A Changing of the Guard

Federal agencies have pushed hard to identify and deploy emerging technologies and new business methods that streamline operations and deliver improved services to their constituents, partners and stakeholders. We caught up with Bill Webner, vice president of Federal for Capgemini Government Solutions, to hear his take on the progress and challenges with this effort.

How would you describe the state of innovation, modernization and transformation taking place with federal agencies?

I would say it is a mixed state of affairs. On the one hand, most agencies are serious about transforming their operations and using innovation as a driver of that change. We continually see new offices and programs popping up with the sole
focus of identifying new technologies and methodologies of streamlining -- or reinventing -- key lines of business.

And there are several examples of agencies supporting their innovation agendas by opening up offices outside the Beltway and in the center of our nation's innovation clusters, like out in San Jose and San Francisco. The recently authorized Modernizing Government Technology Act is a recognition of this -- the desire, drive and mandate are clearly there. On the other hand, the traditional contracting community and other private sector players haven’t delivered on the real, meaningful innovation that many agencies are asking for.

**Why has the private sector failed to deliver?**

The private sector has been stymied, in large part, due to challenges with the procurement processes used by the agencies -- something I often refer to as the "innovation irony" in this market. Despite market demand for cutting edge services and capabilities, most procurements don't allow commercial sector and other global public sector references to be included in the bid package. These types of constraints favor the "old guard", Federal-only government contractors who earn billions a years by recycling Federal-only past performance qualifications. That's the "innovation irony" -- clearly, it's hard to drive innovation if perspectives and experiences from other markets and industries aren't allowed. Here are a few relatively simple changes to consider as agencies look for ways to speed up innovation delivery -- and a few have already tried these:

1. Update procurement terms to allow "or reasonable equivalent" to the past performance requirements such as contract number, proof of value, etc. and remove the constraints of "Federal-only" references; expand CPARS to include commercial sector references

2. Create environments where products and solutions can be implemented and trialed -- rather than discussed -- while security and process issues are identified and managed

3. Create a set-aside business category for new and innovative technologies to fast-track their introduction into the Federal market
You mention the old guard of government contractors, can we assume there is a new guard?

Yes, the new guard includes firms like Capgemini, but also includes the universe of start-ups and other innovators, who are "shovel-ready" but need to have these barriers to entry reduced or eliminated to create real impact. The good news is that the most progressive agencies we work with are independently making changes to their procurement processes so that global innovation and global private and public-sector qualifications are allowed and weighed heavily in award decisions.

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