Getting to the Government of the Future

By Lisa Mascolo

Looking into the future, can technology truly revolutionize how government functions? Or will standardized norms and practices throttle the rate of change despite the pace of technological advancement? Furthermore, how will—and how should—emerging technologies impact public sector operations? These are key questions and challenges facing governments today. Federal, state, and local agencies can take advantage of technology to more rapidly advance their missions and better serve constituents. But to truly harness that power, we need to understand the emerging technologies—their promise and value—and then get the obstacles out of the way.

Data and Data Analytics

Much of the value that technology can bring to government lies in the data that technology captures for access, analysis, and action. Access to structured, unstructured, or even hard-to-locate "dark" data can provide an evolutionary pivot point. Currently, many government programs are focused on reacting to problems rather than preventing them. Access to the right data enables government to prevent and detect, save time and resources, and pivot from reactive behavior to proactive service. For example, government could proactively use data to reduce homelessness and suicide, increase student success, and more efficiently serve soldiers, sailors, and airmen, in addition to detecting the movement of adversaries. With the power of data properly harnessed, government can move from reacting and fixing to preventing and detecting. Data is the engine that can and should power the future of government outcome and government service.

Procurement

While data should be the powerful conductor for rapid change, government will likely sub-optimize the value of data as a result of antiquated procurement thinking and systems. Procurement philosophy and approach must adapt, empowering government to rapidly access the best technology available. Adopt a mindset of "think big, start small, scale fast." While we all have a history with Lowest

Price Technically Acceptable (LPTA), when properly used it is probably acceptable in this age of rapid technological advancement. But it's time to shift the procurement paradigm. LPTE—or Low Price Technically Exceptional—should become the norm. During rapid technological change, the focus of procurement should be to increase the speed to exceptional value and results. The challenge will lie, of course, in the definition and governance of "technically exceptional." While some may say this sounds like "best value," it's really not. The focus on "technically exceptional" is not one we've had in the past. Constituents to be served—and taxpayers footing the bill—deserve the exceptional, driving greater value over longer periods of time for less money.

Workforce

From leaders, managers, and administrators to the people who actually get the job done (no offense to the first three), the rapid advances we see in technology have the potential to fundamentally transform the way government works and the outcomes it achieves. The value of this potential will only be realized if the workforce is transformed as well. Today, the workforce is transforming at least in part due to retirements and the influx of some younger, perhaps more technologically savvy, talent. Then there is the "frozen

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middle"—people at all levels whose current skills may not only be irrelevant in the future, they are not the skills required to get to the future rapidly. This is a reality in the private sector as well. Redefining the job roles and skill sets, at all levels of workforce, has to become a high priority. If government is to take full advantage of the power of technology advancement as a way to drive speed to value and stay ahead of our adversaries, workforce transformation has to be at the top of the A-list.

And first on that A-list should be leadership. Leaders need to be grounded in what it takes to function well during times of uncertainty and rapid innovation. Developing and deploying the power of the workforce during tumultuous times will be the hallmark of great leaders in the future.

We've talked for years about the value of technology in freeing up the people to do more value-added tasks. The realization of that is now finally here. Informed automation and comprehension, augmented knowledge transfer – all at scale—are now a reality.

The technologies are here. Augmented and artificial intelligence, informed automation and comprehension, and blockchain are the future. Importantly, they all must scale through public and private clouds and harness the power of data. As we move forward, the requirements for success will be strong leadership, a skilled and adaptable workforce, and nimble policies that enable organizations to thrive in conditions of uncertainty.