



Perspectives

State and local CIOs: Are you an innovator? By Carl Marsh

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In my experience working with state government over the years, most CIOs are looking for ways to be innovative and creative to help their state and agencies better serve their citizens.

Today, that means updating their programs and applying the latest technologies—be it the cloud, intelligent automation, or even blockchain.

Before joining KPMG, I served as chief operating officer at the Texas Department of Information Resources, which addressed the state's IT assets. I was responsible for IT procurement, network and cybersecurity, data-center operations, the enterprise PMO, and e-government.

So, I have experience addressing some of the challenges CIOs are facing today, particularly around innovation.

During my tenure in Texas, our idea of innovation was exploring the next generation of service-delivery models, particularly in the area of customer self-service. We wanted to be the IT cloud for the state agencies.

But there were hurdles.

As a state shared-services organization, one of our key requirements was to have effective governance. That meant inviting a cross section of stakeholders to be a part of the innovation journey that we wanted to take. We wanted to make sure they did not feel our new systems were something that was being imposed on them.

We also faced an aging workforce, many of whom were retiring. So, we had to find new ways to attract tech people to a career in government.

Lastly, we had to obtain legislative approval to carry out our projects.

Today, many of the challenges facing CIOs are the same—or maybe even more daunting. Consumers have grown accustomed to digital commerce and mobility. They can shop online 24/7 and make their purchases on the go with their smart phones. They are expecting the same customer experience from government agencies. For example, filing taxes online should be easy for most people.

Technology has also advanced dramatically. For example, intelligent automation was science fiction not long ago. Today, we are seeing IA being deployed in a number of industries, and government should be no different.

Some fear that IA is about replacing people. But it is really about becoming a more efficient and effective organization.

For example, demands on government agencies are constantly increasing but without an associated increase in staff. IA can help address this challenge by creating an opportunity to shift manual, repetitive tasks to “software bots,” allowing people to work on high-value activities that are more meaningful.

As an example of IT innovation, KPMG recently worked on a significant project for a client that administers state-owned land. The client is responsible for leasing out 13 million square acres for all sorts of uses—gas and oil drilling, cattle grazing, even windmill installations. In exchange for those rights, the state receives revenues that go to help fund services for veterans and public schools.

Although it has an expansive mission, the client has a relatively small staff that has to ensure compliance with their contracts. This is a formidable task: first, because of the sheer number of contracts; and second, because many of the contracts are based on commodity prices, which fluctuate. The client wanted to ensure they could review all aspects of the contracts.

We were able to help the client by using IBM's Watson, which has the capability to review all contracts, if necessary. Now, the state can be sure that they are reviewing all the contracts in a timely manner.

The installation of Watson at the client is a perfect example of a CIO taking a risk to pursue innovation at their agency to become more efficient and provide additional benefits to citizens.

What I wish I had

Sometimes, being CIO can be a lonely job, or at least I think so. While reports and studies are valuable, often times, I wish I had a trusted adviser, a person who walked in my shoes to discuss the art of the possible.

That is somebody who has done this before in a political environment, who understands the pressure you are under, and who can bring a real practical viewpoint to a situation.

In the end, being able to pick up the phone and have a frank discussion with an experienced adviser can be the difference between being a caretaker and an innovator.



About perspectives

Perspectives is a published series by KPMG's State and Local government practice, providing insights and points of view from KPMG partners and professionals that once held the position of CIO in government.

About the author



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