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The Cloud Rush

Transforming Public Sector Organizations Through the Cloud

By **Pravin Kumar**, CEO, AST Corporation

Pravin Kumar

The adoption of cloud software and its effect on public sector organizations can be better understood only if we keep public sector missions and mandates in perspective. The public sector is guided by the priorities of transparency, accountability, record keeping, and citizen involvement. Policies and regulations related to these priorities greatly affect technology decisions in general, and cloud adoption in particular. With capital budgets that are drafted years in advance, CIOs and CFOs are constrained in their ability to reallocate resources, especially if they are early adopters of new technological advancements.

Public sector organizations have traditionally preferred stringent control of their data and technology resources, relying on in-house servers and staff. Many organizations are realizing that government cloud facilities offer better security and stability for a reasonable price. Cloud providers offer facilities on United States soil, with employees who are United States Citizens with very high levels of security certification. The level of support, particularly around disaster recovery, is greater than what most public sector entities can provide in their own facilities, due to resource limitations.

Proliferation of Citizen-Facing Applications

Citizen-facing applications, enabled by the cloud, are definitely trending. In the public transit, airports, and utilities industries, there is a natural progression to the cloud as these organizations begin to better-understand their customers and how customers want to communicate, regarding outages, weather-related incidents, and service times.

Many transit organizations are adopting technology that allows riders to determine the location of their next bus or train via mobile device. The City of Los Angeles, along with departments such as Los Angeles World Airports, releases all expenditure information online via control panel LA. These are just two examples of how cloud is enabling the proliferation of citizen-facing applications.

Reduced Dependence on Capital Budgets

Pay-as-you-go pricing is attractive to the public sector, particularly for municipal government entities. Rather than having an extremely large initial outlay, cloud solutions can be implemented for a fraction of the up-front cost, while the monthly SaaS pricing can be covered with operational expense budgets.

Cloud solutions are also attracting smaller public sector entities with simpler requirements and smaller budgets. The cloud offers modern computing solutions and the benefits of a top-tier software solution at a lower-cost entry point.

Departmental Ownership of Enabling Technology

Individual agencies, or departments within a larger organization, are driving the move towards cloud-based solutions. New applications and technology allow departments to interact directly with citizens and increase engagement. Applications that exploit social media are of particular interest to many public sector organizations, as they enable the tracking of public opinion, as well as outbound communication, to address trending needs.

These individual departments are now able to implement cloud solutions without relying on their IT departments. In years past, involvement from the IT Department was required to begin any software or application initiative. With cloud, the smaller entities within a larger organization have found opportunity for self-enablement. IT involvement is still desirable in many cases, particularly where integration is needed, but that first push can now come from anywhere in the organization.

IT Transformation to "Command and Control"

While the Information Technology departments of many public sector organizations have traditionally played a pivotal role in all technology innovation, the ownership of technology solutions is becoming decentralized, relegating IT to the role of command and control. IT will continue to be required, for infrastructure, integration, and other services, but will start to play more of a governance role.

At AST, we have witnessed public sector trending towards the cloud. The Orlando Airport has adopted a cloud-based planning & budgeting solution, which successfully lowered IT costs while increasing its visibility and planning capabilities. The City of Detroit recently adopted a cloud-based ERP solution. The configuration encompasses multiple agencies and uses a co-existence strategy to integrate to both cloud and legacy applications. The Eastern Municipal Water District is very near to bringing a cloud HCM solution live. Across the breadth of cloud applications, adoption is on the rise.

There is no doubt that cloud technology is having a transformational effect on the public sector industry. CR