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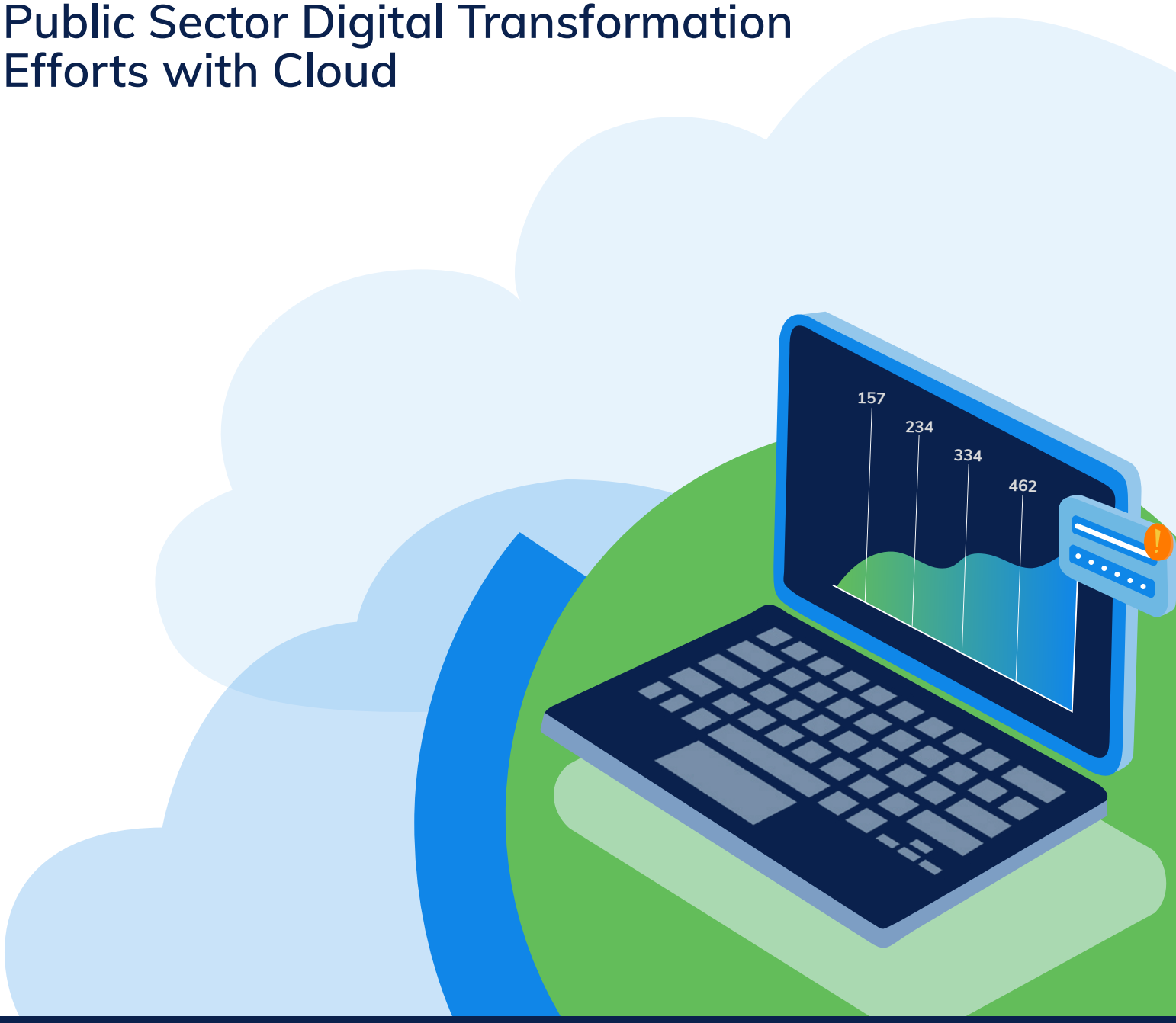
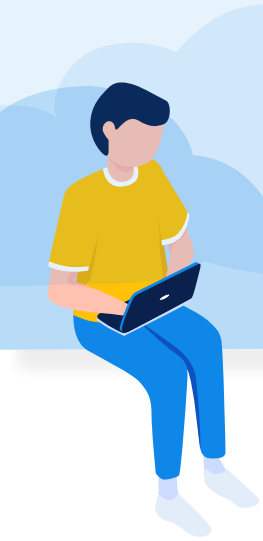
AMPLIFYING

Public Sector Digital Transformation Efforts with Cloud





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Introduction

Released in mid-November, the Presidential Management Agenda underscores the importance of building modern government systems. These new systems focus on not only empowering the federal employee, but improving legacy architectures to deliver a seamless citizen experience. But to start building better services, agencies need to improve internal systems — starting with deploying cloud computing for internal operations.

This was the topic of discussion during *Mission to Modernize*, a roundtable discussion hosted by Anna Pettyjohn, senior vice president of events at GovExec, and sponsored by ScienceLogic. During the conversation, public and private sector leaders convened to speak about their experiences and what they have learned along the way.

Here are five takeaways from the discussion.

Prioritize the Employee Experience

Invest in Mobile-Ready Solutions

Establish Cloud Adoption

Embrace "As-A-Service"

Adopt a Human-Centered Approach

1. Prioritize the Employee Experience

Public sector organizations struggle to attract and retain talent. That's why improving staff experience is critical to winning what Howard Spira, chief information officer for the Export-Import Bank, calls "the war for talent".

"The staff experience is going to be very important," he said. "There's a lot of talent in motion now, and we are seeing all the hiring that we're doing is people [that] want choice and flexibility."

To better support talent, public sector organizations should deploy flexible solutions. Cloud can help agencies adopt this nimble, elastic posture. That way, agencies can quickly scale at a moment's notice, if necessary. With some cloud computing solutions, employees no longer have to interact with runtime software or deal with the cumbersome task of reconfiguring servers. It also gives employees the freedom to choose where they live.

"The hybrid model will not be how people thought of it before," said Jacki Ponti-Lazaruk, chief innovation officer for the Office of Rural Development within the United States Department of Agriculture. "We want to be mobile, working from home, working remotely, and quite frankly, having choices on where we live."

2. Invest in Mobile-Ready Solutions

In a report from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, natural disasters have steadily increased since 1960, jumping a whopping 35% since the early 1990s. For public sector organizations, mitigating this risk is crucial — as citizens often turn to their government in times of crisis. But if an application or website is down, unintended consequences can arise, like a delay in processing disaster relief payments, for example.

Luckily, cloud computing and "as-a-service" providers can help modernize government architectures via virtual mobile solutions.

When the pandemic hit, Pritha Mehra, Chief Information Officer at the United States Postal Service, quickly deployed mobile solutions.

"We are preparing our infrastructure for a completely mobile workforce."

In adopting a mobile-responsive approach, public sector organizations can improve their ability to deliver services in the case of an emergency, thanks to the offloading of servers, storage and networking to external third-party vendors. With PaaS and SaaS solutions, agencies are only responsible for either their applications and data, or data alone, thus helping employees run and manage federal applications and websites during an emergency.

3. Establish Cloud Adoption Ambassadors

Cloud computing can help agencies rapidly modernize applications. But as with any "as-a-service" solution, this technology comes with a learning curve for employees. To better prepare these workers for a cloud-enabled future, public sector organizations should seek to appoint cloud ambassadors.

When deploying Zoom within the USPS, for example, Mehra appointed employees — who were well-versed in the technology — with the title of ambassador.

"It's easy to deploy a tool," said Mehra. "It's more difficult to get adoption, so we focused on adoption, where we created ambassadors across the organization to promote how to use Zoom effectively, whether you were doing a webinar or whether you're doing a meeting."

By selecting cloud adoption ambassadors, public sector leaders can better understand their workforce's overall feelings toward ongoing modernization efforts, while also advancing goals and objectives in a relatively simple and effective way.

4. Embrace "As-A-Service"

When it comes to modernization and cloud computing, software-as-a-service is arguably one of the most recognizable of the "as-a-service" solutions. SaaS' growing popularity is in large part due to consumer-facing applications like MailChimp, Google Workspace and Dropbox. However, public sector organizations cannot rely on SaaS alone. Instead, agencies should take a holistic approach.

That means considering and prioritizing the most important activities from a mission-critical standpoint, said Brian Merrick, director of the Cloud Program Management Office at the Department of State. Indeed, it was the State Department's holistic approach that helped it build an application in eight days. The organization's leadership hopes to continue to leverage a holistic viewpoint moving forward.

"We're also expanding into that inter-agency space and trying to leverage that holistic viewpoint in terms of focusing on our priorities," he said. "Not necessarily on modernization from a lift and shift, or technical standpoint, but looking at it from the mission space, so that we've got the right pieces aligned to deliver value to the mission as rapidly as possible."

Moreover, adopting cloud monitoring solutions can help federal agencies deliver that rapid value to the mission. By equipping leadership and employees with a contextual lay-of-the-land, while cutting across multiple cloud platforms to infer relationships that can ultimately help improve the internal design process, these cloud monitoring services and solutions provide government teams with the tools they need to deliver seamless experiences.

5. Adopt a Human-Centered Approach

Consumers, on average, have an attention span of eight seconds. In this digital age, citizens expect a near-instantaneous experience from private sector brands, and they're looking for that same experience from their government. But the public sector is often challenged to deliver these fast and reliable digital experiences due to legacy architectures and applications that create friction and negatively impact service delivery.

For Mehra, improving these experiences meant stepping outside the public sphere and studying the wider market.

"[The product team] came back with recommendations on our product suite and presented it to the business [team], and they were completely impressed by this team because they truly went out and studied what the capabilities were across our competitors and what the market expectations were," she said.

This approach ultimately helped the USPS establish itself as a forerunner in a framework becoming increasingly popular within the government IT community: human-centered design.

In short, human-centered design focuses on putting the user at the heart of the decision-making process. Instead of focusing on checkboxes, it attempts to solve problems via real-life testing and interaction.

While public sector organizations focus on internal modernization, keeping end users in the loop should remain a top priority. Failure to take the end user into consideration can result in ineffective or unusable applications. At the end of the day, modernization isn't about adding clutter to the employee experience; it's about streamlining the ability to serve.

"Everything starts with people," said Ponti-Lazaruk. "If they don't jump on these things, if they don't use what you build, if you're not talking to the people who are implementing the programs, then stuff gets built that doesn't work."

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ScienceLogic Industry Perspective

Government agencies are in the process of the largest digital transformation in history — a transformation, that is both mission-critical and comes with significant complexity and risk.

Complexity, combined with the volume of operational data and the rate of change involved, can leave agencies struggling with limited visibility, workflow bottlenecks, and operational rigidity due to multiple siloed tools and teams. Meanwhile, heightened concerns around security vulnerabilities are causing agencies to reevaluate their existing tools, making the work of IT operations even harder.

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