dependent on earned income to survive. Her prior experience at FMS in pioneering the federal electronic certification system is also directly applicable to her responsibilities in furthering VA's electronic commerce initiatives.

Chris Sale's budget and financial management experiences with the Peace Corps, the state of Ohio, and National Public Radio helped her to develop the first certified commercial-type financial statements for VA, a decade before federal agencies were required to do so. Her development at INS of a system by which each unit identified its expected outputs for a given level of resources, thus clarifying the relationships between programs, was of immediate use when she developed a similar system at SBA. That system helped the agency to meet

the chairman's aggressive set of objectives and produce its first plans under the Government Performance and Results Act.

Additionally, many of these executives' innovations have been emulated by others, producing an impact far beyond the agencies in which they worked. An updated version of the consolidated Department of Interior pay and personnel system, developed 19 years ago under the direction of June Gibbs Brown, still is used not only by all the bureaus in Interior, but also by the Social Security Administration, Federal Trade Commission, and several other federal agencies and private foundations.

Carson Eoyang's experiences in advanced distributed learning technologies and identification of the opportunities presented by the explosive growth of the Internet are likely to benefit not only the Naval Postgraduate School but the rest of the federal workforce as well.

Dennis Fischer's online automated accounting system, developed for a mini-computer in 1982, was adapted for use by several other federal agencies and was the foundation for a system marketed today by a commercial vendor. The automated payments management system he developed as deputy assistant secretary for finance at HHS continues to pay grants to cities, universities, and others from HHS, and to about 30 other federal agencies on a cross-servicing arrangement. His leadership in various positions at GSA has led to maximizing industry competition for federal business; lowered net cost for credit cards, computer, and other automation services; and dramatically reduced costs for telecommunications services.

The hiring and training practices Chris Sale introduced at INS during its rapid staff expansion have been emulated by other federal law enforcement agencies.

## **Common Characteristics of Uncommonly Mobile Executives**

The six senior executives interviewed for this report have demonstrated success in a variety of agencies. Four have received SES Presidential Rank awards and all have received other awards that attest to the results they have accomplished. Reviewing their



careers reveals that they have the following characteristics in common:

- All are self-confident risk takers, with a strong sense of integrity and the courage of their convictions; they are resilient when things go wrong.
- All have been active in professional and/or interagency groups and task forces, often initiating such organizations or assuming leadership positions in them.
- All are energetic, focused lifetime learners who stay current with technological and management trends and readily adapt them to achieve organizational objectives; they are willing to spend the extra time required for advanced degrees or leadership training.
- When joining an agency, all adapt to the culture, demonstrate confidence in people, and inspire the staff to work together toward common goals.

### **Risk Takers**

June Gibbs Brown discovered early in her career that most agencies have large chronic problems, and she made a point of seeking them out and dealing with them, such as consolidating the Department of Interior's many payroll and personnel systems. As an IG, she created a team that brought together the separate disciplines of auditing and investigations when problems demanded a new approach. When President Reagan fired all the IGs in 1981, she could have simply left the federal government and taught in a law school, but she reapplied for an IG position and was selected as the IG at NASA.

Carson Eoyang knew that his center's research (indicating that gays in the military did not pose special security threats) would not be a popular conclusion, but nonetheless he issued the straightforward report. When the reaction began impacting other work at the Defense Personnel Security Research and Education Center, with him as the lightning rod, he joined NASA for his first Senior Executive Service position.

Dennis Fischer turned the lessons he learned from an unsuccessful attempt to develop a new online accounting system for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare into another try, which did

work. He developed a pioneering system for the Health Care Financing Administration, which is the foundation for a system used by many agencies today. It also was at HCFA that he stood up to pressure by a political appointee who sought a higher allocation for his program in the HCFA budget, and received backing from the administrator. At GSA, he accepted the opportunity to become its acting administrator during the transition between Senate-confirmed appointees. Instead of assuming a caretaker role, he actively pursued a course of transforming GSA to a provider of choice, while preparing for the new administrator. Once David Barram had been confirmed as administrator, Fischer could have simply continued as one of the best known and highly respected chief financial officers in the federal government, but instead accepted the challenge of changing professional fields to become commissioner of the Federal Technology Service.

Robert Knisely's involvement in startup efforts in uncharted territory, from various presidential boards and task forces to establishing the Bureau of Transportation Statistics and recently joining the federal government's first Performance Based Organization, is the hallmark of his career. Most of the jobs he has taken have involved constant risk and resilience in high-pressure situations. His enthusiasm and candor sometimes cause setbacks (such as his experience at the National Endowment for the Arts), but he consistently emerges as an energetic, experienced executive in demand who has led successful change.

An example of Eileen Powell's standing up to pressure was when she overruled a member of the Secretary of Transportation's staff who wanted the secretary not to take a flight from Los Angeles due to a publicized bomb threat when the FAA was assuring the public that it was safe to do so.

Chris Sale's willingness to take risks, like Dennis Fischer's, can best be exemplified by her nine months as the acting commissioner of INS, awaiting the confirmation of current Commissioner Doris Meissner. She could have declined the role in this high-profile agency or, once there, could have served as a caretaker. Instead, she used the opportunity to raise recruitment standards and training during an unprecedented staff expansion; initiate closer cooperation among the various agencies

with responsibilities at our nation's borders; and begin dealing with the many challenges that happened during her tenure, including the initial large-scale smuggling of Chinese immigrants.

### **Interagency Leadership**

Probably the most striking common factor among the six executives is their involvement in interagency task forces or groups and in professional associations.

Brown has served twice as vice-chair of the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency (the departmental and large agency IGs), chaired the Interagency Committee on Information Resources Management, and served on the boards of directors of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center and the Interagency Auditor Training Program at the USDA Graduate School. She also has been a member of GAO's Advisory Committee on Government Auditing Standards. The now retired former IG at HUD and vice-chair of the PCIE, Charles Dempsey, credits her for being instrumental in setting up computer training for the IG community. Her professional association work has included serving as national president of the Association of Government Accountants and on the board of directors of the Hawaii Society of CPAs. She is a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration.

Eoyang was the founding co-chair of the OPM-sponsored Federal Human Resource Development Council and the team leader on "Rethinking Program Design" for Vice President Gore's National Performance Review, and is a board member of the Training Officers Conference. He was founding chair of the Asian American Government Executive Network and recently was elected to the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C.

Fischer serves on the Government Information Services Technology Board; was a member of the Steering Committee of the Joint Financial Management Improvement Program; and was the first elected Secretary/Treasurer of the Federal CFO Council. He has represented all federal civilian agencies on the Cost Accounting Standards Board and served on GAO's Governmental Auditing Standards Advisory Council. His interagency lead-

ership style benefiting all agencies is exemplified in his efforts to address travel reengineering in 1994, which resulted in the JFMIP report "Improving Travel Management Government-wide." The report was the product of a multi-agency task force cooperative effort and resulted not only in agencies streamlining their own procedures, but also in the laws implementing the report's legislative recommendations.

Knisely's many interagency task force experiences have been outlined earlier in this report, with the most recent ones being service as a deputy director of Vice President Gore's National Performance Review and coordinating key agencies engaged in regulatory reform review. One of his initiatives in 1993 was to arrange for presidential management interns to be brought in to work with each of the two dozen NPR teams, thus providing an early interagency experience and opportunity for these future federal executives at the start of their careers to work with senior careerists from across the federal spectrum.

Powell worked on the interagency committee developing travel policy, and she currently chairs the Interagency Advisory Board on Intergovernmental Transfers.

Sale has initiated interagency groups or task forces to deal with a variety of cross-agency programs. At VA she organized a finance officer's consortium to improve coordination in the Pell Grants student loan program; while at INS she sponsored and supported efforts to improve customer service at the nation's borders, bringing together the deputies for the Treasury Department's U.S. Customs Service, the Agriculture Department's Plant Inspection Service, the State Department's Consular Affairs, and INS. She also served as INS representative on the Department of Justice's Executive Officers Group.

### **Lifetime Learners**

Whether they sought advanced degrees while working, stayed current with technology, attended leadership training, or closely observed effective political leaders and careerists in their agencies or on interagency projects, all six principals have consistently exhibited a high level of energy, curiosity, and dedication to learning.

All of Brown's post-secondary education, from her bachelor's and master's degrees from Cleveland State University to her J.D. from the Denver School of Law, were earned while she worked. Additionally, she attended the 13-week Harvard Advanced Management program. She also comments that working with two administrators at NASA, two secretaries of defense, and her current secretary at HHS has provided invaluable learning models for effective leadership.

Powell, a magna cum laude graduate of Virginia Tech, participated in an extensive rotational training program for newly hired accountants at the predecessor Treasury bureau to the Financial Management Service. Some years later she was selected for senior executive development training and took the initiative to obtain an assignment with a major commercial company to broaden her experience. She feels she has learned a great deal about management and leadership from her training, but comments that she also has learned much by observing various federal managers, including what *not* to do. She has attended the Federal Executive Institute and other management training for positive models as well. Her pioneering leadership in implementing the federal government's first electronic signature system for payments and her current efforts in VA's electronic commerce initiatives reflect how she continually updates her applied-technology expertise.

Knisely, a Harvard University graduate, earned his law degree from Georgetown University while working full-time. His primary executive-level training has been to attend an annual national conference on the strategic use of computers at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Practical use of his continually updated technology learning includes establishing the award-winning Internet website of the Bureau of Transportation Statistics and other efforts to make data readily available to the public.

Fischer holds a bachelor's from Vanderbilt University and earned his master's from George Washington University at the time he began his federal career. He attended the three-week course for senior managers at Harvard's Kennedy School. He also cites the value of on-the-job learning from working with effective leaders. His leadership in

establishing fundamental changes in the federal government's ordering and payment systems through credit cards and online information attests to his zeal in maximizing service and lowering costs through planned implementation of current technology.

Eoyang received a bachelor's degree in physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a master's in business administration from Harvard, and a Ph.D. from the Stanford Business School prior to his work with the federal government. His extensive experience managing training at the Naval Postgraduate School, NASA, and FAA, coupled with his White House and Chief of Naval Operations details, have exposed him to key leaders. His primary formal training has been with the National Training Laboratories. The distance learning technologies he introduced and expanded at NASA and FAA will be further enhanced as he explores ways to maximize use of the Internet.

Sale earned a master's from American University while working for the federal government and has gained leadership skills through working with other leaders in her varied career. Her state of Ohio and nonprofit work experiences have been valuable as she has adapted standard business financial reporting practices to federal agencies, an approach which will be particularly useful to FDIC in the coming years.

### **Joining Agencies and Inspiring People to Work Toward Common Goals**

The wide variety of agency missions in the federal government has led to widely differing work cultures. When someone new comes into an agency at a management level, there always is some level of uncertainty regarding his or her acceptance. Trust must be earned — it is not automatically conferred by virtue of position. The individuals interviewed for this report have been able to make an impact rapidly. Their comments on how they approach each new position provide great understanding.

Brown points out that she recognizes every agency has a different culture to which you need to be sensitive. It is important to understand that you need to adapt and work within the culture rather than trying to change it. She seeks to learn the language and the acronyms quickly.

Eoyang was advised by the person who hired him for NASA that it was important to learn NASA's culture and traditions swiftly, and minimize references to his Defense Department experiences. He did so and found that, combined with his technical training and previous aerospace industry experience, he was soon accepted. When he transferred to FAA some years later, he not only followed the same approach, he jumped at the chance to serve in an acting capacity in a critical field position and thus gained a more thorough understanding of the entire agency.

Fischer describes his approach as “tiptoeing in,” talking in-depth with his predecessor in the job, if possible, and starting to get an understanding of the people and points of power within the organization. He also tries to work supportively with any inside candidate for the job who was not selected.

Knisely's transfers among agencies normally have come about after he had been serving on a detail at the request of someone in the agency. He points out that at any agency there is always someone who has been there for many years and knows the agency backwards and forwards — the people, the process, the products, the budget, and the agency's idiosyncrasies. He finds them quickly, then listens and learns.

When joining a new agency, Powell talks to many people to gain their insights and ascertains who the key people are who get things done. She learns the culture and talks with agency customers to gain their views, then seeks to produce some tangible quick results.

Sale seeks to learn the agency's business as quickly as possible and establish credibility with the careerists who have worked there. She gets around and talks with many people who are doing the agency's daily work, and tries to respond and act in a timely manner and always keeps her word.

The common elements among all six executives are an emphasis on listening, adapting to the culture, and developing a bond of trust — with employees, other executives, and agency customers. They are then in a position to introduce new ideas to solve long-standing problems, such as Brown's introduction of the “audigator” concept at Interior and sub-

sequent agencies, and Powell's convincing the independent VA field offices of the value of the Franchise Fund management office. Producing results based on previous management experience — such as Fischer's obtaining legislative authority for carryover of unexpended funds to improve CFO operations at GSA, and Eoyang's helping FAA develop a credible diversity training program — can quickly deepen the level of trust and set the stage for major improvements in products, services, or cost reductions in the years to come.

A further overarching characteristic of the principals is *flexibility*. Opportunities for training, task forces, or positions do not always occur in a predictable and orderly linear fashion. A general sense of career planning is useful, but a broad set of experiences and work colleagues can lead to some unexpected opportunities. Several of the executives profited ascribed some of their invitations to apply for positions in other agencies to luck. It was not pure luck — they were known, respected, and ready to risk a new challenge.

## **Factors That Enhance Mobility**

All of the executives were asked about the factors that contributed to their success in being selected to work in a variety of agencies and were invited to offer their thoughts about greater mobility for others in the future. All felt that their wide range of personal connections was a significant contributing factor. Fischer describes how he has sought in all his positions to identify people with a community of interest, to establish groups and hold off-site meetings to discuss common problems, and to turn to these people for help in resolving issues. While the primary objective has been to help people from all the involved agencies to work better together, the secondary result has been to enhance mobility among agencies when positions need to be filled.

Brown points out that she has always enjoyed a wide interest in the different aspects of government, and she has encouraged her staff to embrace this viewpoint. Most jobs have some overlap among agencies; she encourages her subordinates to become involved in interagency work. Although she sometimes “loses” good staff members to other agencies this way, the federal government gains and interagency cooperation is enhanced.

Eoyang suggests that interagency mobility could be enhanced by developing senior executive positions selection criteria that give explicit and substantial credit to experience across a variety of agencies. Encouraging significant interagency rotational assignments could be another means of broadening this experience.

Fischer urges his staff to do what he did — be willing to move laterally between agencies instead of only doing so for a promotion. People at the receiving agency feel they are taking less of a risk, and the mobile executive can then earn trust and a promotion by performance. He adds that senior executives should not lose a year's deserved bonus simply because of the timing of their move.

Knisely stresses the value of providing assignments for senior executives in other agencies either through the requirement of a 90-day assignment to “vest” permanently in the SES, or through developing a tradition of using senior executives from various agencies for significant temporary leadership assignments, such as starting up (or closing down) a function. He also feels that more emphasis should be placed on helping presidential management interns stay in touch with one another and continue their leadership growth in government.

Sale attributes her positive career experiences to making it known that she was available to take on difficult assignments, and she believes others should do the same. When filling top jobs, it is always important to learn more about an individual's capabilities and capacities than paperwork and an interview may reveal. She suggests the assessment center process. INS arranged for people to have both a “self-assessment,” which was kept private, and a public assessment. Only those who had participated in the assessment center process could be considered for senior management positions.

Powell stated that it may be a bit scary to leave the comfort zone of work and an agency with which you're familiar, but that it can be very satisfying when you do. Significant temporary assignments in another agency can help to overcome reluctance. One discovery she made, shared by Eoyang, is that there is a larger gulf to overcome between head-

quarters and the field within many agencies than there is among agencies. Problems in different agencies are not so totally different.

## **Factors That Inhibit Mobility**

Although the majority of factors inhibiting interagency mobility identified by the individuals profiled reflect reluctance of senior managers to hire outside their home agency, some interesting individual and systemic problems were also mentioned.

Knisely comments that federal careerists tend to communicate vertically — within their agency structures — rather than horizontally, as most political appointees do. This limits both their awareness of opportunities elsewhere that could fit their skills, as well as other agencies' knowledge of their abilities and potential availability. Brown attests to this comment by pointing out that many of her best people are not well known outside HHS.

The four other executives make a point that sometimes is overlooked in mobility discussions, which often focus on the reluctance of agencies to hire someone from the outside: Many senior executives are very comfortable remaining in their agencies and have no desire to work elsewhere. They are familiar with the culture and the people, are considered expert in their area, and do not wish to risk working in an unfamiliar environment for people who might not be as appreciative. Others might be interested in changing agencies, but only within their normal commuting area; thus they equate the term “mobility” with geographic mobility. Fischer also raises the point that some senior managers do not want to lose the opportunity to earn an annual bonus; this usually is missed in the first year at a new agency when they are proving themselves. Powell highlights the fact that the increased flexibility among agencies in such areas as flextime and commuting subsidies may also reduce the interest of some executives in considering a position with an agency that has more restrictive rules. This issue of benefits may eventually pale by comparison when the increasing number of unique pay scales among agencies grows.

There are additional inhibiting factors, including the fact that not all senior management jobs are

fungible. The “generalist” vs. “specialist” debate has raged since the inception of the Senior Executive Service. Clearly there are many program management positions requiring a high degree of subject matter expertise. On the other hand, there are many others where general management skills, including the ability to recognize and reward top technical performers, would produce meaningful results.

More commonly, people who discuss factors that inhibit mobility mention the reluctance among political and career senior executives to lose good managers from their agency or to hire someone who has not worked their way up within the agency. In the 1980s, at an OPM-sponsored interagency review of the Senior Executive Service, the chief of the U.S. Forest Service joked that his agency traditionally promoted only people who wore green underwear.

Fischer points out that political appointees and senior careerists in most agencies discourage interagency mobility, focusing on current work demands rather than risking the learning time for someone new who might later benefit the agency. He has been impressed that the current GSA administrator, David Barram, has selected executives for positions based on the long-term good of his agency, counter to the conservative trend. Powell believes that senior managers are reluctant to hire outside the agency because they fear the learning curve for the new manager will be too steep. Sale adds that there sometimes is a stigma attached to interagency applicants. Some managers wonder why the applicant has not been promoted at the home agency. She also makes two additional points: Many managers tend to hire whom they know best, and some feel bad if they do not “give” the job to an inside candidate. Eoyang contends that the criteria for job selection frequently reflect the biases of the selecting official toward people who have grown up within the organizational stovepipes.

# Recommendations

## Recommended Actions: Office of Personnel Management

Over the past five years, the Office of Personnel Management has been moving away from a policing and broad range technical-training organization to assuming more of a research and consulting role, directions generally appreciated by the program agencies. At the same time, OPM's drastic staff downsizing, elimination of some functions, and related changes have resulted in the loss of much of the agency's central corporate memory and effectiveness in communicating with the federal workforce. It needs to strengthen its database and ability to make pertinent and timely information readily available to all in order to become a more useful research, consulting, and training institution. Specific actions OPM should take to enhance interagency executive mobility are:

1. Establish and maintain a complete and current database on the careers of all federal employees at the grade of GM-15 and SES (or their equivalent), readily Internet accessible to all agency managers, with appropriate search capabilities.
2. Recognize that with an increasing number of executives under the Federal Employees Retirement System (with pension portability), public service careers are more likely going to include public, nonprofit, and private sector work experience. Explore ways to maximize the cross-training value, developing incentives to encourage executives who leave federal service to return later in their careers. Work with the Office of Government Ethics to minimize potential conflicts of interest.
3. Conduct research on ways of ameliorating the increasing differences in pay and benefit systems among agencies in order to ease transfers.
4. Establish a well-staffed and knowledgeable executive search office to assist agencies in filling key positions.
5. Invite current executives who have worked in several agencies to serve as guest speakers or adjunct faculty at each training class at the OPM Executive Seminar Centers and the Federal Executive Institute. Their credibility in answering questions will have far greater motivational impact than even the most committed regular instructors.
6. Strengthen the follow-up interagency program for presidential management interns. Although this report has focused on mobility of federal executives already at high career levels, OPM could set the stage for executive mobility in future years by greatly strengthening the follow-up programs for these interns. Including them in regular government-wide seminars and calling upon them to serve on interagency task forces, as occurred with the National Performance Review, is likely to increase their enthusiasm for federal service and consideration of broader experiences than limiting their careers to a single agency.

## Recommended Actions: Individual Agencies

Agency program managers, working with human resource and training managers, can take several actions to increase the likelihood of finding talented executives they have not previously known who can benefit their programs:

1. Make changes in their normal search and selection process:
  - Review potential selection criteria for all GM-15 and SES (or equivalent) positions with the intent of maximizing the ability to attract applicants from outside the agency. This could include specific credit for experience across a variety of agencies or on interagency groups.
  - Have at least one individual from outside the agency included as a selection panel member for any executive position. The individual could be someone from an agency with related functions or a “customer” agency.
2. Become involved and encourage other agency managers to become involved in working with other agencies:
  - Serve on interagency task forces.
  - Participate actively at conferences involving more than the home agency; serve on planning committees or panels.
  - Seek to arrange extensive details into positions with partner agencies, possibly trading positions for a period of time with a counterpart.
3. Insure that anyone promoted to an executive position has attended residential leadership training, not limited to home agency personnel, either before or within two years of appointment.



# Final Comments

This paper profiles the careers of six highly successful federal career executives who have worked for a variety of agencies. It describes how their experiences at one agency benefited another and gives several examples of how their government-wide impact has benefited the nation. It demonstrates that mobility among agencies can and does happen. It describes the common characteristics that enabled the profiled executives to transfer and swiftly make valuable contributions at their new agencies.

The executives profiled and almost all the members of the Senior Executive Service today represent the last cohort of federal executives working under the old Civil Service Retirement System, which has tended to keep people in the federal government for entire careers. The Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) does not create the same incentives. Just as free agency and spending caps have altered the human resources decision-making landscape in professional sports, FERS and the increasingly broad definitions of public service are likely to result in a more mobile workforce that enters and leaves federal service. Worker mobility in our society is becoming more widespread, and the federal workforce is not exempt. A quarter of a century ago, when most federal managers entered the workforce, people who changed jobs more than once or twice in a decade were derisively referred to as “job hoppers.” Today, anyone who stays in the same job for 10 years is likely to be suspect.

Mobility can be beneficial both to the individual and to the organizations they join. Planned mobility can leverage the phenomenon to increase the organizational benefits.

Based on the experiences and views of the profiled executives, several specific recommendations for actions OPM and individual agencies can take to facilitate more and more effective interagency mobility in the future are offered. Many of the recommendations will provide benefits to federal agencies even if some individual executives do not join another agency. The exposure to new ideas and different ways of approaching problems through working with people other than familiar home-agency personnel can be useful. To the extent experience is gained in another agency with which executives normally do business, it can lead to closer cooperation in the future.

Many federal human resource issues today require legislation, a solution which is always uncertain and may take years to accomplish. The foregoing recommendations for increasing federal executive mobility do not require legislation — they can be implemented within the executive branch by actions today.

# Appendix A – Career Advice

The foregoing case studies identify useful approaches for individuals who view their careers as encompassing the range of public service:

1. Depend upon yourself, not some wise parent figure, to guide your career. Be flexible, and seek opportunities to work for good leaders and to learn from them.
2. Volunteer for interagency committees and task forces.
3. Seek opportunities for training that include people from different agencies or the private sector (such as the Federal Executive Institute, Harvard's Advanced Management course, advanced degrees).
4. Join professional organizations whose membership involves people from many agencies and, when appropriate, the private sector.
5. Be willing to accept positions or temporary assignments outside your immediate commuting area. The disruption need not last forever, and the longer-term rewards can be great.
6. Be willing to transfer laterally into a new agency. After you've made a contribution, recognition and promotion are likely to follow.
7. Gain some experience in the private sector. All commercial companies are not necessarily more effective or efficient, but their approaches and motivations are different. With a major increase in public/private partnering and more instances of blended workforces, it is important to have a clear understanding of the similarities and differences.
8. As a manager, be willing to hire people from outside your organization, and listen to them when they challenge the organizational conventional wisdom.
9. Encourage your subordinates to do all of the above. It will help the entire federal government to work more flexibly, efficiently, and effectively, and help you in recruiting talented and motivated people who can sustain efforts you have started at an agency if you move on.

# Appendix B – Interview Questions

1. Why did you choose to begin a public service career and what other alternatives did you consider?
2. At what level and type of job did you begin, and were you in any sort of intern or management training program?
3. Did you intend to have a general public service or specifically federal career, and had you planned to be transferring among organizations?
4. What were the biggest challenges you faced when joining a new agency and how did you overcome them?
5. What are some examples of experiences and problem solutions at one agency that you were able to introduce successfully at a subsequent agency?
6. What was the most serious problem you faced in your career, how did you deal with it, and what did you learn from it? Did the political/career interface help or hurt?
7. Which particular job or accomplishment have you found the most satisfying? Did the political/career interface help or hurt?
8. What professional, service, or social groups have you joined over the years and what leadership positions have you held in these organizations?
9. On what interagency task forces have you served?
10. Which mentor(s) were most influential in your career?
11. Did people you know seek you for positions in other agencies, or did you actively search outside your agency?
12. To what extent did your contacts through (a) mentors, (b) professional and other groups, (c) task forces, or (d) training lead to positions in other agencies?
13. What government-sponsored training or additional education outside work have you found most useful?
14. Do you still get together with people from former agencies, task forces, or training experiences?
15. What factors do you believe were most significant in your job mobility?
16. What do you consider the biggest obstacles to SES mobility; how might they be overcome?
17. What other thoughts do you have regarding the factors which facilitated your mobility that might be useful for others?

# About the Author



**Michael Serlin** led the financial management team for the National Performance Review (Reinventing Government) Task Force, most of whose recommendations were incorporated into the Government Management Reform Act of 1994. The law included requiring audited financial statements for all major agencies and introduced franchising — competitive cross-servicing of agency administrative support.

A former Senior Executive Service Presidential Rank award winner, and a former president of the Federal Executive Institute Alumni Association, Mr. Serlin worked for three departments (Treasury, Post Office, and Navy) and two independent agencies (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and Federal Home Loan Bank Board) in his federal career.

He is a Principal with The Council for Excellence in Government and currently serves on the boards of directors of three nonprofit organizations — The International Institute of Business Technologies, the Treasury Historical Association, and the Arlington (Virginia) Retirement Housing Corporation. He has contributed frequent articles on entrepreneurial government and other government change efforts to magazines and professional journals.

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