

How the Department of Defense is Transforming to Meet Intelligence Challenges

World's Largest Employer Transforms Approach to Intelligence Community Needs

FEATURED EXPERTS:



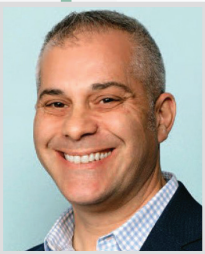
■ **La'Naia Jones**

Acting Chief Information Officer of the Intelligence Community



■ **Mark Chatelain**

Associate CIO, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency



■ **Jonathan Alboum**

Principal Digital Strategist, Federal Government, ServiceNow



■ **CAPT Frank Futcher**

Director, NavalX

Driven by previously unknown challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 has become a year highlighted by many unplanned public sector innovations. One of the best examples of this is how Department of Defense agencies rapidly expanded and streamlined their virtual private networks (VPNs) while simultaneously increasing bandwidth capacity to support a massive influx of remote workers.

Another great example, according to Jonathan Alboum, Principal Digital Strategist for the Federal Government at ServiceNow, is rapidly deploying new cloud-based and enterprise systems to replace legacy hardware.

"Technologies that couldn't quickly adapt to the new working environment are being replaced," said Alboum. "Despite being the largest employer in the world, the DOD has proven that it can also be quite agile in response to a crisis."

Officials at the Defense Department understand that a modern infrastructure requires innovative technology in order to ensure that their missions have the best chance of success. The following are some specific examples of how the DOD and the Intelligence Community (IC) responded to the challenges of 2020 with modernization programs that improved efficiencies.

MODERNIZING COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS TO IMPROVE CROSS-AGENCY COMMUNICATION

Communication is the bedrock that a remote workforce needs to maintain efficiency for day to day operations. By maintaining strong and stable communications, employees are able to access information, share changes and act on information quickly. Part of this modernization effort in DOD has focused on finding better ways to connect with experts on a variety of subjects.

That is what the NavalX program is all about. It acts as the Navy's "super-connector" platform designed to reach out to industry, learn about new technology that the DOD can use, and then demonstrate it through various presentations and platforms. The goal is to bring innovation and solutions directly to places within the DOD and the IC that have the greatest need so that it can be quickly deployed.

"This platform collects information about private industry's technology, their capability and their contact information," said NavalX Director Captain Frank Futcher. "Now the platform is automating this process and making it searchable. So, for example, if there's a program executive office that has interest in AI (artificial intelligence), we might engage with industry at one of 12 locations we call tech bridges," to look for that capacity. Even if an AI company

uses the tech bridge in San Diego, somebody in Washington D.C. could still learn about it by searching the platform for AI companies. Then they can quickly engage with one another, when otherwise they might never have met.

Instead of having executives or decision makers wait for meetings to be set up, this approach allows decision makers to input what they are looking for and bridges them to a company that offers those services.

MAINTAIN AGILE DEVELOPMENT & MICRO RELEASE SCHEDULES

Developing and launching a product is a time and labor-intensive process that can sometimes fail to meet program needs. This can come from mission requirements changing during the design process, and requires the functionality of the developing program to change with it. As with many large product developments, it's difficult to make abrupt changes in design and functionality. This calls for a more agile development philosophy that allows for rapid changes in mission terms.

"We're diagramming and listening to people up front when they give us requirements. Then we take three or four years and develop this battleship, and deliver it to our customers. And either they've left because, through attrition, requirements have changed, or the world has changed," said Associate Chief Information Officer for the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency Mark Chatelain. "What we've done is formulated something called program officers, and this has been unique and innovative because it couples an IT developer and a program manager sitting side by side with a mission owner. So, what happens is those two, working hand in hand together, are empowered to lead their team of people to quickly develop applications and field infrastructure that satisfies an immediate need, utilizing an agile process. In three to six weeks, we can deliver microservices to the users to be able to satisfy their immediate needs, get feedback and continue on with that development."

This agile deployment of field infrastructure allows agencies to complete their longer term goals by building apps and services quickly in the short term. This permits agencies to focus on immediate needs, without having to predict any mission changes that could occur three to four years down the road.

"Just doing that will save many hours of manpower," Albourn said. "And it will allow the Intelligence Community to maintain a strong posture that is always positioned to accomplish their missions."

AUTOMATE TASKS & PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY

Agility is a key component to thriving in the current work environment. One way to increase agility is to automate tasks in order to lessen man hours, and then use the saved time to handle tasks that must be done manually. Of course, part of

the challenge has been finding ways to automate tasks that are currently being done manually.

"Moving from manual to automated tasks, that's done through tools, applications and through the processes," said Acting Chief Information Officer for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence La'Naia Jones. "So, during this time of using, say the teleworking options, that was just maybe one piece of something that we had already started exploring years ago by moving data inferring to the cloud."

Jones says that moving workloads to the cloud is great way to being the automation process. Once there, tools can be used or even created in order to automate formally manual tasks.

"By leveraging the cloud, we're able to do more with less and able to accomplish more of our mission sets. So that's where you can see us changing that mindset of how we can really prepare ourselves for the constantly agile national threats," Jones said. "The cloud gave us the ability to do that."

ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION ACROSS ENVIRONMENTS

This environment has been stressful on everyone across the board including workers, managers and decision makers. One way to alleviate the stress of an working in an isolated environment is to collaborate to discuss strategies that continue to drive change in the DOD and IC. Collaboration not only helps improve the situation, but alleviates boredom and the feelings of isolation. Sometimes, this means a top down culture shift is required. Other times, it just means taking advantage of the tools available to each agency, or starting from the bottom and growing upwards.

"In the past, we've seen a number of attempts at culture change come down from the top, and while it's important to have a sort of leader that might provide top cover for some of this change, what NavalX has been focused on is building at the grassroots level," said Chatelain. "Finding individuals that we call champions across organizations inside the Department of Navy that can work with us is sort of planting seeds at these organizations. And what we're trying to do is build organic capacity in a variety of ways."

Building talent and leadership from within helps place talent where it is most needed. This helps to recruit employees for any short-staffed positions, especially ones that are mission critical.

"It's been about building talent and putting that talent in the right place," said Futch. "We've not always done a good job, whether it's in cyber or IT. Sometimes it's putting people who have laterally transferred from one career field into another. And maybe this is overused, but people are so important. Building their competencies, growing them over time and putting them in the right positions, that is always important for our current projects."

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