FEDERAL TECH PODCAST

Ep. 116 The Key to Agile Software Development

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John Gilroy here. In the next 30 minutes, you will learn everything you need to know about agile software development and the federal government at the Music Mani. Welcome to the federal tech podcast. My name is John Gilroy and I'll be your moderator. Our guest today is norm literati. He's the Vice President for partnerships at Blue scape. And as I mentioned earlier, we're going to talk about software development, flexible platforms. whiteboarding, what's the next step for whiteboarding and all kinds of issues and federal games, they're always coming to four right about now, the reason I brought this up is because we have these executive orders that pop up every now and then. And they make strong suggestion recommendations. And the last executive order I mentioned was one back in May 2021. And number one first point was transparency. So Norm today, we're talking about Blue scape transparency, and getting the job done the federal government and you got the job done the federal gun for two decades, didn't you? Yeah, I

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spent some time in the army that that I seem to harken back to quite often these days. Yeah,

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yeah. Well, let's set the stage here. Before the interview started, I mentioned that I bought my first book on Agile software development 20 years ago. And I don't think people have figured out yet they're trying to figure it out. And they try and they realize there's benefits to it that they fail to try and they fail. So So when it comes to Agile software development, you know, the benefits are iteration, and the benefits are reduced cost. And so where does blue scape fit in with federal government trying to save money on software development?

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Well, John, it's I think you'll come away from this discussion thinking, My gosh, that's so simple. Why didn't I think of that. And that's generally what people come away with, when they see how we enable collaboration at scale in a secure way. It's all about getting the people the data they need, and the tools they need, all in one secure space. And it was something that, that people thought was in the too hard to do box, even even five years ago, but now it's all possible. And and that's what's making everyone so excited, especially those safe, agile partners that are out there.

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I do a lot of interviews with space people, the Space Force and Air Force generals and, and a trending phrase in that community is something called situational awareness. And they like to know where the satellites are. It's kind of a big deal up in spades, because bad things happen, if you know that. And I think this phrase is being liberated for in a technology community about having awareness of what's going on in complex environments. And, and I think when I went to your website, which of course is blue scape.com. He talked about common situational awareness. Well, are you an astronaut or a software developer? What's going on with situational awareness and your company? Well, it's

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it's all about those rooms with big screens. And then you have you have dozens and dozens of of experts in their field all trying to collaborate at once. And they need to have that common operating picture. And, and we talk about that so much around the federal government, especially in the defense sector, you know, how do we get all the information where it needs to be in front of those experts and decision makers, so that they have up to the minute understanding, and they're able to make great decisions. So what we tried to do at Blue scape, coming back to that, what I said about the data, bringing all that data, that information into a space where the experts can interact with it create intelligence make the most informed decisions, they can't. So we've created a platform that is API driven, and FedRAMP, secure, and, and even on some networks, which I can talk about a little bit later, we're the only option to do secure planning and to be able to bring all those feeds all that information together. So that it that the experts can interact with it and get it into workflows get the best decisions they can out of it.

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I'm gonna run with this satellite thing because I think we have a parallel here. I don't know if you remember you are probably in diapers during the Apollo years, but there's a little thing called Apollo 13. And when I think Apollo 13 I think of all those people in front of screens in front of one room, you know, they weren't two rooms. It was in one location Houston. And and they had a lot of information there and they had it have situational awareness that was going on. Well today. Because of technology. We can have virtual rooms all over the world, we can have experts and Palo Alto, California and experts in who knows where receive a Brazil all coming together. So I think that's the challenge is is coming up with something as effective as the Apollo program in today's virtual world. But with so many more can security concerns, I'm sure back in Apollo 13. No one worried about hackers getting into their communications to the moon but kind of worried about hackers today and make that communication secure, don't you? You

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do that's why you have to have those secure options on the networks you're operating on. But if you have all your stakeholders on one up operational network, there's no reason why they can't share all the information they need to share, have the tools they need to have participate in the workflows in, in either a synchronous or asynchronous way. I mean, hearken back to your, to your analogy on the Apollo 13 Weren't there fellas in Australia and the Australian outback that had to talk to Apollo and and then send their information back to Houston, so they could monitor the mission. And you know what, that's no different than than what our our government customers are doing all over the world today with dispersed operations, sometimes disconnected for a while, they'd come back together. But they've got to be able to talk all the way from, from the garrison to the field where the muddy boots guys and gals are. And that's, that's something that it's expected, it's no longer an aspiration, it's expected. And now we're at the point where we can think about shaving time off of those decision flows, shaving time off of that information, sharing, increasing the accuracy of what they're able to get, and, and create that single pane of glass where all the feeds can come in, so that the subject matter experts and decision makers can interact with it and and keep those decision flows moving.

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Well, we're gonna go from a Paulo to Buzz Lightyear, because Buzz Lightyear famously said To infinity and beyond. And so I'm at your website this morning, reading some blogs and coming up with some of the products

that you have. And you talk about or your company talks about infinite and persistent workspaces, infinite and persistent workspaces. So I assume that means if you're connecting to someone in in Kigali, Rwanda, that you can have a disturbance and still remain connected was that one of those words mean, those are important words and fit and persistent? Well,

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as long as our users are on the same network, no problem at all, even if they can't talk to each other sometimes, because of sunspots, if you will, then they can still come back into the connectivity with the workspace. And the the information is there. It's adjudicated between those people with the home base and those people in the outstations. But, but the idea is, it's all secure. And it's right there where they can they can interact with it

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once boils down to software development, I have on LinkedIn every day, I looked at a friend of mine fits his profile this morning, I scroll down and he had SAF lowercase E on it. And he's been an architect for decades, he's very well known as communities. He's good at it. And I saw that. And then when I'm doing my research on blue scape, I noticed that you work a lot with this Scaled Agile Framework. And and this is a tool that a lot of people like Fitz may use in order to accomplish these difficult goals of getting him on the same page sharing information. Is this where you fit into with the safe framework?

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Yeah, are our partners that Scaled Agile have been fantastic. And of course, for them, it's it's a, it's a time of business booming, because all over the federal government, every agency is trying to do things better and introduce those lean Agile processes. And that safe framework is so popular. So they've been kind enough to work with us. And we've built all of the templates needed for their their PIs and ceremonies that are conducted during a safe planning process. And those are already built into blue scape. So for our blue scape users that all are already out there using blue scape for operational collaboration on the missions their organizations have, they can pivot and do their their safe planning, right in that those same kind of workspaces. And for the ones that are just starting out, we provide a great way to bring groups together. And it truly is infinite. It's whatever the customer's architecture can handle. And we are deployed in in secure gov cloud at the FedRAMP level and, and also at the DoD level. We have a tios on on il four, il five and above. And we are the only option on some of those networks for collaboration for things like that. So we try to put a great product out there and so far, so good. Everybody seems to be really devouring those those safe, agile frameworks.

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Your colleague, John Greenstein, He recently wrote an article called a common operating tools to unite sectors against cyber threats. Hmm. So I know, we can talk about Greenfield software development and security and that's fine. But there's a whole world of, you know, threat awareness and situational awareness involved in cyber attacks. And so, so take off your software development hat and put on your cyber guy hat. And so this is a framework that can be used for coordinating cyberdefense as well, is that right?

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Absolutely. So it's all about responding to a crisis crisis response operations. So our initial customers were using it for things like floods and famines and met evacs. But now, we see an increasing move toward creating

network operation centers that require that same type of visibility, information sharing, and workflows toward decisions, where you have to integrate a lot of outstations. And a lot of stakeholders, maybe that you normally wouldn't even work with. So take a federal agency that's protecting its network and has a network operation center, there may be times when outside stakeholders need to collaborate with them, call up, pick a pick a giant, giant company like Apple or IBM, and you need to get them in on the conversation. Well, not only do we enable our customers to be able to spin up a crisis response really quickly, but we allow them to bring in those other stakeholders who may not share the same network on a normal basis. But you can bring them into a secure workspace where you can govern their participation, get them into that environment, that collaboration environment very quickly, and decrease that time to value. When you bring that that stake outside stakeholder in for some type of cyber incident, you got to enable them to share information very quickly. And that's what blue scape allows him to do. Instead of sending up, you know, information back and forth on email. Instead, you can post the latest information right into a workspace or even bring your Splunk feed into a workspace in real time. So all the stakeholders can interact with that data, formulate the best response, they can with the most up to date information. And so whether it's a cyber response operation, it's a natural disaster that needs to be handled by state and local authority assisted by FEMA and, and other other entities like the National Guard, or it's the, it's the US Central Command, trying to coordinate response operations across the world, we allow you to bring not only your organic stakeholders into a collaboration space, but out parties also. And you're able to control what they see what they can touch. So that you get the value there quickly, without giving anybody any sharp objects, they could cut themselves on

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what they can see my my, my what our great phrase, let's go back in time to 2021 in May, document came out of the White House called executive order. And it talked about cybersecurity and transparency. And so I would think this is a very careful conversation of who knows what I bet there's people thriller agencies that don't want to tell nobody nothing. And I'm sure this look at the DOD has got to be slick. And, uh, you know, in the civilian industry like that, too. And so, so how does one achieve the goal of transparency in a hybrid environment? Sure.

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Well, the the whole transparency, you know, from a supply chain, aspect, if I could start out with that is pretty simple. We're a US based company that's been through the entire FedRAMP vetting process, so you know, where the tool came from. And you can have that confidence in the, in the FedRAMP framework that, that we are compliant with everything our federal customers need. But then when you get into the actual use of the tool, and bringing in those outside stakeholders, you're able to govern what, what team, someone what collaboration team, a particular stakeholder is part of, and what information you can share with them. So you come into a collaboration space, and John may be able to see everything in there, because John is an overseer of that, that response, that crisis response, that collaboration, but Nora may come into the workspace and only see those pieces of information or those workflows that are relevant to me. So transparency, where you need it, and lack of transparency where you need to maintain governance and control over collaboration.

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I was just handed a telegraph from the White House in front of me here. And it says, I've got to mention artificial intelligence. So I don't have a choice here. You know, the White House is telling me I got to talk about transparency, and about supply chain, got to mention AI. And there's got to be an application artificial

intelligence for working with a complex type of documents in complex situations you have so you applying AI to Blue scape.

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We fit into the AI workflow in a great way. And that's it what what the machine learning experts would call the inference phase. So everybody's wanting to use AI and they're all out there on their journey trying to figure out how to make life better using AI, but it boils down to taking data and using those machine learning AI tools, especially these, you know, fourth generation GPT right now, but still, there's humans in the loop. Because we're, we're all trying to figure out how much we can trust AI and, and what types of bias, bias and, and explained ability they have and to integrate those new technologies into workflow. So blue scape, because we're an API, when we're API driven, and we let you open up the tools, you need to open up in a collaboration space, we allow you to call to a data store from within a workspace, send out that data to your machine learning model, or your large language model, and then get the results in the workspace and decide what goes into your workflows for decision. So as customers make their journey in figuring out how to integrate AI into their decision flows, where we're right there with them, providing them the means to get that integrated.

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We mentioned some DoD specifications and FedRAMP. And, and 135. Agencies, I would guess, there's different requirements, each agency for different types of transparency, different security levels, and of course, the the amount of data. And so does blue scape has the ability to so it's not just one size fits all you like it or is it customizable? Because it's I think it's a platform. I don't know if it's customizable for smaller agencies and fit into the smaller group as well. It

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sure does, we have a number of different levels of blue scape, you know, when it comes to network security. So whether you're a federal civilian agency operating on on a FedRAMP, secure network, we've we've got you covered in a AWS gov cloud instance, although we can deploy and in any of the hyperscalers clouds. But for the Department of Defense, we deploy on il four, il five, we're just moving on to to il six right now. And we're on networks above that, in fact, you know, we we have a nice little niche, and in those networks, those customers and here's your here's your color moment where the truth is stranger than fiction. We were invented by a furniture company out of Holland, Michigan, the Hayworth company, and they wanted to figure out a way to bring people from across the world into a collaborative environment to build furniture and, and leather seats for Lamborghinis. And so they created this, this collaboration tool, which eventually became blue scape. And our first customers in the commercial world when they productize it were Disney and Amazon and, you know, movie studios media and entertainment manufacturing. And that's when when some guys and gals from here in the beltway came to Hayworth and said, We want to try out this blue scape tool. And so we've been catering now to federal customers for about eight years. So we're we're pretty well established and in some some dark spaces. And now we're scaling for our customers across government to point to those networks where they need us so that they can interact not only with with collaborators inside their organization, but anybody that they allow on their network can collaborate inside of blue scape, again, bringing the people the tools, they need the data all together securely.

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Well, in 1085 interviews, I've never had an origin story that includes furniture, maybe sitting on furniture, but furniture manufacturing. Wow, that's incredible. Side note here, my daughter is an engineer. she designs her own couches, and she has some custom built. We need to maybe she should yeah, she should use blue scape for that. Yeah, she's have one built right now. So it's everything's. So I know you spend time in the military and you're in and out of the DOD. So when you present this to military folks, what's what's their what's their? What's their objection? What's the challenge? What's the hurdle they have to overcome? Is it sharing data with other folks that, you know, his army hates? Navy hates? Whoever I mean, is that one of the challenges? What's the biggest challenge you have to just sharing this information with disparate elements?

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We battled the status quo, John, you know, everybody's so used to sending back and forth PowerPoint decks getting ready for the morning briefing when the general walks in, to update him or her on what's going on in the world and the decisions they have to make. But that's the old way of doing business. And you got to figure out do I have the latest version of of the PowerPoint deck and does it have all the information the boss needs to be able to make that decision? Well, we battle against the status quo and our value prop is that we can shave time off your process increase the accuracy of what you're doing help you to make better decisions with less headaches. So done or the day of needing to send the latest file off to the briefers minutes before the general walks in the room. Instead, you've got a real time picture back to that situational awareness, you have everything that your your analysts produced, you have everything that your planners produced, and you have everything that your your current operations people want the boss to see, all in one space, where they can bring everybody up to speed in a moment, make the best decisions they can. So it's just about getting rid of the old way of doing business. And it's so tough, especially in those crisis response operations. When you have to bring together all these disparate parties to come up with a solution really quickly, you don't have time to spin up a shared drive, you don't have time to spin up a new network to keep everybody secure. Instead, you've got it right there in vitamin with an email, decide what they can see and what they can't see. Get them in there contributing their best to the whole workflow. And that's, that's how we reduce time to value. All

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in a secure environment. That's the catch. I mean, lot lot of people can do that. And just the hurdle of FedRAMP for a couple of years. That's a big hurdle. And so you may make a lot of claims, like, Well, yeah, I won the Boston marathon last year. But the reality is, it's pretty hard to run that race, it's pretty hard to run the race of serving the needs of a dynamic environment, situational awareness, and the Pentagon and, and FEMA, there's another situation where so two could change what could happen next week with FEMA, so no. So last question, positive negative, where you see it's going to have the next five years needs to be adopted, I think it's gonna be another agile book on the bookshelf, for the next 20 years.

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Things are moving so fast right now, like, I can't be anything that optimistic, I just hope nobody asks me to become a safe agile planner, because we're too busy trying to serve the customers, but they're devouring it across government right now. And it's it's everybody from little mom and pop shops that are adopting it to those big systems integrators that are serving their federal customers. And so we try to make it easy on everybody. So whether you're training five people, or you're training 105 people we are, we're able to scale and help them to do it in a secure way. And because they have all the tools they need, right there and can bring the people in quickly,

that that helps them to get to where they need to go. I for us, right now, it's hair on fire, meeting all those customer needs, and we're really enjoying it. But the meaning behind the mission part, going back to what you mentioned before I spent, you know, to over two decades, having to manage ops centers at times and manage my j two section, my J five section with planners and, and my ops centers where it all came together. And if I would have had a tool like this certainly would have made my life easier. And those those people, great people that work for me, so I'm happy when we get to engage the customers and through our partners, especially who really care about what they're doing with those customers.

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And you got great partners as well. Well, unfortunately, Norm we're running out of time. I'd like to thank our guests, Norm Lazzarini. He's vice president for partnerships at landscape This is John Gilroy here and the next 30 minutes you will learn the connection between a furniture company and situational awareness at the Pentagon. Hit the music Mani