

REFRAMING FEDERAL MICROGRID DEVELOPMENT

Kent Myers

The federal government is currently replacing conventional electric power plants with advanced microgrids at major military bases. A microgrid is a significant upgrade, having high potential locally by exploiting new energy sources and better ways to integrate, but also setting a new national pattern.

Policy levers are being applied to make the transition to microgrids a success. A direction has been set, and this has been followed up with favorable acquisition mechanisms, ample funding, and political support. It would seem that everything is in place, except that an underlying organizational culture is poorly matched to what microgrid development requires, and this organizational culture is relatively immune to the policy levers that have been applied.

By “culture” we mean interlocking management practices that are actively reinforced in the everyday dealings of the federal workforce. Several common and even best practices in federal acquisition and project management are not well matched to microgrid development and may seriously limit their benefits. These practices grew from experience with technologies, organizations, and standards of a different era and continue to be considered the proper way to purchase and manage services. While these practices continue to be workable in many situations, they suppress systemic, evolutionary approaches to technology development. An alternative approach and associated practices are proposed that are more likely to bring out the full potential of microgrids while maintaining conventional safeguards.

In sum, an important overlooked target is identified for policy intervention that will unlock microgrid development, but successful intervention hinges on overcoming a persistent organizational culture – a difficult prospect.

Kent C. Myers, is a management consultant with Leidos (formerly SAIC), currently helping the intelligence community create a single information enterprise. Some of his recent projects include development of expertise in identity intelligence, building a diagnostic tool for adaptive organizational capability (which won an innovation award), and creating a campus-wide knowledge strategy for the US Army War College. He has devised methods in process design, performance management, and organizational development to cope with complex environments and to build novel capabilities. Recently he published *Reflexive Practice: Professional Thinking for a Turbulent World*. Myers has a PhD in Social Systems Sciences from the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania and a BA in International Relations from the School of International Service, American University. His website is www.linkedin.com/in/myerskent/.