



EPISODE 4: ACCELERATING INNOVATION

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Pre-Roll

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Tim Irvine

Given the scale and complexity of many government agencies, the unifying purpose and silo span and collaboration is the foundation required to fulfill their missions, but getting stakeholders and subject matter experts in the same room to rally around opportunities and to create that desirable future is no easy peep

Stephanie Wander

That's right, Tim, this is especially true for the state department's bureau of overseas buildings, operations, which is charged with connecting stakeholder and experts via secure resilient facilities that support the state department's objectives abroad. And during the pandemic, when experts were confined to their homes and travel was restricted, that challenge only became more urgent and complex.

Tim Irvine

The state departments that would be O tech accelerator program was tasked with bridging that gap. And they did just that making the world just a little bit smaller by piloting mixed reality headsets that allowed their experts to provide remote assistance, onsite workers, be alive, point of view, video calls, but what did it take to get this innovative technology up and running and what is its future at the state department?

Stephanie Wander

That's what we're here to discuss today on the federal innovator, a podcast for, and about the innovators taking on the biggest challenges in the federal government and making change that is more human, simple and enduring. I'm your co-host Stephanie wander, deputy director and senior fellow at the limit council geo-tech center.

Tim Irvine

I'm Tim Mervin, managing director and lead at Accenture federal studio. Joining us to discuss these issues and more are Danilo Stapula chief information officer overseas, building operations for the state department and Erica, how may technology accelerator program manager at the state department. Thank you both for joining us today.

Erica Jaume

No problem. Thanks for having us



Tim Irvine

First question, I'll go to you, Dan, how do you fit within the department of state? Tell us a little bit more about your mission and purpose

Dan Stapula

And the chief information officer for the overseas buildings, operations bureau. We fit within the department of state under the under secretary for management in our commission is we are the real property manager for the 278 posts, their residences, their buildings overseas. So our mission is overseas focused. It's with all the ambassadors, the missions, the posts in the countries that we serve. We both do all the real estate and leasing transactions and then manage all of that as well as providing the government oversight to design engineering and construction projects worldwide. So as you can imagine, during the pandemic, this affected our mission in a lot of different ways, but the monitoring projects, having to stop projects in different countries around the world, the real estate portfolio, being intimately working with the facility managers and their real estate officers, real property officers at embassies worldwide, the post overseas has all the same challenges that we have here.

Dan Stapula

Domestically. We have classified and unclassified work in spaces where it's appropriate to have a regular air conditioner and places where you need a secure building equipment, which must be dealt with, with secure systems that requires sometimes we have maintenance work that can only be done by Americans. In a lot of cases, we send those folks traveling on a very regular basis. So I think as Erica had mentioned, when we were speaking earlier, folks travel a lot from OBO because there are certain parts of the facility management function and the construction management function, they require a personal presence.

Stephanie Wander

What is the tap program and how does it work?

Erica Jaume

Technology accelerator program is a program that's in place to work with the business to identify the business needs a newer technology that's coming out, either to market is already out that the business wants to use in order to make their lives a little bit easier for building management, construction management, overall technology capabilities, anything that may not be available necessarily in the federal space as is with something that we can get to the standard norm people think about is I'm going to go to work. I have a PC I work with have monitors and mouths and a phone. Well, what's next? What can we bring to help you guys do your job more efficiently?

We're also looking to save a lot more money by bringing technology to the department and then to our bureau through these analysis, I think you had asked about the program structure, how we kind of move about to support the business we're in the process of identifying our intake.

Erica Jaume

So we're receiving a lot of requests from different angles. One from the business, two from the department three from industry saying here's the coolest new thing. And then also for, from our resources that have heard about great new opportunities within private industry and are bringing them to say, I heard about this use case from so-and-so within the business, this would meet their needs or could meet their needs. I'd love to be able to explore it. A lot of our facilities overlap with other agencies. So it's, you don't want to just bring the shiny new toy into a facility that has top secret or highly classified information in it because you don't necessarily know how it's going to work ahead of time. So we work with other bureaus to do that assessment take and tear apart the actual technology, and then work with the actual posts to help bring the technology.



Erica Jaume

And at post they have different intelligence working groups, so they can run some of this technology through the other agencies and say, okay, well this would benefit our mission by bringing this in, they help us justify. And then if we can test it there, then we're able to test. But sometimes those are the challenges we had, but we pilot do lessons learned, identifying any business challenges we might meet, whether it's through use of the technology, through where the information is, extending the federal data, and then determine if we need to build out a different kind of service or identify different kinds of technology that would support the business need. Then again, sometimes we do have to pivot find a new technology and start from scratch, but that's all part of the R and D process.

Tim Irvine

That makes sense. And actually one thing that hadn't occurred to me, but based on when you're talking about the business, kind of making the decision on the scaling, do you ever package content for them to make it easier for maybe the business is socialized to other places? Because I think one of the big challenges to build momentum and interest is about the ability to have portable content. That's easily socialized. That gets with a good story to say, Hey, this happened in Paris or London or Istanbul. Maybe other people would see it and then cover maybe an opportunity to pilot as well. Is that all on the business? Or do you get into that? You're

Erica Jaume

Absolutely correct. I would say about 20 to 25% of the role is marketing. It's marketing the capabilities, highlighting the interest, identifying the business use case the success, the challenges we've had the hurdles, but it comes down to creating one pagers dashboards displays that do draw attention from the business and from others hosting, we hosted two deep dives on some of our technology back in December and focus the technology around

more of a winter themed holiday themed capability. So with the HoloLens, we did one of our team members, baked brownies and disagreeing the use case to everyone in the bureau and then also across the department. So we highlighted the capabilities in a silly way, but it certainly built morale and people took time out of their lunch hour to actually join us.

Stephanie Wander

I'm curious, what challenges do you face when engaging in tech innovation? Are there budgetary considerations? Is it all about risk mitigation? Is it just the approvals? Are there other things you might not think of that are challenges that you have to deal with? Yeah.

Dan Stapula

All of the above, we're lucky that we've got a lot of support to go out and pursue innovative approaches and solutions. If we need to buy a drone, we can buy a drone to test it out, but to go further than that, once you've fleshed out, the idea is that all those same budgetary concerns come into the picture. So it all depends on what you can bring to the table and what the payback is, both for the mission and dollar wise. So we've gone after some fairly straightforward use cases where the payback for being to do a, to keep million dollar billion dollar projects going when they can't proceed further, without certain inspections from a payback point of view, that's a no-brainer, but not everything is that clean cut. And then if you have obstacles, those start adding up as far as being able to mitigate them.

Dan Stapula

But yeah, we have the same in our case. As soon as Erica mentioned super supportive leadership, they want us to investigate these things. So the willingness to spend on some basic R and D applied R and D for us, is there, there's a huge amount of support. Not everybody has that, but we do have that fortunate, but then taking it to the next level, actually applying it on more than one project goes through the same challenges. And we



follow the same kind of prioritization of funds and budgeting requirements that the rest of the organization does. When did it take a step back out a little bit, just relative to the Apollo lens program. I'm curious, are there, because it felt like that was really about closing gaps, closing a real or perceived distance between say headquarters and some of the sprawling state department facilities. Are there other things that, as you looked at a technology that enabled you to do that kind of close, maybe a gap in time or a gap in distance, are there other high or low tech ways that you've thought about closing that gap?

Dan Stapula

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Erica, you could probably elaborate on this. I'll just bring up the basic iPhones that people have. Government issued. We had many folks doing the low, it's not low tech, but the FaceTime approach to using your iPhone to provide visibility into like the status of a project or the status of a particular piece of equipment, you can use your iPhone and do the equivalent of FaceTime. I don't really know if it was FaceTime per se and that's similar, but not as elaborate as what you can do with the hollow lens, same thing with iPads. So yeah, there's more than one way to skin. The cat is just, you want to get to the point where, oh, I also want to be able to pull up the manual at the same time and visualize stuff at the same time. So there were the requirements drive wanting a little bit more elaborate solution, but there certainly are bloated, you know, and people get on the phone with each other and walk their way through certain maintenance procedures. So without the visual, Erica, you might have more examples, but those are the ones that jumped to mind.

Erica Jaume

I find it funny when people ask, well, why invest in a \$3,500 product when you have an iPhone and you can talk over FaceTime the difference. And this is specific to HoloLens. The difference is the way our technicians work or our field engineers work. They require their hands or their extremities to do something. So walking through doors, tripping over furniture, doing actual

physical inspections, to turn a wrench on some kind of mechanical resource and following guidance that they need either printed out or right next to them, as they're doing the work, the runner up to that, from what we've been proposed, if things hadn't worked out for you. So the Holland would be to stick an iPhone on your head and walk around in our experience. We did not think that that would work too well. She's mad. That is too low.

Tim Irvine

Yeah. I can see that maybe doing that in a long line at Disneyland, but the less so fixing the mechanical issue in a foreign embassy, that's pretty great. And I think the great thing about that is just the understanding, the nuance of the context. What do you need your hand and extremities for? I'm imagining people propping up a phone, holding a phone, propping up a manual, wiping grease off the lens and then fumbling and dropping a step down the elevator shaft. It's like that context is so critical.

Erica Jaume

Exactly. Exactly. So the introduction of the technology is just initially for remote interactions, but layer on top of that additional applications that we're working to get approved within the department. And you have the capability to see virtual reality applications for how your mechanical rooms should look the design of it, the HVAC system, if something's broken and it's not aligning properly like a gear or something, you'll notice off the bat because the virtual reality display will overlay on top of the actual reality image. And so you'll see that the gear in VR is in one spot, but it's located somewhere else in another spot. So it's off the rails or something. And those are training techniques. Those are helpful applications that would be able to get us where we're going. And I think you guys had alluded to it earlier. One of the things that we've been so resourceful from working through getting the Hollins adopted within the department of state is that there has been a lot of support at the department level from an enterprise deployment because it doesn't just take one bureau.



Erica Jaume

We have to work towards collaborating with different organizations to bring these tools and technologies in place. There's a cybersecurity team that does a full scope analysis, our capabilities, how this technology works, how it's intended to work, how it should work, what happens if a user loses the device, there's a remote management team that can wipe the device like the configurations and aligns it to the department cloud. So it really takes a village to bring this entire technology together. So we've been very, very lucky to one have a business need and drive that business need alongside the actual stakeholders that have made this all possible to adopt within a larger enterprise schematic.

Tim Irvine

That's awesome. And thank you also for the enduring image of somebody with a phone taped to their forehead. Cause that's kinda what I'm

Erica Jaume

No, that's right. That is right. Yeah, absolutely.

Tim Irvine

We're super, super grateful for your time. Thank you so much. Wow. That was really remarkable. And I think from my perspective, wholly unexpected, as far as the span of responsibilities across the department of state, I did not expect to be talking about our culture and the potential movement of a building as a result of an earthquake and using sensors to evaluate it. How did that strike you, Stephanie? What stood out to you?

Stephanie Wander

Yeah, likewise, I think I was just like, you really struck by the breadth of their work and the challenges that they face. It always amazes me when we start to talk about spaces that we're really talking about people and culture and how formative those things are as a backdrop to what

people experience. And it seems like they really have a role as cultural ambassadors, as well as thinking about all of the security and sort of operational tactical implications and from a design challenge, that's just really extraordinary.

Tim Irvine

Could not agree more. I think the one thing, knowing that they set the lab up around the beginning of the pandemic, so they've obviously got a charter or they got a mission, whether they had clear cut backlog set up of all the different ideas they want to truck clearly that needed to be rethought and was fundamentally, potentially shaken by the pandemic and the move to remote and then the impact on their customers and on their constituents. I think one thing that really stood out was this notion of resilience as a very important and a mandatory part of what they're doing. Secondly, we've all needed to live it on a daily basis, as well as in our work, but on the theme of resilience, what are your thoughts? There was there surprises there.

Stephanie Wander

It really wasn't so much surprising, isn't it? Oh, yes. Moment. That resiliency really is becoming increasingly important as a design criteria. I think across all government solutions, I think as we see things like climate change increase, as we see these kinds of pandemics, as we, you know, we're dealing with more and more stakeholders, how our systems are able to respond, how technology enables that or creates vulnerabilities, I think is going to become a more and more important question for us thinking about how does government innovate around these issues. So I really think that resiliency is something we're going to need to get really good at in our design work, in terms of thinking about how our people and systems can respond with alacrity.

Tim Irvine

I think you're right. And I think even just thinking about climate change, knowing that there's many different organizations that their missions



are being affected, if not rewritten by things like climate change. I think the same thing occurs to me too, when we talk about culture and then we talk about climate change. It's just designing for equity broadly, I think is another thing. Well, we didn't discuss it specifically in this discussion with Dan and Eric. I do think that is a lot of agencies really are needing to fundamentally rethink a focus and these things that felt like maybe they're on the sideline or there were a special provenance of a different group, or I think are increasingly becoming it's part of the mission and this part of the strategy. And that's part of the practice that needs to be cultivated. It's not a side project that is the project. Sorry. I think that's a healthy reminder.

Stephanie Wander

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I think we saw it in some other examples, just how equity isn't really a one size fits all solution that we have to think uniquely about the spaces and cultures that we're serving. And how do we really think about unique solutions that fit the needs of particular groups and environments. And if we don't think about customizing, we potentially lose sight of really important opportunities to make traction in terms of that.

Tim Irvine

Yeah. And thinking about that customizing stuff, I thought the one enduring image I have from the discussion was as Erica was talking about the HoloLens and its use and department of state where they're working in a one handed or a no hand and environment and talking about, well, as they're making a case for this, from a pilot perspective, it's like, well, do you really need all the lens? Or does it need to be a \$3,500 solution? Are we talking about tape and an iPhone and FaceTime? So I've got this image of somebody with a phone taped to their forehead, trying to manipulate a panel in an elevator. But I think there was a definite pragmatism and Eric has discussion of how they take things off the backlog, how they work in kind of an MVP model and then just test things out and don't try to go for scale, go for value and efficacy and then let

the business decide and be a part of it. But the business needs to react to that successful pilot and say, is this something that we can and should be building on at scale?

Stephanie Wander

Yeah. Like you, I found it so striking how pragmatic they were about these decisions and how they think so carefully about how their customers and constituents are affected. What do you think it takes to create that kind of culture amongst a team to really be able to create an environment where you have that grassroots momentum in terms of innovation?

Tim Irvine

It's a number of things. I think one thing that stood out from that conversation, and it's just a healthy reminder that it's not about having a brilliant idea and then everything else falls in line it's about how do you have that idea? How do you demonstrate that there are emerging technologies that can support that idea where in some cases I've been emerging, just different technologies, different solutions and services, but it's about socializing them. It was telling that Eric had mentioned that 20 to 25% of their job is marketing. It's the marketing of these things to get people on board, but it hasn't been blessed. And then it just magically takes off, but they do hard work about it. That hard work might mean making brownies. As she talked about the holiday themed open house, where they would demonstrate the technology, somebody in the group made brownies, they get people in there talking about, and it just creates an environment where people, their posture has changed to embrace the possibility. And so you build constituents and you build a support network and you build connections with like-minded people. So you've got this mix of a great idea, but also the force of personality and kind of willing things in their existence by just marketing it, socializing it. And I think that's just, it was really, really pragmatic. And I thought a really cool counterpoint to the shiny newness of the technology is just the people that collaborate and have a common purpose and find each other and support each other.



Stephanie Wander

Yeah. And we talked about this quite as much, but it strikes me that too, the technology can really be that wave that you ride. If the tech is really good and it's seamless and it's fun to use and you engage with it and it just makes sense to you and it clicks about what it means for your business. It makes it a lot easier to say, yes, let's take this project from pilot and actually deploy it. And how do we embed it? Like if it's a great solution and it solves problems in a lot of ways that tech will sell itself.

Tim Irvine

Yeah. Yeah. And actually one thing too, and we've heard this in some of our other sessions and discussions with federal innovators, but just the connection of public and private and like reaching out to the private sector to help, to speed things along. And Stephanie, in many ways, I look to you and your work as somebody who's very used to activating that ecosystem. So I'm curious, are there lessons or things that you heard from Dan and Erica that stood out that feel like other folks in the federal space can and should be thinking about relative to commercial practices or commercial networks?

Stephanie Wander

Yeah. I think finding these inroads for tech companies to have conversations basically for government to discover private sector solutions is really tremendously valuable. So I thought the tap program, the tech accelerator program really was a great example about creating opportunities for people to engage in using those opportunities, not only to go to the back, but then to ultimately find cost-effective solutions, to see where they could drive the business value. I think ultimately your perennial challenge with building relationships with the private sector is the text available. I think they want to work. They want to solve important problems. It's just, how do you make it easier for them to engage, to work with you, to navigate the purchase processes, to understand your buying cycles. So anywhere that you can build bridges or create

test cases where everyone can feel out how it work and what it would be like to work together are enormously valuable. So I think it's this idea that piloting just becomes more and more important to private sector partnerships,

Tim Irvine

That concept of a bridge builder, because public to private, I think that very much isn't aligned philosophically with that approach, that our convention around kind of building bridges to other groups and other like-minded individuals and other people that help to fuel demonstrable progress.

Stephanie Wander

Absolutely. Tim, one of my questions for you is, was just thinking about how do you think about a federal innovators and helping them identify when it's really time to take something from the prototyping stage, I think, or called it the tip of the sphere and really time to say let's scale it, let's take it to business value. How do you know when you got enough value that it's time to take something out of the experimental phase?

Tim Irvine

I think there are always going to be cycles of maturity. And I think the one thing that's been consistent with everybody we've been talking to around innovation in the federal space, is there a commitment to a test and learn mentality, a commitment to lean practices that allow you to increase your speed to confidence and your speed to value. And so if you're starting with eight people or so, or maybe you're starting with as Dr. Vega called empathetic interviews. So are you starting to reach out to groups of individuals in a qualitative form and then you slowly move from insights to prototypes to pilots. I think there's a maturation across those. As you increase scale, it's not zero to 60 or psych all that. Let's go from a to Z as quickly as possible Z being massive scaled, a rollout it's a to C and then DD. And it's like, you've got to maybe pace yourself a little bit and have demonstrable value. And you could do a lot of



that with qualitative research, getting feedback, and then just rolling out. And that doesn't have to take a long time. It's not about coding initially. It's about testing and this prototypes, they might involve zero code whatsoever. You can learn a lot from getting a paper prototype or a scenario presented four or five people as you can, in some cases for 30,000 people. That's super helpful, Tim. Thank you.

Stephanie Wander

Thank you for listening in to this episode of the federal innovator. Please stay tuned for more episodes. As we explore innovation across the federal landscape.

Post-Roll

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