Igniting Your Agency's Innovation

govloop

Introduction

Face it: the status quo is not working for scores of agencies nationwide. Whether the issue is customer service, mission priorities or other concerns, the old way of operating is causing friction between government employees and the communities they serve. Going forward, the public sector must reinvent itself at every level.

Innovation thus becomes the name of the game, but agencies cannot play a sport whose rules they do not understand. For starters, innovation is not a refresh that occurs overnight. Without changing how people work and processes function, agencies may not see innovation's benefits.

Digitally transforming their tools, meanwhile, can intimidate agencies. After all, these upgrades must fit employees and workflows, or they will not save agencies money or improve efficiency. Even worse, agencies must innovate securely, or they may jeopardize sensitive constituent data.

Perhaps most importantly, the changes agencies make must fairly impact the entire public. Without equity, agencies may deliver products and services to their customers unequally. Left unchecked, the result can be rising mistrust between governments and the people they serve.

Fortunately, innovation is not impossible for agencies. During GovLoop's recent virtual summit, "Turning Innovation Into Action at Your Agency," government and industry experts shared best practices for modernizing agencies for consistent innovation.

Read on to hear how some of your peers are actively tackling outdated habits and systems with innovation.

Contents

As Government Innovates With Tech, Who Gets Left Behind?

A conversation with Bill Zielinski, Chief Information Officer, Dallas

Equity is a small word packed with huge implications for the way we live, work, serve others and ensure fair access and opportunities for all.

But as we hear more about equity in the context of government services, there seems to be a disconnect among some who don't quite understand what equity means in terms of their everyday work, how it applies to them and, frankly, why they should care.

Well, we want to demystify equity and make it make sense for all government employees, whether you serve on the frontlines or are grappling with equity implications for an entire organization. Consider this: equity asks not just who am I serving, but how am I serving them and who am I not reaching?

"As we are thinking about our expansion in the digital world, if we don't understand that access part of it, then we are going to leave behind portions of our populations," said Bill Zielinski, who serves as the CIO of Dallas, Texas. Zielinski directs IT operations for America's ninth largest city with a population of 1.9 million people, giving him a critical perspective on why decision-making should be rooted in equity.

Zielinski broke down how and why equity impacts the government and ultimately, our everyday lives.

"There is hardly anything that we do without some aspect of tech," he said, and access to technology often equates to opportunities.

As a deliverer of technical solutions, Zielinski explained that there are often guiding principles for managing a project and program to seek the best ways for successful deployment.

But equity forces you to take a step back and understand the environment as well, Zielinski said.

For example, when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down libraries, community centers and other public places where residents were getting services, what became clear was that digital engagement was taking place in physical locations citywide. As locations shut down, so did Wi-Fi and opportunities to access government services for a large swath of the community, Zielinski said.

The same was true for phases of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout that required online appointments or vehicles to drive up and get a shot. If you didn't have personal transportation or online access, you were left out.

So, what should you be asking to ensure that equity is embedded in decision-making, including technology? Zielinski's response: human-centered design (HCD).

He advised public servants to step back and start with the end in mind. Consider this question: What are we trying to accomplish, and for whom?

Zielinski and his team took this approach to guide Dallas's website redesign. No, there is no flashy blockchain or artificial intelligence (AI), but this project gets to the heart of meeting the community's needs. Dallas brought in a HCD expert to help identify specific communities in the city where there are lower penetration rates for internet access.

"How can we ensure that once you [residents] have broadband access, we are ensuring that we are building out services in the way you can access them?" Zielinski said.

And equity isn't an afterthought or something that only applies to certain projects.

"I'm beginning to look at many of these projects with that equity lens placed up front," he said. "Human-centered design helps to do that."

Zielinski and his team are also working to put measurable key performance indicators, or KPIs, in place to understand if they are increasing access and equity. When asked about his biggest lessons learned on this journey, data took center stage.

"The first step in solving a problem is admitting you have one," Zielinski said. Data has been instrumental in understanding the extent of the problem and how best to apply limited resources to address inequities.

"It is to our own detriment that we are leaving portions of the population behind even as we modernize the technical stack," Zielinski said.

Ultimately, governments must bring everyone along during their modernization journeys or risk leaving parts of the public behind.

Case Study: **Community Trust Required for AI Initiative in Los Angeles**

A conversation with Jeanne Holm, Deputy Mayor for Budget and Innovation, City of Los Angeles

Los Angeles, California, needed more than partnerships with institutions to roll out its $1.3 million AI initiative around air quality – it needed community buy-in.

Funded by NASA, the Predicting What We Breathe project uses AI, driven by satellite and ground sensor data, to analyze urban air quality.

- People in low socioeconomic positions and Black, Asian and Hispanic residents often face higher exposure to pollution, according to the American Lung Association.

- Some of Los Angeles' most impoverished communities also have the least amount of air quality sensors, said Jeanne Holm, the city's Deputy Mayor for Budget and Innovation.

- The sensors are needed to gather data to help Los Angeles understand how to improve air quality in the neighborhoods that need it most.

In April 2021, Los Angeles set up citizen science programs with local community organizations to distribute free sensors to residents, Holm said.

Working through trusted brokers like Pacoima Beautiful, an environmental justice organization, was key to gaining the communities' trust for setting up the devices.

- "If we can convince [the brokers] this is a good thing, they use their trust to carry this forward," Holm said.

- Los Angeles also used lessons learned from the federal Census, where community trust was vital for getting residents counted. The city continues to use Census ambassadors to reach residents.

Los Angeles' air quality project is just one of many new tech initiatives focused on equity. Others include:

- BIG: LEAP, a citywide guaranteed income program

- Angeleno Corps, which helps youth find employment in technology, arts and education

- Angeleno Connect, a single sign-on capability for key city services that allows residents without bank accounts to qualify for banking services

- Repair Innovation Fund, a participatory budget program that allows residents to decide where they want city funds spent

- Get Connected LA (GCLA), a digital inclusion program that helps residents receive low- or no-cost internet

"As we come out of the [COVID-19] pandemic, it's an opportunity to take advantage of what we made and figure out a way to sustain those and make them digitally equitable," Holm said.

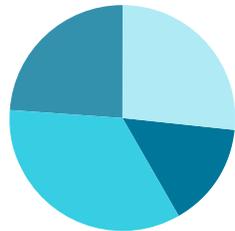# The Nation's Cybersecurity Is at an Inflection Point

Tim Brown   **Lester Godsey**

A conversation with Tim Brown, CISO and VP of Security, SolarWinds; and Lester Godsey, Chief Information Security Officer, Maricopa County
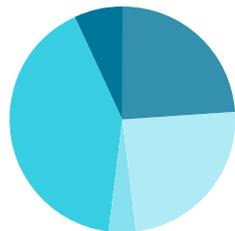
Is your agency more secure now than it was before the pandemic?

- **35%** In Some Ways
- **27%** Yes
- **24%** Unsure
- **15%** No

How many feel their organizations have as good of security in place for cloud services hosted internally?

- **41%** Unsure
- **24%** Yes definitely
- **24%** Slightly
- **7%** No on-prem services/ only cloud
- **4%** No

In the aftermath of major cyberattacks that threatened critical infrastructure and national security, President Joe Biden signed an executive order on May 12, 2021, that aimed to strengthen America's cyberdefenses through increased information-sharing with the private sector.

"Protecting our Nation from malicious cyber actors requires the Federal Government to partner with the private sector. The private sector must adapt to the continuously changing threat environment, ensure its products are built and operate securely, and partner with the Federal Government to foster a more secure cyberspace."

– Executive Order on Improving the Nation's Cybersecurity

Biden's order requires technology service providers to share information about cybersecurity breaches no later than three days in severe cases.

- It will also set baseline security standards around software sold to the federal government.
- And a safety review board will be established to make cybersecurity recommendations based on previous incidents.

"This is an inflection point," said SolarWinds' Tim Brown, CISO and VP of Security, referring to how industry and government have responded to recent breaches.

- In December 2020, SolarWinds discovered a highly sophisticated cyber intruder in one of its popular applications. The intruder is believed to be linked to a Russian intelligence group.

Malicious actors often have the upper hand when it comes to successfully launching attacks, Brown and Lester Godsey, Maricopa County, Arizona's CISO, agreed.

- "The fundamental issue, from my perspective, is that the bad guys only have to be successful once," Godsey said. "Everyone else's batting average has to be as close to perfect as humanly possible."
- Godsey and Brown spoke hours before the Biden administration released the president's cybersecurity executive order. They also discussed how government is moving forward from past cybersecurity incidents.

Eventually, increased transparency and communication between government and industry will be key for improving national cybersecurity.

For example, SolarWinds engaged the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and other intelligence agencies early in its breach discovery.

"We had to give them enough understanding and detail, so we could collaborate well," Brown said, adding it was a "heavily communicated event."

During the 2020 elections – a "unicorn event," said Godsey – communication was also paramount to ensuring election security amid various threat vectors.

- The 2020 elections were "the most open and communicative process" Godsey said he had participated in from an intelligence-sharing perspective.
- Godsey's team, the Office of Enterprise Technology (OET), regularly communicated with Maricopa County's recorder elections department, Arizona's CISO and the local fusion center, with everyone sharing intelligence with federal agencies like CISA and the FBI.
- The day of the general election, OET shared hourly reports on the status of network traffic and intrusion attempts with its partners, shutting down credible threats that may have attempted to sway public perception on social media.
- "Communication can't be understated," Godsey said.

State, Local Agencies Seek New Tactics for Ransomware Battle

A conversation with Maria Thompson, State Chief Risk Officer, North Carolina; Daniel Hankins, Cybersecurity Coordinator, State of Texas; and Rufus Coleman, Director and General Manager, U.S. SLED, Infoblox
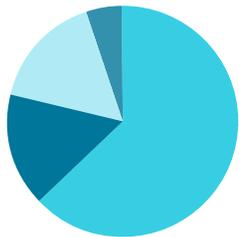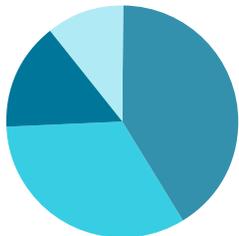
Maria Thompson   **Daniel Hankins**   **Rufus Coleman**

Has your organization increased cybersecurity training/procedures in the last year?

- **63%** Yes definitely
- **16%** No
- **16%** Somewhat
- **5%** Unsure

Has your agency spent time talking about ransomeware attacks in 2020 or 2021?

- **41%** Yes definitely
- **33%** No
- **15%** Somewhat
- **11%** Unsure

Perpetually working with limited resources, many agencies were already struggling to fend off ransomware and other cyberthreats. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they saw a surge in malicious activity, especially phishing, but their resource constraints did not change.

"The bad guys are looking for ways to hit us when we are most distracted and get into our environment," said Maria Thompson, North Carolina's Chief Risk Officer.

Thompson and other government thought leaders discussed strategies for helping agencies shore up their cyberdefenses.

Double Down on Cyber Awareness Training

Thompson said the primary way cybercriminals are getting into networks is through social engineering and phishing. These bad actors are crafting emails that trick users into sharing information or clicking on links that download malicious code.

"People are not taking that extra step to stop and think, 'Should I click on this link?' or 'Is this person trying to get information from us?' 'Should I validate that the request is valid?'" she said.

North Carolina has responded by increasing end-user training, much to the consternation of some employees who said they didn't have time for it.

"But I said, 'Now is the time more than ever that we should be focusing on this,'" Thompson said. "The bad guys are looking for ways to hit us when we are most distracted and get into our environment."

Keep Network Administrators Up to Speed

Texas has taken a similar approach. The state legislature recently passed a bill that required security awareness training for all public employees, said Daniel Hankins, Texas's Cybersecurity Coordinator.

But Texas is also focused on ensuring that its IT administrators keep their skills up to date, providing them with a steady stream of information about training opportunities.

"Everybody gets the basic cybersecurity training," Hankins said. He noted there is a real risk to agencies, "if your administrators are a little bit behind on the technologies, or they don't understand that something is critical."

Don't Look for a Quick Fix

Given the complexity of today's cybersecurity challenges, agencies should not expect to find one solution or even one company to fix their problems, said Rufus Coleman, Director and General Manager, U.S. SLED at Infoblox, which provides core network services.

Instead, agencies should take a defense-in-depth strategy, using security orchestration, automation and response (SOAR) capabilities to manage cybersecurity activities across their environment, Coleman said.

Industry vendors need to do their part as well, he said – by sharing information and insights that can help everyone understand the threat landscape.

"What we do is share information with other vendors in the tech community to [help them] make their tools smarter," Coleman said. "We work in tandem to produce better outcomes and quicker outcomes for our public partners."

How to Innovate Like the DoD

A conversation with Sean Brady, DoD Senior Lead for SW Acquisition, OUSD (A&S)/ Acquisition Enablers; Bill Bensing, Software Factory Lead, Managing Architect; and John Willis, Senior Director, Global Transformation Office, Red Hat
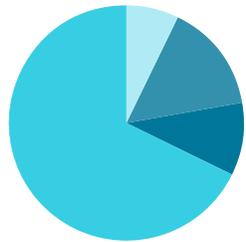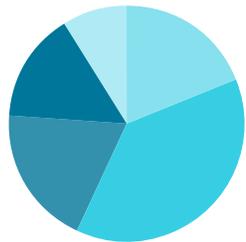
Sean Brady   **Bill Bensing**   **John Willis**

Does your agency use a DevSecOps strategy?

- **68%** Unsure
- **15%** No
- **10%** In some places
- **7%** Yes

What is the biggest barrier to creating more collaboration on your team?

- **38%** Lack of proper employee training/expectations
- **19%** Lack of tools/resources
- **19%** Cultural barrieres this not the way we have done things before
- **15%** Lack of executive level support
- **9%** Lack of governance

The Defense Department (DoD) is truly one of a kind. Unlike America's other agencies, the DoD oversees national security and the U.S. armed forces. The DoD's status as the world's largest employer also makes it unique. Recently, for example, one DoD official estimated his agency has over 200,000 acquisition and engineering professionals alone.

How does an organization as large and important as the DoD innovate? The secret may be DevSecOps. DevSecOps mixes IT operations, software development and security into one organizational philosophy; once implemented, DevSecOps can continuously develop high-quality software. DevSecOps can also make agencies more agile, boosting their flexibility and improving their resilience.

Sean Brady, DoD Senior Lead for Software Acquisition, Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (OUSD (A&S)) and the Office of Acquisition Enablers, said other agencies can learn from the DoD's DevSecOps successes. Bill Bensing, Software Factory Lead, Managing Architect and John Willis, Senior Director, Global Transformation Office at Red Hat, also described how DevSecOps can help agencies imitate private sector companies like theirs.

All three men detailed how DevSecOps can fuel powerful innovation at agencies:

Start With People

Agencies that do not first change their culture will struggle with DevSecOps. For instance, cybersecurity personnel can make security stronger at their offices. Without eliminating silos between their various teams, agencies will not see DevSecOps' best results.

"If you don't address the culture part and the people part, things can collapse," Brady said. "It starts with the leadership. Show some early victories and build some trust."

Make Personal Contributions

Regrettably, DevSecOps' agencywide impact can convince individuals they cannot contribute to realizing it. Every employee can do their part to ensure DevSecOps takes root at their agency, Bensing said.

"If you want to start doing this and you're running into hurdles, look inward," he said. "What can you do to be more collaborative?"

Take team meetings. By including personnel from every department in these huddles, agencies can obtain the cooperation needed for DevSecOps.

Collect Feedback

Humans are often creatures of habit, so many government workers may be reluctant to abandon their routines. Should hesitation set in, Willis recommends collecting feedback from people impacted by DevSecOps.

"Treat it like research," he said. "That's the only way you're able to get past the problem."

Why does this matter?

Agencies serve citizens, and DevSecOps can help them do just that with greater speed and flexibility. In the future, more agencies may embrace DevSecOps once they realize how it can score more mission wins.

"We have to be absolutely dominant in DevSecOps," Brady said of the DoD's plans. "As we look to the next decade, that is going to be increasingly important."
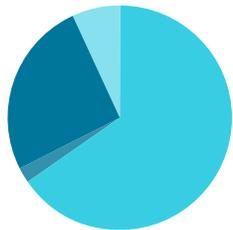
Are We There Yet? No, Transformation Experts Agree

A conversation with Bill Smith, Chief Information Officer, State of Alaska; and MJ Jackson, AVP and Global Head of Industries, DocuSign
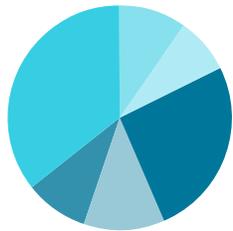
Bill Smith   **MJ Jackson**

Has your organization been more innovative in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic?

- **66%** Yes
- **26%** In some ways
- **7%** Unsure
- **2%** No

What is your agency's biggest barrier to innovation?

- **36%** All of the above
- **26%** Budget
- **12%** Workforce
- **10%** Culture
- **9%** Resources
- **8%** Tech

Digital services and expanded telework are major milestones for government. This age of government 2.0 is one that tech-minded acolytes dreamt of, but few in the public sector forecasted its landfall by 2021.

Alaska was "midstream" in its transformation efforts when the pandemic hit, CIO Bill Smith said. Already with a long-term vision for digital government and accessible services, Alaska more easily pivoted online.

"A moving boat is easier to turn," said Smith.

But after weathering the first year of COVID-19, many governments – including Alaska's – now don't have a charted course ahead.

Agencies never intended for stopgap measures to be permanent fixes; they were just plugging holes to keep afloat amid unprecedented organizational toil. Now, they must rationalize applications, workflows and policies. Whether for funding, security or comfort, agencies are deciding what to reel in, what to adapt and what to pursue.

"We're surviving in remote work, but I'm not sure I'd use the term 'we're thriving in remote work' yet," Smith said.

MJ Jackson, AVP and Global Head of Industries at DocuSign, agreed with the assessment that agencies aren't "transformed" yet. Plenty of organizations have made forms available online and incorporated digital signatures – DocuSign's area of expertise – but haven't changed the processes and practices around them.

"That's just treating a symptom of the problem," Jackson said. "True transformation comes over time."

Not innovating comes with a cost, Jackson said. Though familiar territory, the smooth waters of convention and legacy systems deliver less value and still run up charges. The choppy waters of innovation, though risky, can be a better course to follow.

Agencies should also ensure new services are built and delivered equitably, Jackson said. Building equitably involves having diverse representation and engagement during production, while delivering equitably means enabling accessibility on different devices and in different formats.

Jackson mentioned several ways to lead transformation and innovation. Any project should be evaluated for three qualities, he said: whether it's valuable, measurable and sustainable.

From there, agencies can judge the end product's experience, this time applying three simple "Es." Collectively, the (1) engagement, (2) efficiency and (3) effectiveness of the result determine its impact and success.

Over time, these steps can be a compass for transformation.

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How You Can Be a Part of Organizational Change

A conversation with Courtney Winship, Deputy Chief Data Officer, USCIS

Agencies are immense organizations, so when a change of winds occurs, it can all feel over your head. Transformation efforts are regularly led by the whims of politicos and bigwigs after all, so many times, you must just go with the flow. Unless you're a part of the process, that is.

Courtney Winship, Deputy CDO of U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS), recently spoke about how employees can embed themselves in transformation efforts. USCIS is in the middle of several major transformational projects, one chiefly led by Winship's office to make the organization a more digital, data-driven enterprise.

"When opportunities are offered, get involved," Winship said.

Those opportunities come in many shapes and forms, but frequently, they're right in front of your nose.

Take surveys, Winship said. Contribute your ideas to crowdsourcing campaigns. Or if there's a working group, sign up for it. In these ways, you can actively be a part of iterative – yet transformational – change at your agency.

And don't be afraid to take the baton yourself and run with it.

Leading Change

"If there are ideas that you have, take time out of your day, when you're able, to draft a little proposal, put a plan together and present it," Winship said.

When the idea is your own, the first thing you must do is "find your champion," Winship said.

Track down, engage and involve that one person who will fight for your idea and tote it to decision-makers.

Earlier in her career, Winship developed an onboarding "buddy" program, in which new hires are assigned to a person in the organization who can help them settle in and answer their questions. Buddy programs are just one example. Other ideas encompass mental health task forces or changes to standard operating procedures.

"All of these things really are transformational," Winship said.

Embracing Change

Of course, you have a full-time job to worry about as well, so you can't always be the harbinger of transformation. More times than not, change will come your way, and not the other way around.

Embracing change starts with having an open mind, Winship said. This is a mental switch – actively deciding to view change with optimism and acceptance instead of automatically perceiving it as an impediment to work.

If you can flip that switch, then you'll be in the right frame of mind to get involved and practice some of the tips mentioned earlier, including:

- taking surveys
- joining working groups
- testing products
- contributing feedback

A Culture of Change

The onus can't all be on you as an employee, however. Organizations are responsible for making individuals feel they can impact change.

To create a culture of transformation, organizations must create environments where employees can experiment and freely contribute. Co-creation is invaluable, Winship said, so agencies need to open channels for collaboration.

"It's OK to fail, first off, and to feel uncomfortable," Winship said. "Because with discomfort often comes that change."

Agencies can encourage these spaces by cutting down all meeting times by five minutes or leaving meeting-free blocks of several hours. During these times, employees can evaluate, collaborate and ideate.

Another tool for success is communicating for the audience, Winship said. Knowing how to communicate a "what's in it for me" message without "political mumbo jumbo" can get people interested and invested in furthering change.

"Wherever we've found success is involving people from the beginning," Winship said.
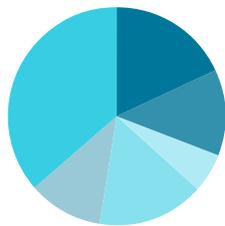
Making Your Agency's Work Easier

A conversation with Michael Peckham, CFO at the Health and Human Services Department's (HHS) Program Support Center (PSC); and AJ Ford, the Director of Public Sector Strategy, Tricentis
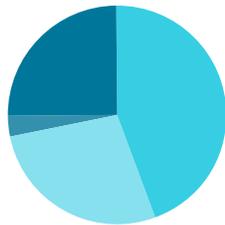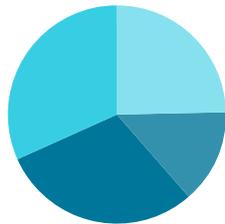
Michael Peckham   **Arthur Ford**

Are you in the...

- ● **37%** Other
- ● **18%** IT field
- ● **16%** Program management
- ● **13%** Services
- ● **11%** Senior executive
- ● **6%** HR

Does your organization struggle with bottlenecks in tech modernization efforts?

- ● **44%** Yes definitely
- ● **27%** No
- ● **25%** Unsure
- ● **3%** Somewhat

Does your organization start with a human centered design approach to problem solving?

- ● **32%** Unsure
- ● **30%** Somewhat
- ● **25%** Yes definitely
- ● **14%** No

Most government employees want to serve citizens better, faster and more reliably. But this goal seems harder for agencies anytime their workload grows. How do agencies – whether federal, state or local – become more resilient while meeting their mission objectives in the best possible way?

Automation might be the answer agencies are looking for. This technology involves machines performing tasks that are often manual and repetitive with little to no human involvement. When used effectively, this tool can save people energy, money and time. Even better, automation can make these workers' agencies more agile, innovative and resilient.

Why are scores of agencies nationwide still hesitating about automation? Michael Peckham, CFO at the Health and Human Services Department's (HHS) Program Support Center (PSC), and AJ Ford, the Director of Public Sector Strategy at Tricentis, a software testing solutions provider, said the reason is resistance to change. Yet automation can reward agencies from the top down as handsomely as it has many private sector companies.

Peckham and Ford explained three ways agencies can ease automation into their workflows:

Calm Fears

Unfortunately, change can scare people, and few tools can transform everyday routines as dramatically as automation. Clearing away the misconceptions about automation is crucial for getting public sector employees to embrace it, Peckham said.

"What we need to promote to folks is we are using these tools to make our personal lives so much easier," he said. "We are not trying to replace anybody."

Ultimately, automating activities like data entry is not meant to eliminate data experts. Rather, automation is intended to free these personnel for more fulfilling work that is too complicated for machines.

Design for Humans

Human-centered design considers perspectives from as many people as possible during the problem-solving process. Although seemingly straightforward, Ford argued more agencies should utilize this approach for adopting new capabilities like automation.

"If you're not designing your systems and processes around users, you are going to have bigger problems than mission goals," he said.

Take displaying data. Using HCD, agencies can determine which method of illustrating information is easiest to understand for their workers.

Update Processes

Before fully embracing automation, agencies may want to examine how their workflows already work. Often, automation uncovers surprising ways people have gotten around roadblocks in their responsibilities.

"There's always something wonky where you weren't prepared for what a human was doing in the process," Peckham said. "It is important to go back and identify these processes before automating them."

The Big Picture

If your office remains on the fence about automation's potential, imagine the technology agencywide. By automating most of their processes, agencies can essentially field two workforces for the price of one.

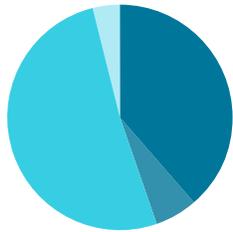# How to Get Your Innovative Ideas Off the Ground

A conversation with Dr. Rebecca Laborde, Master Principal Scientist, Clinical Innovation, Oracle; and Kristen Honey, Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary for Health; Executive Director of Data Operations, Health and Human Services Department

Dr. Rebecca Laborde   **Kristen Honey**

Do you feel like your organization is taking an innovative approach to problem solving?

- **52%** Sometimes, but it depends on the project
- **39%** Yes
- **6%** No
- **4%** Unsure

Innovation can mean a lot of things to different people, especially if you work in government. When the word innovation is mentioned, you might see a mix of eye rolls and bright-eyed colleagues, all of whom bring their own outlooks and past experiences to a project or initiative. But have you ever considered whether your perception of what innovation means or could mean is limited or incomplete?

"Innovation doesn't mean you have to build something net new," said Dr. Rebecca Laborde, Master Principal Scientist, Clinical Innovation at Oracle. Innovation makes space for creativity, and that could be repurposing something that worked in the past and applying it to a new problem or deconstructing a process and rebuilding it in new ways.

Ultimately, innovation is about solving a real-world problem, said Kristen Honey, Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary for Health and Executive Director of Data Operations at the Health and Human Services Department (HHS).

Honey and Laborde described how they are embracing innovation by turning good ideas into tangible results. Below, we've highlighted their best practices around innovation that you can put into practice now:

Make Problem-Solving The Pillar Of Innovation

Innovation is not about finding technology or an approach and then identifying a problem to apply it to, Laborde said. First, you must understand the problem and all the options on the table for finding a solution. It's vital that the right people are involved throughout the entire process.

Seek Top Cover From Leadership

You can't reach across silos and try new things if you don't have leadership top cover, Honey said. The other element that's necessary to innovation – but often lacking – is the ability to reduce or eliminate red tape. Honey highlighted the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), which is credited with paving the way for the modern internet, as an example of what's possible when red tape isn't a barrier.

At DARPA, employees can move fast, respond to needs and reach across silos. The same is true for the U.S. Digital Service (USDS), which is situated within the purview of the White House and works on high-impact, public-facing projects. USDS has direct access to leadership at the White House and federal agencies, which has been vital to its success.

Solve Problems That Matter To The Community

"Innovation is really problem-solving issues that matter to the community, issues that people know best," Honey said. The higher up you get, the more removed you are from understanding the problem that everyday constituents and frontline employees best understand. Leadership must find ways to stay connected with those most impacted by the problem to co-create meaningful solutions with them.

Be Open To A New Path Forward

Sometimes situations mandate that you must set aside some processes and find a new path forward, which is why having buy-in from senior leaders is critical, Laborde said. It's important to have key stakeholders who are going to lean in and be champions of this new path forward. Although innovation often involves a lot of people, all of them may not be able to focus on a single project for a sustained amount of time. Identifying the people who will pull something all the way past the finish line is critical.

Ask For Forgiveness And Not Permission

This philosophy isn't a blanket license to do whatever you want. Instead, innovating with this mindset requires an understanding of what lines you must stay within so that you are innovating in a secure way to achieve goals, without being too disruptive, Laborde said.

Honey's advice: always keep the problem you're trying to solve at the forefront. That is your North Star. No matter which direction agile sprints, user feedback or co-creation takes you, the goal is to move the ball down the field in a coordinated approach. Ask yourself:

- Where are we going?
- What is the long-term goal?
- What is the strategic priority?

Don't let urgent matters crowd out the important ongoing work that's necessary to drive progress, said Honey, and don't let creativity take you off in a different direction.

5 Steps Toward Innovation

Throughout the virtual event, our experts stressed that innovation is an attribute that agencies can cultivate by applying creativity to their people, processes and technology. Here are five crucial steps our thought leaders discussed:

Collect user feedback. The products and services agencies deliver go to citizens, so it is only natural that government employees gather input from these users. Gradually, the questions, comments and concerns agencies aggregate from users can produce experiences that are better tailored for the public's needs. For example, agencies cannot effectively reach underserved communities if they do not hear what members of those communities need. User feedback ensures agencies do not miss their customers' priorities.

Focus on security. Security is integral to innovation as new products and services cannot help people if they endanger agencies' sensitive data. Consequently, monitoring threats and reducing risks can help agencies avoid getting sidetracked by security disruptions. Speed is another bonus – secure agencies can innovate quickly as they are agile, aware and compliant with all relevant federal, state, local and global security regulations.

Collaborate consistently. When it comes to innovation, communication is key. For the best innovation, agencies need to erase the internal silos separating their teams. Externally, agencies must also actively nurture relationships with their peers, private sector businesses, community organizations and other partners. Together, these activities ensure agencies have the cooperation and diversity of perspective they need for the best possible innovations.

Give everyone seats at the table. Agencies will not know what ideas they are missing without including the people capable of suggesting them. Going forward, the most innovative agencies may be the ones that are also the most equitable. By keeping every party impacted by potential innovations in the loop, agencies can avoid unanticipated consequences while ensuring everyone gets exactly what they need.

Take advantage of today's tools. Modern technologies can do marvelous things for agencies, and innovation is no exception. Whether it is reducing workloads with automation, enabling remote work across large distances with cloud computing or another option, agencies should carefully examine how the latest tools can assist their missions. For agencies willing to integrate these technologies into their workforces and processes, the rewards for innovation can be significant.

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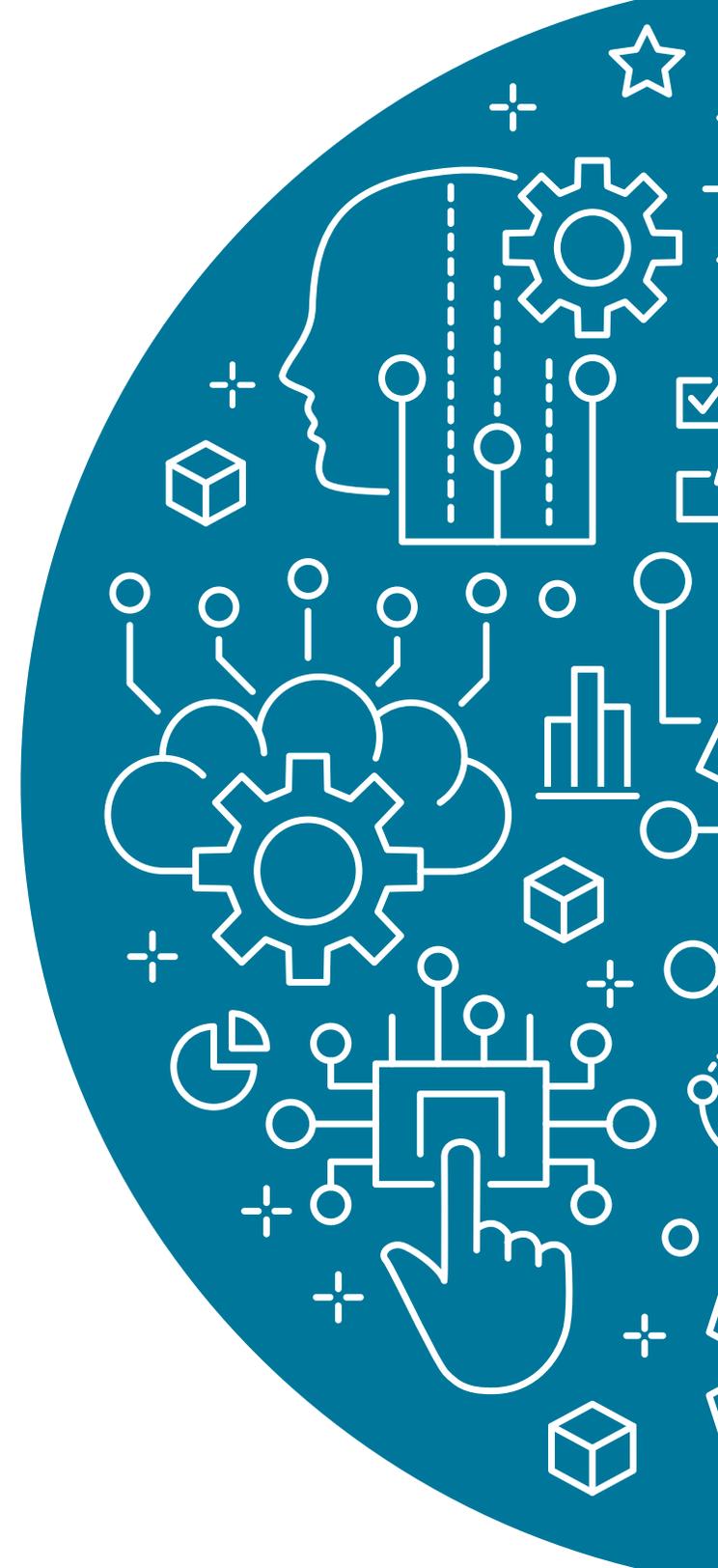
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