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Building an Effective Business Case for Federal IT Investment

Video Transcript

Michael Lumb: So one of the other things that we saw with the interviews that we conducted with the study was around being able to show quantitative results from IT investment so how do I show that the money I spent, the budget I had around this IT investment really produced the results, the ROI, if you will? DO you have any feedback on things that you did or put in place at commerce?

Scott Quehl: Yes. I'd say one of the, we are reminded everyday of what is not working in the federal government. We turn on the television, we look at the news or

watch the Sunday morning talk shows and how is possibly ever going to work? How does this government even possibly function? But yet 95 percent of what happens on a daily basis is not on the news or is not in a Sunday morning talk show. 95 percent of what works on a daily basis are good people trying to do the right thing using the power of reason and experience abiding by the law to get stuff done in an environment that is by definition challenging. Because that's why we have government to deal with challenges. So in my experience, when it was time to make an investment in a major IT project that

was going to have mission, technology, financial implications, the ability to make that business case more often than not won the day. Not republican, you go and see the staffers in the senate, you go and see the staffers in the house, you go talk to the OMB, many of the staffers working in appropriations in the hill and use to work at OMB and these are technicians. They have their sensitivities. But most decisions were weighed based on the merits. And most of the persuasive arguments to OMB was not about saying no, it was about asking a series of very tough questions and within constraint,

finding a way to say yes more often than no. If you can make the real case. And making the real case came down not to just being kind of cool or suave, making the case came down to here is the business case and does this make sense or not. And oh, incidentally, we are not just asking for infinite amounts of new money, we found 60, 70, 80, 90 percent or 30,40 percent, some meaningful percentage of the ability to pay for this new investment internally through our efficiencies. We've come to the table with our own tough love but we are going to need that little increment more. And for that new increment, here is what we are going to do for the benefit of the tax credit and American people and if you can do that, you are not only going to win more arguments than you are going to lose, all kind of quietly, all part of the non dramatic process but you are going to as a department, as a CIO or as a CFO is going to develop a bit of a reputation for that level of rigor and it is going to start winning some jump balls that maybe otherwise wouldn't have been won but for the demonstration of the rigorous business case and doing what you say you are going to do and making your own tough choices internally before you start asking for more. You're going to develop an ability to win some of those jump balls. And ultimately, the departments that work that way are going to prevail more often than not in getting the funding approved for their top priorities.

Michael Lumb: Excellent.