SPECIAL FEATURE! Seven Government IT Truisms That Non-IT Leaders Need to Know

By Steve Monaghan, Director of the Information & General Services Agency - Nevada County

The genesis of the *Seven Government IT Truisms* dates back to a conversation I had with Bill Chiat, the visionary behind the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) Institute for Excellence in County Government. Bill, who had an illustrious 40-year tenure in state and local government including serving as the CEO for Napa County, CA, recognized the imperative for senior management to be technologically literate—not just in utilizing tools but in steering Information Technology (IT) to transform their organizations.

The paramount hurdle we recognized was enlightening non-IT executives (aka: Business) about the untapped potential of IT and the necessity of their stewardship in maximizing IT investments and oversight. Appreciating what they don't know could significantly advance digital transformations, leading to more streamlined, effective, and impactful local governments.

Together, Bill and I envisioned a course aimed at equipping Business leaders with the necessary tools to succeed in this digital era. Sadly, Bill passed in 2020, but his vision for this course lived on as I was able to later develop and teach it, titled, "Essential IT Leadership Competencies for Non-IT Professionals." This course has been well-received by local government attendees in the now aptly named CSAC William "Bill" Chiat Institute for Excellence in County Government and also at the California Special Districts Association Education Program.

Participant feedback particularly highlighted a standout segment titled *The Seven Government IT Truisms*," which I crafted from over two decades of experience as a local government chief information officer working closely with peer agency executives. These truisms are not searchable via Google or AI platforms; they are gleaned from the front lines of government IT management. Leverage these truisms to drive engagement and conversations within your organization's leadership teams.

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The Seven Government IT Truisms (abbreviated)

Truism One: Every Public Service Relies on an IT System

We live in an age where IT is woven into the fabric of every business process. A simple civic issue like a pothole repair involves a complex array of IT systems, from the initial citizen report submitted online to the electronic dispatching of the work crew. This reliance on IT for the mundane to the complex showcases the necessity for informed oversight and strategic planning by all leadership.

Truism Two: IT Management Is Inherently Challenging

Managing IT is not for the faint of heart. It demands a blend of dedication, knowledge, and strategic vision, particularly from those who do not have a background in technology. Agency department executives that shortchange this responsibility and delegate internal IT leadership/oversight as "other duties as assigned" to a mid-level manager, analyst, or their already overloaded fiscal lead rarely achieve high IT satisfaction or realize the full value from their investments.

Truism Three: Business and IT Are Interdependent

The relationship between agency department (Business) operations and IT (internal IT department/staff) should be one of mutual respect and collaboration, a true win-win partnership. This relationship requires understanding, shared goals, and a commitment to work through challenges together. Organizations that maintain a dichotomous view of this relationship often struggle to realize the full potential of their IT endeavors.

Truism Four: IT Is a Major Financial Commitment

The fiscal impact of IT is significant, with costs rising steadily ([read my previous article on escalating SaaS costs.](#)) Every aspect of modern public service relies on some form of technology, which in turn drives up IT expenditure. For non-IT leaders, understanding and actively participating in the financial management of

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IT resources is not just beneficial; it's essential. Understandable full-cost transparency from IT back to agency departments is equally essential.

Truism Five: The Demand for IT Exceeds Supply

The rapid and cyclic changes with technology have led to an unquenchable IT demand that often outstrips the available supply. Departments within an organization vie for the latest IT advancements to enhance their operations, but IT departments, bounded by fiscal and logistical constraints, struggle to keep pace with these demands. Volatility among GovTech vendors, product lifecycles, regulatory enhancements, and security requirements compound demand, restricting available supply even further. This scenario underscores the need for astute IT governance and the careful prioritization of IT projects by having Business and IT working closely together.

Truism Six: IT Poses Increasing Risks

As our reliance on IT grows, so does the risk associated with it. Non-IT executives must recognize and fully understand their role in mitigating these risks that they own. As IT risks are escalating with the advent of threats such as ransomware and data breaches, the stewardship of that risk is a critical component of modern IT governance and executive leadership.

Truism Seven: A High Proportion of IT Projects Encounter Difficulties

A sobering reality in the realm of IT is that a significant number of projects encounter obstacles, from budget overruns and delayed timelines, to unrealized functionality/value. These projects are not just about technology; but more about people and processes—elements that demand strong non-IT leadership and clear vision from the outset.

The *Seven Government IT Truisms* are more than observations; they are a clarion call for non-IT leaders to better understand and embrace their role in steering their organizations towards IT success. There is a long-time industry mantra that

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states "IT needs to better understand the Business to be a true strategic partner." It is equally as important for the Business to fully understand these Seven Government IT Truisms so that they can be informed and equal participants in building a healthy Business - IT partnership.

With these truisms as a guide, local government leaders together can navigate the complexities of IT and use technology as a catalyst for digital transformation and enhanced citizen services. Use them to start conversations across your organization while leveraging the [7 Leadership Strategies for Counties to Move Forward with Digital Transformation](#).

For additional IT articles tailored to local government leadership, check out the following:

- [The Impact of Artificial Intelligence Tools (like ChatGBT) for Rural County Organizations](#)
- [Rural California Counties have a Digital Equity Problem](#)
- [County Leaders: How to Drive Information Technology Success in Your Organization](#)
- [If Phone and Internet Services Fail in an Emergency: 9 Preparation Strategies for Rural Counties](#)
- [Rural Broadband and 4 Ways Counties Can Move Forward Now](#)
- [6 Simple Ways County Leaders Can Execute Cyber-Risk Oversight](#)

AUTHOR

Steve Monaghan is the Director of Nevada County's Information & General Services Agency. For twenty-plus years, he previously held the position of Chief Information Officer (CIO) and was responsible for planning, organizing, and directing the county's overall information technology efforts and investments. His efforts have resulted in significant recognitions and awards for his leadership in the IT industry and, during his tenure, Nevada County has received numerous awards for technology leadership and excellence. In addition, Steve created the CSAC/CCISDA County Technology Executive Credential program, serves on NACo and ICMA technology related advisory boards and workgroups, and serves as a member of RCRC's Broadband Advisory Committee. Find additional information about Steve here (https://www.linkedin.com/in/stevemonaghan1/) and connect with him directly at steve.monaghan@NevadaCountyCA.gov

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