

NASPAA Competency: Leadership & Management

Essential Leadership Qualities in the Digital Age

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Based on my firsthand experiences and insights into digital transformation in the public sphere, the three leadership traits most essential for guiding organizations through the challenges of digital transformation include communication, resilience, and guidance. When a leader can communicate resilience and guidance, then greatness is possible.

Communication

To guide an organization through the challenges of digital transformation, a leader must be able to communicate effectively and efficiently. Leaders must be able to plainly communicate their intentions and their directions. Great communication, however, is not one-sided. Communication must be multilateral. Leaders must be able to communicate back and forth as well as up and down.

Resilience

Multilateral communication also necessitates a great leader to be resilient. Resilience in a leader means both getting up when facing adversity, but also pivoting, whether it be in communication style or in another direction. A great leader needs to be resilient in the face of digital transformation, able to deal with any challenges. With any transformation, there is uncertainty and growing pain. If a leader is not resilient, the natural ebbs and flows of politics will be unhinging.

Guidance

A great leader is a guide. By providing guidance into the digital transformation, the employees will have a path to follow. When leaders do not provide guidance, the operations, and

administrative staff flounder without a clear path. The word “leader” is literally “a person who leads.” If a leader defines “leads” as merely “the person who goes first,” the leader misses the mark. Leadership is leading as a guide, both walking the path and pointing in the right directions simultaneously.