

Q&A

Executive Viewpoint

A conversation with Guy Cavallo



CIO, Office
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Management

This interview
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What role is the cloud playing in IT modernization at OPM?

The cloud is at the heart of our modernization effort. We have many legacy on-premises systems that need to be modernized not only to take advantage of all the benefits of the cloud, but to make them easier to use so we can deliver better customer experiences.

In fiscal 2022, my team completed building our first enterprise cloud environment, and by the end of that year, we had already moved 28 applications to the cloud. At the end of fiscal 2022, I also announced a two-year sprint to move the majority of our applications to the cloud. So we are well on our way.

How is OPM using cloud technology to enhance the experience for federal employees and retirees?

When I arrived at OPM, we were struggling technology-wise with our Retirement Services Contact Center, which is used by federal retirees and potential retirees who have questions about the federal retirement system. It was a very old, on-premises system that would have unacceptable crashes. We could have potentially hundreds of people on hold and lose all of them at once. I knew that by leveraging the cloud we could fix the failing technology, so we moved the contact center to the cloud.

We now have expandability, and our agents are able to work from our offices or their homes. It has given us a high level of reliability that we didn't have before, and it has also allowed us to expand our hiring pool because people don't have to be in one physical location. That's one example where the cloud already has made a big impact on the delivery of services to our citizens.

Every new application we're building is focused on delivering an improved customer experience as the driver. We have some systems that aren't quite ready to go out the door, but people who encountered OPM's legacy website in the past will see a much improved experience over the next year.

How are you creating a secure environment for moving mission-critical apps to the cloud?

I believe cloud is the most secure environment we have today. The cybersecurity teams at the major cloud vendors vastly exceed the size and resources available to most federal cybersecurity teams. I'm also a big proponent of utilizing FedRAMP. Through that program, we are leveraging cloud cybersecurity capabilities that work not only on cloud technology, but also help us manage our on-premises environments. Most cloud-based tools don't have the same technology limits that cybersecurity tools for on-premises systems might have.

Cloud tools have helped us automate many aspects of cybersecurity and helped us use artificial intelligence and machine learning to improve our cybersecurity posture. So I'm a firm believer that the cloud is the most secure way to provide services to our citizens.

How do you keep up with changes in cloud-based technologies, and what do you see as the most exciting and important developments?

That's the fun part of the cloud: Whatever you know today, tomorrow it's going to be different and better. It's a continually evolving environment. My team at OPM, including Deputy CIO Melvin Brown, decided that we need to make sure employees have time to

learn and keep up with advances in cloud technologies. So we implemented an enterprise program that enables every employee to dedicate time on Fridays to training.

Without such a commitment in the past, whenever an employee submitted a training request, we would have to weigh the impact on our training budget before we could approve the request. Some training courses were so costly that only one person would get to go to one class. Our solution was to make unlimited technology classes available to everybody all the time.

We provide unlimited cloud training to every employee, and we also provide unlimited support for them to get certified in cloud technologies. In the last year, 30 to 40 staff members have obtained their cloud certifications. At our monthly all-hands meeting, we recognize everyone who has received a new cloud certification so their peers can cheer them on.

The basic cloud training is mandatory for everybody in my organization, even the people who will never work on a cloud themselves. I want them to understand the cloud basics from a procurement and contract perspective. All of us need to understand what we're buying and how to use it.

Our Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey scores have skyrocketed because of the support we've given our team to make this IT modernization change. It is a radical change. I don't want to underestimate this. Many OPM systems have been around for decades, and now we're saying, "That's great, but we need to move them to the cloud." In addition,

to comply with current customer experience requirements, we have to change those systems.

What advice do you have for other agencies on how to generate enthusiasm for the cloud?

I've done a presentation on this topic a number of times, and it's one of my favorite to present. I've been very lucky in that I have moved three federal agencies to the cloud in the last seven years. Based on my experiences, I tell other people not to spend a year studying whether to do it or not. They need to grab a few people and just get started. I did my first cloud migration with three people. The next one I did with five. Here at OPM, we did it with about five or six.

“Every new application we're building is **focused on delivering an improved customer experience as the driver.**”

I advise other agencies to take the leap and make the investment. You don't need an army to be successful. Start small, allow the team members to make mistakes and allow them to learn, but don't wait to get started. The process can be very fast. At all three agencies, I had our production cloud ready within 90 days from when we started.

However, once you turn the cloud on, your biggest roadblock will be getting a large enough "pipe" to be able to use the cloud. That will end up taking you longer to implement than standing up the cloud. I hate to say it, but in all three agencies, we stood up the cloud long before we were able to implement the bigger pipe to the

cloud. So I advise any other agency to start the procurement of its cloud connection pipe on day one, even before you begin moving to the cloud, because otherwise you will be waiting for it at the end.

Is there anything you'd like to add?

I believe my role as CIO is to set the vision and the direction for IT modernization. I declared that our modernization future is the cloud, and everything we have should be implemented in the cloud unless there's a very strong business exception for it.

However, to be successful, you can't just be "technology correct" without doing the legwork to communicate with the rest of the senior leaders and the business owners to understand why we're going to the cloud. That takes constant communication and updates, and it requires not using technical jargon but explaining to them the benefits of automatic elasticity, redundant data storage, and automatic

disaster recovery and failover so we're protected if something goes wrong in a way that we can't provide at a reasonable cost with an on-premises environment. This type of communication works best when it is conducted one-on-one, instead of in a large group setting, so any concerns can be directly addressed.

As I said earlier, we have the vision, we have the leadership support, and we now have the staff resources to migrate to the cloud. It is a journey not just for technology's sake, but to allow OPM to deliver an improved citizen experience for all our federal employees, retirees and citizens. ■

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Leading MultiCloud Vendors



Google Cloud



ORACLE
Cloud



servicenow

vmware



Cloud Enabling
Technologies

31 vendors



Platform-
as-a-Service

18 vendors



Infrastructure-
as-a-Service

9 vendors



Software-
as-a-Service

56 vendors



Managed
Services

5 vendors

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These solutions are available through Carahsoft's Public Sector contracts including GSA, SEWP, NASPO, ITES-SW2, E&I and many others. For more information, visit carahsoft.com/multicloud; or contact us at: cloudmanagement@carahsoft.com or (833) 597-5570.

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