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## The Evolution of the Best Practice

Technology helps drive modern best practices in government

The “paperless” office has been a decades-long vision. It seemed to have finally achieved its promise a few years ago with the ability to scan and attach digital versions of paper documents and digital signatures. Now, those concepts are already a thing of the past. Today’s technologies enable digital processes from start to finish.

Business best practices, like the paperless office, are designed for efficiency and optimization. Yet best practices are constantly evolving, and incorporate the latest enabling technologies to continuously improve optimal procedures and processes. Governments design processes around best practices and the ones that want to stay ahead of the curve build programs and train experts to manage and monitor them as technology changes.

For back-office solutions, advancements in cloud computing have become pivotal to establishing and achieving modern best practices. Cloud computing is the underlying technology for other digital enablers, including social, mobile, analytics and the “Internet of Things”—a network of connected physical objects with embedded internet applications, sensors and more that collect, analyze and exchange data.

This emergence and rapid acceptance of cloud computing today represents a new opportunity for agencies. In fact, the adoption of modern best practices are global and cross-industry, says Bob Sabo, Strategic Programs Lead, Oracle Public Sector. With the public sector’s need to increase efficiency and effectiveness, they are critical for modern government.

“With modern technologies you can interact with citizens, employees and other stakeholders using completely new channels,” he says. “Effective agencies take advantage of digital transforma-

tions, and embed solutions into the process—whether it’s financial reporting, budgeting, or employee recruitment.”

Government organizations have always pursued process improvement, better integration of resources, reduced paperwork and other overall efficiencies. Technology is often the foundation of those pursuits. In many ways though, modern technologies are now driving best practices. Without them, you can only advance so far. Here’s a look at how technology is positively affecting several areas of business best practices.

### Human Capital/ Talent Management

The overall workforce is changing and in many cases shrinking. In government, this decline is exacerbated by the gradual aging out of a generation of workers who

have a comprehensive understanding of their existing workforce. Who is ready to retire or move on to other positions and when will that transition likely occur? They have to predict their future needs and establish a plan to ensure they have resources with the necessary skills to fill those gaps. Success requires sophisticated data collection and a way to marry that with analytics to help predict those future needs, understand potential gaps, and develop a robust succession plan. And this should be naturally paired with a modern, engaging recruitment and applicant tracking system.

In order to attract the best talent, modern government business practices must align to the expectation of the skilled job seeker. They tend to live in a highly social, mobile-first world and learn about employment opportunities

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have accumulated decades of institutional knowledge and expertise. Agencies need to examine their existing workforce and at the same time seek out new workers to fill defined gaps. This means that government is competing with private industry to attract the same caliber of professional from a shrinking pool of resources. So the competition for that talent is intense.

Agencies are also faced with an entirely different dynamic: they need to

through multiple channels, using messaging and social networking applications to interact with their networks. Agencies must provide a simplified, user-friendly solution that helps job seekers start and move through the process efficiently and easily. Successful recruiting efforts begin with the first interaction, and top talent expects social, mobile and easy-to-use solutions at work. Organizations that

can't provide that experience will lose out in the battle for their attention.

At the same time, agencies often have strict compliance requirements. As a result, there are a number of hurdles they must negotiate that private industry often does not. The city of Chicago has successfully used technology to navigate these challenges. Chicago deployed an Oracle cloud solution to automate its hiring processes, enabling officials to reduce the number of candidates they need to manually screen by 90 percent, while also cutting the time-to-hire from a year to just 90 days. In the process, the city saves millions of dollars a year in recruitment costs.

### Finance and Procurement

Government agencies award contracts after a competitive bid process, a laborious procedure that requires loading vendor catalogs and manually keying in items. This demands tremendous effort, and in many cases government purchasers simply bypass the rules and buy off contract, circumventing pre-negotiated pricing with vendors. In the process, that costs government agencies millions of additional dollars—taxpayer dollars.

Cloud-based applications provide a guided shopping experience to help government purchasers with procurement. Workers simply enter a keyword for what they need. They then see a list of approved vendors along with the negotiated contract prices. Procurement policies are enforced through this application, and all necessary accounting is completed automatically. All the purchaser has to do is select the item.

Even the tradition-bound world of government finance can profit from modern technologies, particularly with the often tedious process of period end closing and financial reporting. This process involves coordinating all involved accounting staff and ensuring they complete the right tasks in the right order. Social media tools can enable much smoother collaboration. They also

automatically keep a written record of the process in case questions need to be answered after the fact. Task lists and sub ledger posting can be automatically monitored to ensure all steps are completed.

### Planning, Budgeting & Reporting

There is no government function that stands to profit more from modern, technology-driven best practices than the budgeting process. The government's budget sets the strategy and priorities. The budget needs to be accurate, inclusive and clear. The primary aspects of this process, preparing the budget, analyzing the costs and revenues, and communicating the budget all can be dramatically improved with modern technologies.

Involving every level early is critical to understand their priorities. Modern cloud applications offer an intuitive, easy-to-use employee experience, letting the tool be used across the organization and at all levels. It simplifies and accelerates the process of engaging different departments and agencies that have input into the budget reporting process. Today, more government agencies are engaging citizens during the budget process using modern social collaboration tools. In addition, mobile devices can help quickly exchange information, collect needed data, and reduce face-to-face meetings.

Cloud-based applications offer predictive and proactive analytics needed for real-time decision-making. The utility of on-demand, cloud-based predictive analytics makes it far simpler to see patterns in budget numbers and to sift through various what-if scenarios to get a better idea of different outcomes in different situations. That's something budget departments have asked for over the years, but until newer technologies were developed, they weren't easily or cost-effectively available.

It is imperative that once the budget is created that it is communicated to all key

stakeholders in a clear, concise format, especially for citizens. Using modern budgeting applications throughout the budget cycle allows for faster and more accurate report generation and budget book creation. It allows governments to provide the context needed, such as tables, graphs and narratives for the audience to better understand priorities.

### Conclusion

All this points to a growing urgency government agencies face with regard to upgrading and integrating their back-office processes with modern mobile, social and predictive analytics technologies. Modern best practices dictate their use, and government agencies that fail to embrace them will quickly fall behind in delivering the services employees and citizens expect. The cloud provides not only the opportunity to deploy those new technologies but also align business process to best practices. As government agencies shift to a cloud-first mentality the opportunity to achieve and maintain best practices grows. Cloud-based applications create a mindset of constant change and innovation.

"The preferred approach is for government to look at modern best practices and determine what needs to change internally to achieve the desired result," says Sabo. "Oracle provides the modern technology and framework for our customers to get there. Things get exciting when the conversation shifts from what is happening today to what we should be doing tomorrow and into the future."

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