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Collaborative Work Management: A Better Way to Get Stuff Done

Market Trends Report

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Introduction

Federal government employees do a lot of good work, but too often that work happens in silos. When employees rely on desktop solutions (such as Microsoft Word or Excel), there is no seamless way to collect all the data from individual systems into a coherent, agencywide view — and it's a challenge to do it in real time. It also limits employees' ability to collaborate, and makes it difficult to standardize new processes and best practices.

Collaborative work and real-time data-sharing, however, are increasingly goals of agency leadership, who recognize the impact that comprehensive, real-time views of agency projects and programs have on decision-making. The President's Management Agenda, for example, emphasizes the importance of innovation and data-driven decision-making in improving federal jobs and services. And many agencies already have launched projects built on innovation, such as those detailed at Challenge.gov, the Environmental Protection Agency and elsewhere.

But without an effective, efficient platform for coordinating and managing projects, government agencies risk leaving many potential solutions on the table. That is the idea behind a collaborative work management platform.

To learn more about collaborative work management (CWM), GovLoop teamed with CWM solution provider Smartsheet. We'll explain CWM, how it benefits agencies and detail best practices for implementing an effective solution.

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*"Collaborative work management platforms are becoming much more critical for closing the gap between where government agencies were prior to the pandemic and where they are today. **The need for real-time reporting has escalated.**"*

– Asif Husain, Senior Security and Compliance Strategist, Smartsheet

By The Numbers

11.4%
of an organization's resources are wasted due to inferior processes for project management.

70%
of new applications developed by organizations will use low-code or no-code technologies by 2025, up from less than 25% in 2020.

89%
of federal executives believe tech democratization is becoming critical to igniting innovation across their organizations.

78%
of U.S. government executives say the use of Agile and DevOps methodologies is having a significant positive impact on their organization.

54%
of organizations say they don't have real-time access to their projects' key performance indicators.

>95%
of new digital workloads will be deployed on cloud-native platforms by 2025, up from 30% in 2021.

91%
of federal executives say their organizations are innovating with urgency.

*"Instead of walking through a 30-slide deck, we can deliver a briefing from a dashboard that visualizes data and metrics … [and] the people we're speaking with have **exactly the information they need, when they need it.**"*

– Tracie D. Stack, Special Projects Manager, Integrated Award Environment, U.S. General Services Administration

Deliver More Value with Collaborative Work Management

Challenge: Work Gets Lost in the Shuffle

Work being done within federal agencies is often disconnected from what's being done throughout the enterprise. Separate projects and programs, each dealing with a mix of processes and legacy systems and often being carried out on desktop applications, make coordination among employees difficult. Assembling the results of that work across applications that are effectively siloed is difficult and time-consuming. In some cases, documents created with those applications are out of date almost immediately.

The effects on agency efforts can add up.

Working in isolation: Working with siloed desktop apps can prevent teams from easily sharing information and learning from one another.

Limited governance and standardization: Using different systems involves diverse methods of capturing and analyzing data, different processes, and various operating procedures. This results in confusion and the need for constant retraining. It also tends to hinder efforts to standardize an organization's processes and governance rules.

Lack of a common operating picture: Siloed workstreams and antiquated systems hamper the ability to aggregate data, creating an opaque view for leadership. By the time leadership has a view on which to base strategic decisions, the data could be weeks or months old. This makes it difficult to track progress, drive accountability, make critical decisions quickly, react to new developments or get strategic alignment.

"It makes it very difficult to make the right or accurate decisions," said Asif Husain, Senior Security and Compliance Strategist for Smartsheet. "The need for that collaborative work, and the ability for that information to flow across systems, is really important."

Solution: Collaborative Work Management

Federal agencies need tools that accommodate the way they work, executing against unique use cases not often found in the private sector. For many agencies, a comprehensive, cloud-based software as a service (SaaS) solution may be the answer.

A scalable, secure CWM platform — combining task, project, workflow and automation capabilities with information-sharing, reporting, analytics and dashboards — can help optimize resources.

The extensive list of potential benefits includes:

- Connecting different legacy systems and applications and bridging silos to improve collaboration.

- Providing consistency with templated workstreams and user-created workflows and automations, thus encouraging collaboration.

- Freeing up staff to work on more mission-critical projects. IT staff, for example, can concentrate on big-ticket issues instead of toiling over simple app requests.

- Democratizing IT, allowing even non-technical employees to build powerful workflows without complex formulas or writing a single line of code. Using "no-code" tools, which gives users a visual interface and drag-and-drop procedures, employees can create their own processes and applications, which spurs innovation.

- Giving agency leadership a common operating picture, with real-time reports and granular dashboards, providing visibility and creating accountability.

- Enabling the scaling of new solutions, making it possible to replicate solutions across the enterprise.

- Allowing for improved project management, providing a system for sending alerts, assigning tasks, and managing identities and permissions.

- Improving security through identity management, and providing tools for governance and privacy protection.

- Delivering a significant return on investment (ROI). A Forrester Total Economic Impact study commissioned by Smartsheet found that global enterprise customers saw significant benefits from increased visibility and management, including reductions of 80% in the time spent on project, portfolio and program setup, and a 75% reduction in work management-related emails. On average, customers saw a 680% ROI over three years.

Best Practices in Collaborative Work Management

Focus on Security

Agencies should start by doing their due diligence when selecting a work management solution. It's critical that a provider have authorizations under the Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program (FedRAMP) and the Defense Information Systems Agency's (DISA) Impact Level 4 (IL4) program.

It's also important to confirm their levels of authorizations. FedRAMP Moderate, for example, covers some information not available to the public, such as personally identifiable information (PII). DISA IL4 covers controlled unclassified information, including PII and protected health information, as well as some mission-critical data.

"Due diligence is definitely paramount in terms of making sure that a SaaS vendor actually has these authorizations in place," Husain said. In addition to features and authorizations, a vendor should be ready to work with the agency throughout the implementation to meet its security posture.
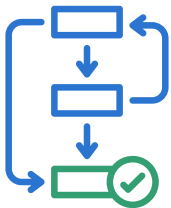
Think About Outcomes

When assessing a SaaS or CWM solution, it can be easy to get caught up in the features and functionality it offers. "But you really have to take a step back and look at the intended outcomes," Husain said. "Does that platform, through its sets of products and features, contribute to the end goal and outcome that your agency needs to achieve?"

A platform provider should, like an agency, be focused on results. "Ultimately, it's really building that trust, and embracing the data-driven decision-making that a CWM platform will drive towards," he said.

Empower Teams to Shape Their Work

This can involve two key steps:

- *Eliminate silos.* In addition to sharing information via a CWM solution, agency managers should get teams working together, regardless of bureaucratic barriers. They should look to normalize sharing appropriate information, documents, status updates and dashboards, and focus on scaling solutions and establishing best practices.

- *Build trust.* Getting the most out of the new workflows requires trusting your experts to know what will work best, and providing a secure platform where they're empowered to create their own solutions.
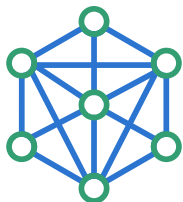
Create a Common Source of Truth

Don't lose sight of one of the biggest benefits of CWM: creating a common source of accurate, real-time information to enable informed decision-making, more efficient project management and better outcomes.

A single, real-time view can, for example, help leaders decide if a project is worth taking on, or stay up-to-date on a project's progress. It can ensure consistency of procedures across the agency, and help ensure efficient response to disasters or disruptions (such as a pandemic).

Case Study: Automation Helps Agency Manage Complexity

A fairly large government agency with a science and technology focus was facing supply-chain, logistics and parts-tracking challenges with a project that involved building some technologically complex components and vehicles.

The project involved more than 17,000 machine operations and 2,700-plus individual parts kept in about 15 locations, all of which needed to be tracked through a scheduling process. The project also involved 20 departments. Tracking the parts manually took an enormous amount of time and resulted in inefficiencies, including parts that simply got lost.

The agency implemented the Smartsheet Gov platform and began automating its programmatic practices, as well as approvals and other processes, Husain said.

"They started observing a tremendous amount of time savings and a tremendous amount of cost savings," Husain said. "The automated process just completely streamlined operations. Real-time dashboards provided senior management and leadership with visibility on the current status of various programs and projects," including the project's manufacturing processes.

Introducing Smartsheet into the processes reduced the project's "time to market" by several weeks. "It reduced many of the issues and the bottlenecks that had been observed," Husain said.

Most agency projects don't involve parts and manufacturing, of course, but they do often have complex processes that can become unwieldy (especially in the cloud). This is one example of how an agency saw "a tremendous amount of value by just bringing in this collaborative work management platform to their specific government environment," Husain said.

HOW SMARTSHEET HELPS

Smartsheet is a modern work management platform that's trusted by federal government departments and agencies. In fact, the Smartsheet Gov platform is built for government, with authorizations at the FedRAMP Moderate level and DISA IL4, which allows a do once/use many approach that can be applied across the government. And it is a completely separate platform from the company's commercial environment, operating in a physically distinct cloud.

The company's SaaS solution can be implemented quickly, and its flexible, no-code platform can scale from single projects to enterprisewide implementations. Federal agencies — both civilian and defense — that use Smartsheet Gov have seen measurable results in efficiencies and projects supported as well as reductions in the resources required for projects.

Smartsheet also recognizes the constant evolution within agencies, Husain said. "The Smartsheet Gov platform is constantly evolving as well, to meet the needs of our partners within the government."

Learn more: www.smartsheet.com/solutions/federal-government

Conclusion

In a constantly evolving cloud-based environment with increasingly hybrid workforces, collaboration is essential to efficient operations. But many of the everyday tools federal agencies rely on undercut collaborative work. They need a way to connect the data and documents created on desktop applications and legacy systems, and seamlessly put that information into a comprehensive real-time picture of agency operations.

A secure CWM platform authorized to handle sensitive government information allows agencies to create standardized workflows, promote collaboration and innovation, and provide leaders with real-time views on which to base decisions. It enables agencies to optimize their resources and spending while improving their ability to deliver on mission goals.

Whether starting in one area, such as contracting or human resources, or applying CWM across the enterprise, agencies can empower employees to create and shareinnovative solutions A CWM platform can benefit agency leaders, employees and the bottom line.

ABOUT SMARTSHEET

Smartsheet is a modern work management platform that empowers companies of all sizes to scale and deliver value as business requirements evolve. Backed by enterprise-grade security, Smartsheet is used by more than 80% of the companies in the Fortune 500 to implement, manage and automate processes across a broad array of departments and use cases. Smartsheet Gov provides federal agencies with a FedRAMP- and DISA IL4 -authorized CWM platform to share data, track and automate tasks, empower teams, and provide real-time visibility to make better decisions faster.

For more information visit: www.smartsheet.com/solutions/federal-government.

ABOUT CARAHSOFT

Carahsoft is The Trusted Government IT Solutions Provider®. Our technology manufacturers and reseller partners are committed to providing IT products, services and training to support government agencies as well as healthcare and education organizations. As the Master Government Aggregator®, Carahsoft holds more than 100 state contracts and cooperative purchasing vehicles, including NASPO ValuePoint, OMNIA Partners, PEPPM and GSA, to meet the technology needs of state and local governments across the U.S.

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ABOUT GOVLOOP

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government." We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 300,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government.

For more information about this report, please reach out to info@govloop.com.

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