

How connected data heals the post-COVID supply chain



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A **GENERAL OFFICER** I once worked for taught me the importance of asking two questions. The two questions I'd ask when I walked into any job were: "Are you having a good day?" and "How do you know?"

The lesson here is for leaders at any level to be able to answer these questions with data-driven insights. For many public- and private-sector organizations, the ability to maintain a healthy and responsive supplier network is critical to success. But since the beginning of the pandemic and now the war in Ukraine, our usual supply chains have been disrupted. We have gone from a just-in-time mindset to a just-in-case mindset.

The new strategy is to overbuy. It's a buffer and an insurance policy. Government agencies are going to multiple sources to bring in what they need because they aren't sure which one to trust. It's a wasteful and unsustainable situation we need to rectify with technology that empowers us to make better and more data-driven decisions.

MOVE TO ACTION

There are three superpowers we need to develop to get beyond

our current inefficiencies and begin making decisions differently. The first is connection. We have data pools spread across enterprise resource planning software, legacy applications and cloud services. These data silos need to be connected so everyone in the organization can see what's happening.

Second, we need to see the analytics based on the data. Many companies offer tools to perform analytics, but if it's not connected, real-time analytics, we're making decisions based on old data. Third, once we have de-siloed our legacy systems and connected our data in real time, we need to move to action.

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Action can be a human-based activity, or it can be an autonomous action based on human-created parameters. A recent [Ernst & Young](#) report discusses the difference between "doing digital" and "being digital." For government organizations in the process of modernizing, it's an important distinction.

Whether we're talking about connected supply chains across planning, procurement, manufacturing and logistics or a self-service offering for citizens, transforming our systems means automating certain functions to make people's jobs easier and the organization more efficient.

IMPOSSIBLE TO OVERLOOK

How we proceed toward these goals makes all the difference. Public-sector leaders need to think big, start small and scale fast. The best approach is to pick a chunk of the business that is consequential and show everyone incremental results. Executive buy-in is also important but sometimes comes later, after several bottom-up iterations that are so successful they are impossible to overlook.

The [National Telecommunications and Information Administration's new grants portal](#) is an excellent example. The end-to-end, FedRAMP-authorized system gives NTIA and its customers the digital tools they need to apply for broadband grant programs and support the government's management of the projects funded with the grants.

Applicants log into the system via an online community portal, built using [Salesforce Public Sector Solutions](#) and [Experience Cloud](#). Similar to a TurboTax

Source: Unsplash



experience, grantees are guided through a series of fields that capture information and generate the standard federal grant forms automatically, making the applicants' experience both familiar and intuitive.

With the rollout of the grant portal, NTIA has positioned itself as an example that other federal agencies can follow as they transition from legacy systems to cloud-based solutions under tight timelines. The portal also reminds us of what can be accomplished with the right technology and the will to change. ■

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