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Meeting the Innovation Agenda: The Role of Government Technology Leaders in Driving Better Citizen Outcomes



Back Row (Left to Right): Shane McLeod, Department of Veterans' Affairs; Justin Booth, Hitachi Data Systems; Greg Downes, Hitachi Data Systems; John Astridge, Food Standards ANZ; Grant Spratt, Australian Bureau of Statistics; Nathan Heeney, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet; Pravin Bhatia, Department of Industry, Innovation and Science; Kevin Noonan, Ovum; David Ireland, CSIRO; Radi Kovacevic, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet; Adrian de Luca, Hitachi Data Systems

Front Row (Left to Right): Nathan McGregor, Hitachi Data Systems; Greg Davies, Datacom; Misha Kaur, Department of Employment; Silvia Liertz, Department of Employment; Jane King, Australian Taxation Office; Angela Chow, Department of Finance; Bob Smith, Department of Agriculture; George Yacoub, Hitachi Data Systems

Meeting the Innovation Agenda: The Role of Government Technology Leaders in Driving Better Citizen Outcomes

In November 2015, 14 of Canberra's leading Government technologists attended an executive luncheon entitled 'Meeting the Innovation Agenda: The Role of Government Technology Leaders in Driving Better Citizen Outcomes'. The event was hosted by OmniChannel Media in partnership with Hitachi Data Systems.

The event was attended by some of Canberra's leading technology executives from the government's largest organisations. The luncheon provided an opportunity for attendees to share insights into how the role of the CIO has become crucial in driving better outcomes for citizens, as well as how technology can enhance the relationship government has with the community.

The keynote speaker was Kevin Noonan, Government Research Director at Ovum. The moderator for the event was Adrian de Luca, Chief Technology Officer for Hitachi Data Systems.



Introduction

Ovum's Kevin Noonan opened the discussion by providing a brief insight into the stakes involved in innovating within the government space. He discussed that the metric of success is radically different between public and private sectors. Crunching data that provides 20% degree of accuracy in the welfare space, for example, is not acceptable because such an outcome could put the community at risk.

He also noted the need for technology leaders connect with the departments on a strategy level, not just a day-to-day operational level.

"We need to start to engage with our staff about the more complex [IT] cases."

Citizen-Centric Innovation

Noonan advised stakeholders to start thinking about the difference between 'e-government' of the past and the new 'digital government' imperative.

"We have had governments getting rid of paper, using websites, and moving forms online for years – this is not a new mission."

The problem, he said, was that for a lot of governments, digital is a veneer that covers old ways of doing things. The challenge today is "for digital government to start to think about using ICT as an integrated part of everything we do to bring value to the citizen."

He said the traditional way government has related to its citizenry is one of transaction, often in the context of a 'life event', like births, deaths, and marriages. But that model, Noonan believes is no longer viable for any sector of government.



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Kevin Noonan
Ovum



“We need to think more about the conversation we have with the citizen as we go,” he said.

Noonan concluded that digital is not ‘everything’ in the innovation dialogue between government and client, and added that sometimes it is best to not think of digital at all:

“There is one part of the digital service chain that will not be digital and that is [human interaction]. We need to think about how we empower the [human] ‘analogue’ engagement when we deliver services.”

“How do we clear the path of those things slowing us down and stand in the way of organisations delivering truly innovative government?”

Entrepreneurial Approach To Agility

The conversation quickly moved onto a discussion of the kinds of values that are driving innovation within an organisation.

For instance, participants agreed it is contradictory to accept speed as essential in delivering a desired outcome.

But Noonan asked the guests to consider the reality of workflow within each of their own organisations: “Not everyone is moving at the same speed.”

This is problematic if the IT department is outpacing everyone else within an organisation. “We need to ‘speed-match’,” he said.

What is needed, according to Noonan, is an entrepreneurial approach to agility: “It is no longer about IT agility, it is about organisational agility.”

Adrian de Luca from Hitachi Data Systems suggested that a complete mind-shift is necessary to review the process here: “How do you retrain people who have been building stuff in a waterfall environment to transition to agile methodology? There needs to be a way to drive productivity through better tools and better training.”



The Risk in the Bi-Modal Approach

Bi-modal is a new buzzword in the innovation space. It refers to a growing culture within organisations who have found its two-team, two-speed approach valuable. For some it represents a high-velocity fast-track to innovate. As such, much of the discussion was taken up with its relative merits and virtues.

Both Noonan and de Luca were skeptical about bi-modal as both a managerial concept and its potential role in government organisations.

“Bi-modal is a great idea,” Noonan argues, “but it is not how organisations work.”

De Luca suggested that underpinning the philosophy of the bi-modal approach was an ambition to reform legacy systems. “They are not the problem,” he said. “The problem is legacy thinking.”

Even with unlimited resources, he added, if the mindset has not evolved within a team, “you would still end up with the same organisation you started with.”

It was discussed that a bi-modal strategy can impact decision-making from a financial perspective. Being able to build a business case around an innovation strategy that is separate from traditional IT spend can benefit technology leaders who are seeking more involvement organisation-wide.

However as explored by the group, once the dust settles and a CIO is managing two separate strategies, it can have a negative impact on Business As Usual (BAU) processes.

Interestingly, the group noted that a positive step is for teams to spend more time on innovation is to concentrate on limiting the amount of time they spend on BAU processes. This can be achieved through implementing a variety of strategies that focus on automation and simplifying multiple system applications.



Tackling the Pervasive Data Issue

Big Data, Open Data, the Cloud, and advanced analytics drew debate from speakers and guests.

A critical element of this discussion looked at whether government should be building apps and digital services, or whether agencies should be taking a more “open data” approach, allowing for private technology ecosystems to fill this void.

“In the past, you were patted on the back for how much you personally delivered,” de Luca said. “Now you are rewarded for how much your ecosystem delivers.”

Noonan received a question from the table about the ROI on compiling data.

“There is a saying: ‘no-one is going to thank you while you are doing it,’” he said, drawing laughs from around the table.

Noonan continued that the reality is that government agencies are not going to get more money, but there is a huge untapped resource out in the community. “If we can get an ecosystem to do stuff as opposed to costing you money, that’s a good thing,” he said.

De Luca felt that the question of data has reached “worst case scenario” globally, with some governments “shoveling data out the door.”

He added: “Where governments have been responsive and innovative with data, it has paid off in spades.”

“

In the past, you were patted on the back for how much you personally delivered... Now you are rewarded for how much your ‘ecosystem’ delivers.”

Adrian De Luca,
Hitachi Data Systems



Conclusion

Noonan noted that governments are most successful during periods when there is a “call to arms” for CIOs to deliver on innovation.

That is, it is filled a space and resolved a problem. “Australians give very direct feedback to our government,” he said.

Complacency will not be tolerated and clarity of purpose and authentic communication will be rewarded: “We have to think about return of investment in the eyes of the citizen,” he said.

The discussion reached the consensus that it is not technology, but mindset that is the significant factor in the conversation about how best to move forward into a digital government space.

Smaller, tightly focused projects are the future of government innovation. Where success will be defined by outcomes, not scale, outcomes that are defined by a direct and agile relationship with the citizen.



About OmniChannel Media:



OmniChannel Media is a digital publication and events company that showcases the world's best in technology, innovation and disruption for the Australian C-Suite (CXO) executive via TechExec.

Technology is no longer a function, it is an enterprise. As business operations and technology continue to converge, it is critical that business leaders understand the true impact that technology has on their industry.

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