

Ep. 6 Overcoming Challenges to Federal Cloud Transition

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Welcome to the federal tech podcast. My name is John Gilroy and I'll be your moderator. Our guest today is Jay McMillan. He was recently named Executive Vice President at Booz Allen Congratulations. How are you?

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Doing great, John, thanks for having me. Really excited to be here?

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Yeah, I saw Jays background and I said, Wow, this guy seen the stamp on the stern and up to the top and the bow and all kinds of places all through the ship. And he's he's got a good experience on, generally speaking, how to get the idea of how cloud can impact the government system experience, the whole idea of economic advancement and business. And I thought we come up with just a general interview today. See what kind of insights Jay can bring in the area of the role of the cloud for the federal government citizen experience and then moving forward. But before we begin, give us a thumbnail sketch your background, how you wound up at Booz Allen, please?

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Sure. First of all, again, thank you for having me. And, yeah, I've been in federal consulting my entire career. And going back a little ways, ran civil for Lockheed Martin. And then ran a Department of Treasury work, most recently at IBM did that for about nine years. And then three years ago, came in to Booz Allen and now running what we have portfolio in the civil world called Citizen Services, large portfolio about 2000 people really focused towards mission in our civilian government.

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Well, it's the middle of April as we're recording this, I guess, is the right time of the year to have someone like you in the air, isn't it?

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Yeah. It's it's nice to be back and I am back in the office. You know, reconnecting with staff reconnecting with clients. So It's been a tough couple of years with with COVID. But sure, it feels good to be back



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off couple years, I've been interviewing federal people for many, many years, about 16 years now. And I remember back in about 2010, when you were in high school. In 2010, I interviewed this guy named Vivek Kundra. I'm sure you remember that name. And if you remember, it was probably probably, you know, tattooed on your forehead, the 25 point plan, everything was the 25 point plan. And, and one of the big points is, of course, cloud first. And I think this is where we began the journey. And and here it is, what I don't know, 1011 12 years later, and it's still making the transition. From your perspective, working for major organizations dealing with menu for agencies. Good transition too slow, too fast, too expensive. What do you think of his whole transition in general, last 10 years to the cloud?

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Yeah. Great question. Thank you for it. **Every, every agency is at a different timeline in on a different journey, as it relates to cloud.** Some are adopting cloud quicker than others. And seeing the benefits of that adoption, some are still exploring cloud. But I would say that across my portfolio of business, you know, Cloud is on the tip of everyone's tongue. There's a lot of planning that goes in as as you are migrating into cloud environments, making sure that it is done properly, it is done with a level of speed. But also that you're seeing the benefits from it. And I think the planning stages are so vital to making sure that over time that the benefits and the outcomes of cloud first are recognized in each agency.

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There's a popular author in town named David Linthicum. Have you read any news articles? J? I have not? Well, he writes a lot for info world and all kinds of publications. And about a month Go ahead. He just loved his article, he talked about the cloud hangover. So what's happening? Well, we got old J. McMillan and agency a and he moves to the cloud. And then he finds out that not exactly what he expected to pay. And if he wanted to leave, it's not exactly what I expected to be charged to leave. And so he may get up in the morning and look for some aspirin have a cloud hanging over? So have you seen this happen to agencies in the past?

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Actually, I have not the the clients that we have engaged with as it relates to cloud and cloud migration and, and transformation, right, and we, you know, we aspire to transform agencies. And to the extent that the planning is done holistically across the enterprise, and that they're not looking at point solutions. And that they're defining the technology in a manner that is open. I think the benefits are realized quickly. So the clients that we perform cloud, cloud migrations, cloud enablement, and frankly, digital transformation, I think are absolutely seeing the benefits of that modernization efforts.

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And that's, maybe you didn't read the article after all, because that's what David said, he said, Look, what you want to do is, you know, in the past, you didn't architect a system for, for for unknown entities in the future, has to have some flexible, open ended source. And he said, that's really the best way to do it. Whereas 1015 years ago, you'd have ones and you'd move on. But now it has to be an architecture that is open and fluid to different options. And so that's almost what you described. You talk about open.



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Yeah, and I think it's open. And I think it's multi cloud environments, right? There's we have customers that are multi tenant environments, as well. And but there are risks, right, **there are risks with legacy applications and making sure that as you're migrating legacy and the associated data with legacy**, that you're doing it in a manner that, you know, it's security first. You know, we sit with our clients, we sit at the intersection of mission and technology. And sitting in those spaces, there's a responsibility that we feel to ensure that our clients are doing the things as it relates to modernization, doing those in an effective manner, and security being a priority as we're migrating. So there's several methodologies that we put forward. To ensure that, again, I get back to my earlier comments around planning. You know, not all, not all technology is the same, and making sure that the technologies that we do trust, and that we are bringing to our clients and implementing for our clients are within the guidelines. And you know, the security postures that that we want for our clients.

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I started off talking about my interview with the vet Kundra many years ago, I'm sure if we dug that interview up and listen to it, I would not use the word identity management, I would not use the word zero trust, and it seems to be the same interview is the same chair that without be pardoned by almost a big part of it. And so, you know, the role of the cloud has has been there, but it's changed over time, hasn't it?

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It has, and it's become very complex. And, you know, as as, as you look at the landscape around cloud, and the technology, you know, I see in the future is becoming more complex, and with complexity come comes risk, right. So, to my earlier comments of, you know, properly planning, and recognizing also the clients want speed and agility. But I think it's a delicate balance. And just making sure that, you know, within the guardrails and the guidelines that our clients are asking that we're, we're delivering on, on from an outcome perspective as well.

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I listened to podcasts, I record podcasts, I listen to this podcast called Feds at the edge. And they interviewed people from the VA. And they talked about COVID, and giving remote services to veterans in rural areas. And this is really been a push to COVID. But it's not COVID. Cause it's also we got an executive order here, that clearly talks about improving customer experience. And I think these doctors from the VA are saying, Look, you know, this is one way to improve it through the interface itself. So there's there's specific, I think healthcare is a great one or the application of this, but there's all kinds of various to increase Citizen Service, isn't it? Yeah, absolutely.

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And, you know, as, as the government continues to transform, and again, I see, you know, experience as a transformation. And I also agree that the past two years has been a catalyst for experience, right? So we're not trying to change mission, we're trying to change how mission is delivered. And in order to do that properly, I do believe that we talk to our customers customer, right, and making sure that as their experience and their experience journey progresses, that we're in a position to capture that information captured that the data, data



is the new currency. And being in and having our arms around the data and understanding the data really drives to being able to deliver mission differently. Experience is one way to do that. Then we have many examples of, you know, how we've been able to transform, you know, organizations. The other piece on experience, I think, is looking at it from an enterprise perspective, point solutions gets cluttered. And, you know, the challenge that the many challenges that we face is looking at it holistically. And again, holistically meaning it's becomes very complex. But leveraging, you know, technology in order to deliver mission differently, I think is where we shine here at Booz Allen,

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that word mission, really, it's really should be the title of this interview or something because it's really important for many of our listeners, you know, I I've gotten to know several of my guests, and one of the guests I've gotten over the years, is a retired brigadier general, Greg touhill. And he is now working for a nonprofit in Pittsburgh, and it's called cert, and I had a conversation with him and I said, Well, you know, it's crazy. You have pretty good background, or any place, you can start your own company, you could make just piles of money. And he said, Well, John, it's about the mission. And he's he is putting his money where his mouth is about the mission for him and, and this year, actually, a month ago, he was just given the James Baldrige Award for raw cybersecurity. So this mission is just overriding concern for many of our listeners, isn't it?

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Yeah, it is. And we are a we are a mission first company here and you It makes me it makes us proud, right? It makes us I think differentiates us on the market that we look at things with that lens. And again, we aspire to sit where mission and technology collide. Which allows us to, to drive transformation in my business, John, you know, if I were to describe my business, it's digital transformation and cyber, recognizing that digital transformation is a big word, right. But, you know, the the opportunities, and the excitement that we feel here at Booz Allen is simply, you know, Mission centric, and and making sure that technology is driving that mission. And I think that's what differentiates us here at Booz Allen.

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Would you say the word collide, I wrote it down? Because 10 days, 10 days, guys at the satellite show is sat a company from Japan. And guess who we're talking about? New the 30,000 satellites gonna go up there next five years and the opportunities for collisions? Night? Wow. Oh, yeah.

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Maybe I shouldn't use that. Lockheed people, because they'll get jumpy about that. About mission where mission intersects? Collision? Yeah, that's people. You know, it's a responsibility. We, you know, we, you know, we take that very seriously. And it's a responsibility by everyone here in the 29,000 people here at Booz Allen. And, you know, we see it as our responsibility for our clients to make that happen. And, and, you know, there's forcing functions in the business, I think, you know, COVID, in the last two years is one of those forcing functions, right. You know, businesses and agencies need to do things differently. They're learning, right? We talk in terms of, you know, the future of work, we've we're learning here at Booz Allen, what does the future of work look like for us? Right, because we're in unprecedented times. And, you know, we think we have it all



written down and right. But we, we believe there's, there's areas that we need to improve and, and that's the excitement around the business. So.

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And there's a lot of excitement in all kinds, not just the Space Force, not just the DOD, excitement, all kinds of different areas, but because I think it's finally, it's kind of like, if you're stuck up in Hudson Bay, and it's springtime, and it's kind of falling out, the ice is kind of thawing out. And I think the government starting out and understanding their responsibility to have a good system experience with their websites, whether it's healthcare, whether it's taxes, or, or or maybe a retirement account, Social Security. So when someone like you thinks about Citizen Service, do you think about user interface? Or do you think about speed? Or do you think about mobile applications? So

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I don't think there's anything off limits when it comes to user experience. And it's really defined, frankly, at the at the enterprise level? Yeah, mobile apps, right. If you, you know, if you're 25 years old, you do everything on your phone. You know, we talk in citizen services about identity access, right? And what that experience and identity access looks like. And, you know, as as the workforce comes, you know, becomes younger and younger, right? And then the speed of technology today, allowing us to do things differently. You know, it's hard to guess what next year, five years from now, where technology is, you know, we, you know, obviously, 5g is, you know, on everybody on this front and center on everybody's mind, you know, cloud enablement, right, where's cloud enablement, going to be? In, you know, five years quantum How is quantum going to affect, you know, businesses in the future, both private and public, and in, you know, the federal government? So we we have those conversations, I think it's dangerous to try to predict. We, we look at the technology, I think from a long term view, and then getting back to the earlier comments of we try to map that technology into mission and how we could deliver mission differently for our clients. So it's everything is is very fast paced, we have to keep up, we have to stay ahead. We invest significantly in our staff to make sure that they are proficient in the newest technologies. We look at many different technology companies both large and small, on how they could affect our, you know, our digital transformation agenda. So, we have people that, that kind of geek out on all that technology and bring it back into our world so we can put the mission centric view on it.

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A lot of men my age say they had a misspent youth, part of my misspent youth was living in Central America, I learned Spanish. And I remember some fun phrases and one phrases cMpL. Anthea, always ahead. And so we gotta look ahead here, you know, so if an agency is looking at digital transformation, improving citizen services, citizen experience, they've got to be way to pay for it. And a lot of people are saying, well, maybe it's time to leverage this technology modernization fund TMF. So from your perspective, is this just pie in the sky? Or is this really something worth pursuing? Well,

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I'm going to answer that in two ways, if I could. I do believe technology, modernization is a way for cost takeout. Right? As as you drive more modern and enabling technologies into environments, you see



efficiencies, and what that allows organizations to do is divert resources into different areas. So he talked about, like earlier, around cloud, right? Seeing the efficiencies of cloud versus being, you know, in data centers, and having all the staff in the data centers, watching the lights blink right, in, in driving them into more modern and enabling technology environments, you know, allows not just the ROI, but allows the time spent to free up people to go in and, you know, to other areas of the organization to, you know, again, you know, deliver on mission. So I do believe that enabling technology is one way that the government and other organizations can from a cost takeout perspective. No, I don't think TMF is pie in the sky. I think it is an avenue in a in a funding source that allows that allows agencies to tap to become more efficient. We we hope that we see more of it. Because again, I think that's where Booz Allen shines.

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Good. I have a one more question about the technology modernization fund. But one of the best ways to keep up with the fast changing world of technology is to attend webinars, you learn at your schedule, and you get continuing education credits. The best webinars are from Fed insider.com. And they're free. Just last week, they had military leaders talking about securing comms for 1.5 million endpoints Holly's endpoints boy, DOD has got all kinds of challenges when it comes to remote endpoints. So technology modernization fund, mean it comes down to the word use ROI. Earlier this morning, I interviewed a gentleman from Southern Methodist University SMU in Texas, and went back and forth and I said, you know, what? University? What's the ROI in the university for cybersecurity? What is the return on investment? How do you measure that? I mean, how can you find anything that'll increase your cybersecurity and, and his his? His question was how much is enough? And it's like another nonprofit organization called the US government. Roi is a difficult concept to talk about in different agencies. So this concept of ROI is difficult for easy for you to explain with digital transformation and the agencies you work with.

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Well, first of all, as it relates to cybersecurity, I mean, the risk of not being secure I think far outweighs the federal government. So yes, they there are diverting funds towards cyber posture, right. I do agree that there are there's a law of diminishing returns, maybe Um, and however, you know, with the exposures and the advancement of malicious actors, there will there needs to be consistent as well as expanded monies applied to cybersecurity postures. And that comes, you know, there's a lot that goes into that right there is there are tools and techniques and methodologies, we talk a little bit about zero trust, right. And I think one area that we're very passionate about is awake getting away from point solutions. Really looking at cybersecurity from an enterprise level, from the, from the strategy and engineering all the way through to the operations and making sure that it's all connected. And being being delivered at the enterprise level, rather than at the point solution level. There's a lot of tools out there, John, there's there's in good tools, right. But looking at it from an enterprise level, I think there's advantages to doing that we are seeing our customers take that posture, where we can look at not just the strength, the the cybersecurity strategy and the connection of the engineering and the operations, but also at tool refresh, and making sure that we have the best enabling tools across the enterprise to protect it.

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Let's say this is a virtual interview. So I'm gonna get up my virtual mirror and slide over into your office there in the claim. And have you looked in the mirror from the perspective of Booz Allen, I mean, you're a technology provider, we know that. So So from looking in the mirror, what can you folks do to maybe move the government forward with innovation?

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Well, innovation is, again, a very big word, right? The, you know, the relationships that that we have here with our clients. I feel as though we can have conversations both good and bad. And being the thought leader, sometimes you're put into that position where you have to deliver news of you may, you know, you may not be innovating the way you need to be. And having those conversations are always tough. But we don't shy away from that. You know, the, it's also very dangerous to, to point them in a direction that has not been planned, understood, and making sure that we're looking at the concerns of our clients. And in bringing technology and the thought leadership that Booz Allen does to the table to propel them forward. We don't shy away from those conversations. I think they rely on our clients rely on us for that thought leadership. And, you know, we bring it, so

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and we mentioned point solutions earlier. But that can be very tempting for a federal CIO, they see something and it's like, wow, it's a dangly thing here. It's shiny. And yeah, oh J there's holding her back saying no, no, no, no, no, no, but it's saying you don't understand it's a it's just like my new Tesla. It's dangly thing and shiny, and it may be the back and pull them back. But it

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may be the right solution. Right? It might be the right solution. But my point is looking at it holistically, rather than the bright shiny object of today. Because it may not be the bright shiny object of tomorrow, because technology is moving that fast. You know, you look at AI, you look at 5g, you look at the analytics. As we're innovating with our clients, you know that space is going to be different tomorrow than it is today. And making sure that we have eyes wide open to that as we're guiding our clients through innovation and digital transformation. What's the phrase?

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It's like? They need an adult in the room. Like, hey, I made that mistake. I chased that that was a mistake to me. I chased that and I'm gonna sit back and maybe Maybe it's like a The fuller picture, you know, hey, let's let's just sit back with quantum it's a great, it's it's stylish and trendy, but let's just kind of hold back on this and and even the quantum people talking about 10 years, aren't they? I mean, it's yes, it's bright and shiny, but just pull back on that a little bit, I think.

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Yeah. But you got to understand the impact that quantum is going to have on the business. Oh, yeah. And that's where and that's where you start. Right? And, you know, in our solution Innovation Group here at Booz Allen, that's, that's how they think. Right? They think in terms of how technology is going to impact our clients,



and, and it's a very powerful position to be in and I'm, I'm amazed, I've been here for three years. I'm just continuously amazed on, you know, the people here at Booz Allen, how they think, I'm also amazed with our clients, and their willingness to listen are the willingness for them to lead as well, through innovation. You know, we have some, we, our clients understand where they need to go and where their mission set needs to go. And having those conversations really energize our staff, you know, today's world, you know, coming out of COVID. You know, it worries me sometimes that we're not sitting down with our clients every day like we used to, and the impact that that has, you know, I believe over time, John, that we will mirror our clients. Here at Booz Allen, you know, we, like many companies, even though I'm in the office today, others, others aren't. But that doesn't mean that we're not delivering with our clients. You know, the war on talent is real. And making sure that as we as the future of work comes about, and has started to come about, that we're being flexible in how we interact with our staff and the leadership, how our leadership has to lead differently. But that's the internal, the external is making sure that our clients are comfortable with our posture, and, and ensuring that, you know, we're going to hit the day to day deliverables and the mission sets that we're supporting, day in and day out, even though we may not be there with them, you know, every day. So it's very complex. It's more complex than I thought. But here at Booz Allen, I think the word flexibility is, you know, reigns around here and in making sure people are comfortable, right, comfortable with coming in, with with, you know, all the internal guidelines that we have as it relates to COVID. And if you're not comfortable, then a remote status is fine. But we're we're working through that we will continue to work through that we will continue to refine that. And just couldn't be more proud of how Booz Allen has handled itself. You know, through the COVID pandemic,

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on the one hand, you described a very complex situation. On the other hand, you've been with Booz Allen for three years, a recently named Senior Vice President, so he must be prospering in this very difficult environments.

Congratulations for you, Jay. It's great. Thank you. Thanks for listening to federal tech podcast with John Gilroy. I'd like to thank my guest, Jay McMillon, Executive Vice President at Booz Allen. Thanks, Jay.

