

SNAPSHOTS

in FEDERAL IT MODERNIZATION

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From the editor's desk



Sarah Sybert, Managing Editor

Rethinking Federal IT Modernization

Officials across the War Department are rethinking how technology is evaluated, acquired, authorized and scaled to meet mission demands that evolve faster than traditional processes allow.

The challenge lies in government's ability to move promising capabilities from pilot to operational use at speed, without sacrificing security, governance or accountability.

The Department of the Navy's Innovation Adoption Kit and the Marine Corps Community Services' Operation StormBreaker demonstrate

how some of the services are addressing this challenge.

These stories illustrate a broader shift toward outcome-driven modernization that account for calls in speed and efficiency. This includes new frameworks for managing technology lifecycles, divesting legacy systems, reimagining continuous authorization and software delivery through DevSecOps. Many of these efforts are not unique to DOW.

As agencies face growing pressure to deliver secure, resilient and mission-ready digital capabilities, these models offer practical lessons for modernizing IT at scale. 🌸

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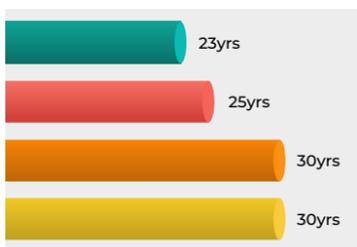


ARTICLE

Navy Unveils Innovation Adoption Kit to Fast-Track Commercial Tech

Investment horizons and outcome-driven metrics shift focus from sustainment to rapid iteration, aligning modernization with Hegseth's call for speed-to-capability.

BY ROSS GIANFORTUNE



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Navy Unveils Innovation Adoption Kit to Fast-Track Commercial Tech

Investment horizons and outcome-driven metrics shift focus from sustainment to rapid iteration, aligning modernization with Hegseth’s call for speed-to-capability.

BY ROSS GIANFORTUNE

The Department of the Navy’s Innovation Adoption Kit (IAK) positions the department’s evolution to focus on evaluation, implementation and scaling cutting-edge commercial technologies across the enterprise.

“May we all take the opportunity that this era and moment present to be the best partners with private sector we’ve ever been to deliver faster and better for our warriors,” innovation kit author and DON CTO Justin Fanelli said on LinkedIn.

Introduced in an October memo, the kit serves as a “systematic framework for technology integration,” providing commanders and program managers with the practical tools necessary to bridge the perennial gap between rapidly emerging innovations and mission-ready naval capabilities. The document serves as a tactical manual for overcoming the bureaucratic hurdles that frequently stall military modernization, often referred to as the “Valley of Death.”

“Information superiority requires rapid innovation and iteration in a coordinated, enterprise-wide effort transcending traditional silos,” the document reads. “Iteration is the catalyst behind rapid innovation that delivers high-impact solutions to our warfighters.”

The kit aims to provide a unified methodology to overcome recurring



bureaucratic barriers, such as siloed decision-making, rigid acquisition pathways and limited mechanisms for scaling successful pilot programs, supporting War Secretary Pete Hegseth’s recent call for quicker innovation to support the warfighter.

“We must transform the way department works and what it works on,”



**Michael
Frank**

**Deputy CTO,
Department of the Navy**

Hegseth said in November.”. “We must build a department where each of the dedicated people here, especially the true entrepreneurs and innovators from our industrial base, can apply their immense talents to defend America where they have the resources, access, information and freedom to perform.”

‘Outcomes Over Obstacles’

The kit is built on a philosophy termed “outcomes over obstacles,” which prioritizes speed and warfighter needs over traditional, rigid processes. The document argues that while the War Department has historically prioritized “sustainment and gradual evolution,” today’s mission demands “faster, more flexible adoption” of tech.

“Government stakeholders across the DOW face recurring barriers: siloed decision-making, waterfall budgeting, rigid acquisition pathways and limited mechanisms for piloting or scaling promising solutions,” the document reads. “The Innovation Adoption Kit exists to help government stakeholders — program managers, requirement owners, contracting officers and technical leads — bridge that gap.”

A New Framework for Technology Lifecycle

Central to the kit is the introduction of investment horizons, a framework to visualize and manage the lifecycle of technologies. This model categorizes investments into four distinct stages:

- **Horizon 3 (Evaluating):** Focused on tech scouting and pilot programs using “other people’s money and work.”
- **Horizon 2 (Emerging):** For pilots that are scaling into next-generation products.
- **Horizon 1 (Scaled Production):** Technologies that are fully deployed and designated as enterprise services. (ctd.)

“Leveraging the structured piloting approach with outcome-driven metrics will enable PMs to more effectively build a pipeline of technology that will spur competition and drive efficiency across the portfolio.”

— Michael Frank, Deputy CTO, Department of the Navy

- **Horizon 0 (Retiring):** The critical phase of decommissioning obsolete systems to free up resources.

This framework is paired with structured divestments, as the kit calls for the department to “cattle drive the obsolete.” This includes the divestment of unneeded and unproductive IT systems and applications to eliminate redundant or obsolete applications, ensuring money is redirected toward modernization.

“To achieve widespread adoption and deliver a cutting-edge marketplace of scalable, reusable resources, we must prioritize needs and synchronize efforts to remove irrelevant technologies,” the document reads.

Deputy CTO Michael Frank told GovCIO Media & Research that the kit outlines ways that the Navy can move faster while still maintaining compliance with existing acquisition and budgeting constraints.

“Leveraging the structured piloting approach with outcome-driven

metrics will enable PMs to more effectively build a pipeline of technology that will spur competition and drive efficiency across the portfolio,” Frank said in an interview. “Additionally, the existing acquisition and budgeting constraints are being modified with the changes in the warfighting acquisition system. As a result, there will be additional opportunity to lean into the top 10 behaviors and drive meaningful change.”

Innovation Kit Factor in Navy Recognition

The Department of the Navy won the 2025 Forrester Technology Strategy Impact Award for North America for its modernization push — of which the kit is a major part. Fanelli told GovCIO Media & Research that the award is the first time a government agency won the award, beating out private industry giant Verizon.

“The Department of Navy achieved strategic alignment by shifting from compliance-driven IT to mission-focused outcomes, anchoring every initiative

to top-level capability needs instead of legacy requirements,” Forrester wrote in its announcement. The kit “reduced delivery cycles from months to weeks, while its generative AI assistant, DON GPT, scaled across departments and increased productivity.”

By anchoring initiatives to the top-level requirements outlined in the kit, the Navy successfully deployed Flank Speed, the first secure cloud environment in the DOW to achieve full zero trust compliance. Additionally, the service’s focus on outcomes over obstacles enabled the rapid scaling of DON GPT, a generative AI assistant that has delivered productivity gains of 20 to 30% across the workforce.

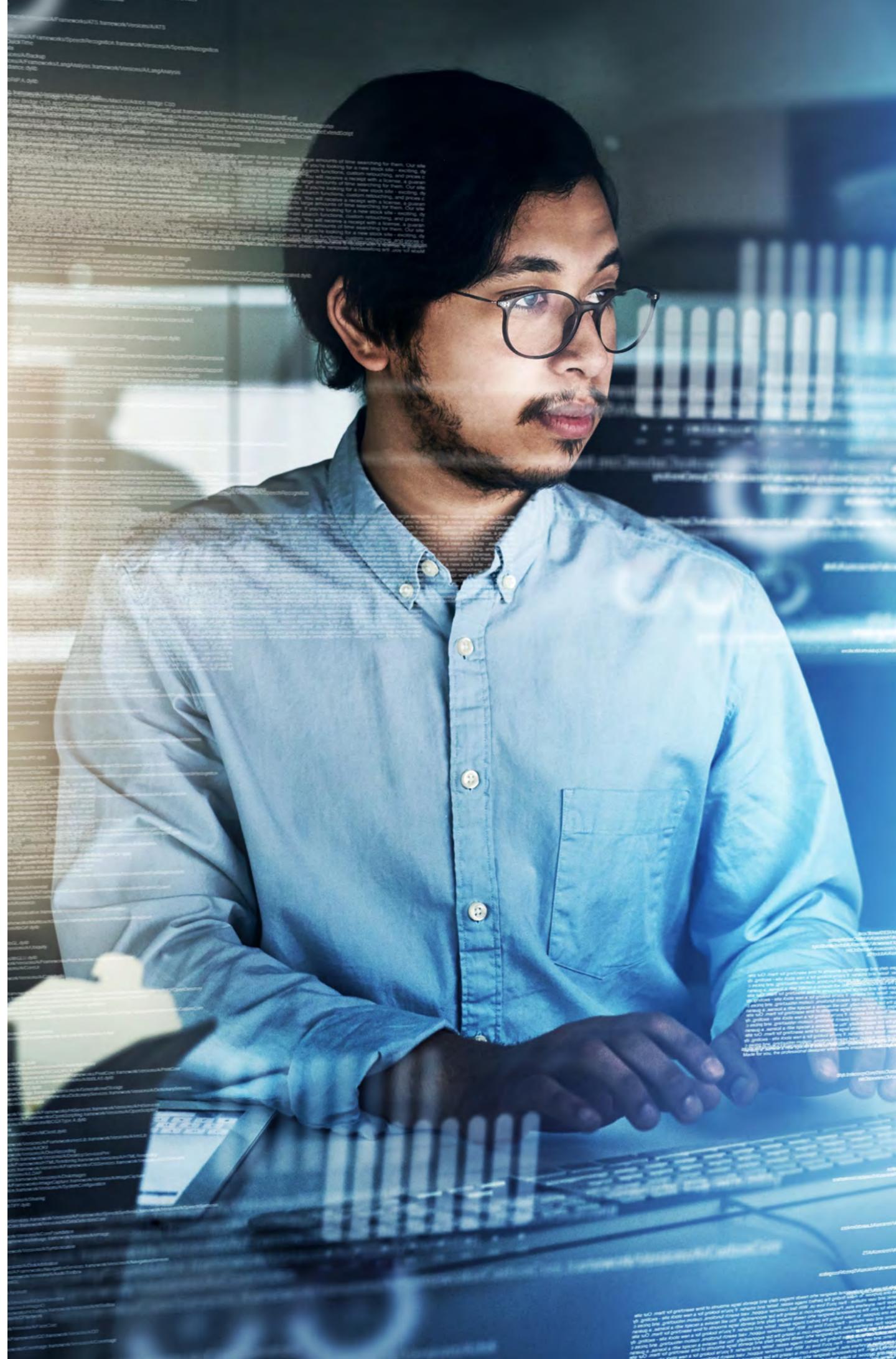
Accelerating Delivery with Modern Standards

The kit addresses the technical side of adoption through modern service delivery requirements, including scaling shared services.

“The Department of the Navy is implementing shared information technology services as a fundamental shift in how the organization designs, consumes and delivers services to support mission objectives and the DON Information Superiority Vision,” the document reads.

The DON is mandating that digital services be “composable by default,” cloud-native and zero trust compliant, and the kit calls for top-level requirements to bypass the years-long delays associated with traditional requirements writing.

“The release of the IAK comes amidst significant changes to the DOW and DON acquisition landscape, including changes to the authorities and processes that will alleviate many of those tradition barriers,” Frank said. “However, by itself, the IAK can still help PMs and COs by providing common frameworks and methodologies to scout, assess, pilot, transition and divest capabilities. It also includes a set of outcome driven metrics that can be used to measure performance on a standard scale.” (ctd.)





Measuring Success Through Mission Outcomes

The Navy is implementing metrics that focus on tangible mission outcomes, such as “user time lost,” “operational resiliency” and “customer satisfaction.” This marks a shift to risk acceptance, granting teams the “freedom to iterate for the good of the warfighter.”

The kit helps workforce readiness and encourages a mindset shift among naval personnel to adopt more agile, flexible approaches to technology integration, Frank told GovCIO Media & Research.

“The biggest challenge has been, and always will be, culture. There are many frameworks in the kit that will help PMs but the most important is the

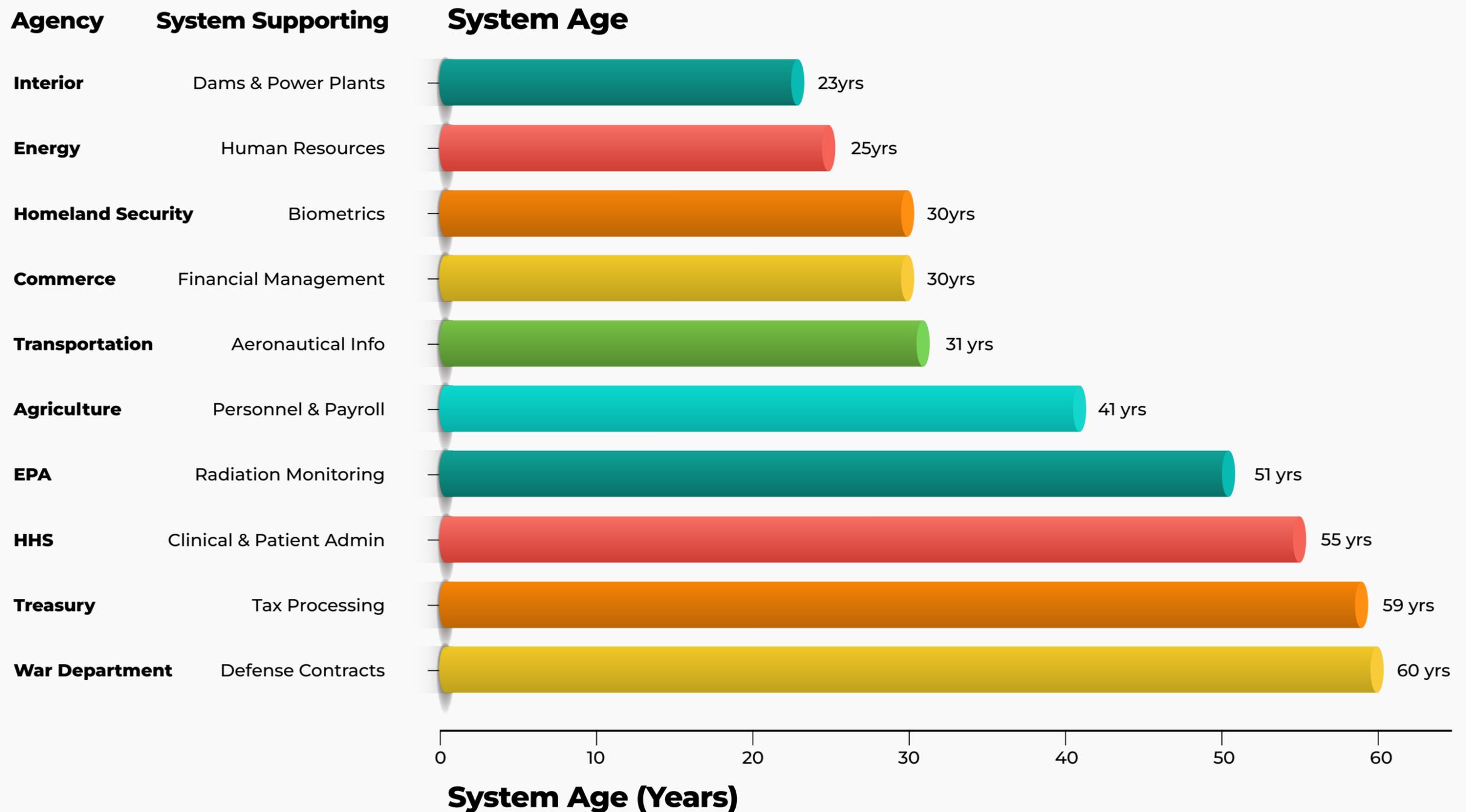
top 10 behaviors,” Frank said. “Spreading these behaviors across the DON acquisition community will be critical to driving a true mindset shift.”

Within the “obstacles over outcomes” framework, the department calls for learning through a different relationship to risk and failure. Evolution requires “bias toward speed,” the document reads, including trying, missing the mark and learning from the experience.

“Failure is a tool, not a permanent mark. Success is not the only criteria for recognition. All attempts to achieve information advantage are celebrated when focused on outcomes,” the document says. 🌟

Top Federal Systems in Need of Modernization

GAO report identifies several mission-critical federal systems still running on decades-old technology.





Breaking the Legacy Systems Paradox in Federal IT

Observability platforms and automation are essential to secure, modernize and measure mission impact.

 **What non-technical barriers most hinder federal IT modernization, and how do these constraints impact agencies?**

Chamberlain The most significant non-technical hurdle is the legacy systems paradox. It's often easier for agencies to secure funding to maintain existing systems than to justify the high upfront costs of modernization. This creates a massive attack surface that agencies struggle to secure. Beyond budget, procurement and authorization bottlenecks mean that by the time technology is deployed, it's often already obsolete.

Organizational culture also plays a massive role. Leadership may delay major decisions to avoid leaving complex transitions for their successors, which can kill forward momentum. Furthermore, rigid "cloud-only" policies often ignore the reality that some mission-critical systems simply cannot move to the cloud immediately.

These constraints amplify technical challenges by forcing agencies to operate in silos. Without a comprehensive observability platform to act as a "nervous system," agencies lack the feedback loop needed to know if they are prioritizing the right fixes. Observability



Brian Chamberlain
Navy and Marine Corps
Account Executive,
Solarwinds

bridges this gap by providing a “single pane of glass” that monitors both legacy and modern environments, ensuring that modernization is a phased, manageable transition rather than a blind leap.

 **How should agencies prioritize AI and automation investments to climb the hierarchy, and what role does observability play in enabling each layer?**

Chamberlain Agencies must prioritize security and compliance as the foundation before they can scale to efficiency or cost reduction. We’re currently in an “AI arms race.” Because threat actors are already leveraging AI to evolve their attacks, agencies cannot afford to remain stuck in manual processes.

To climb this hierarchy, agencies should focus on zero trust. Observability

acts as the intelligence-gathering tool to ensure the zero-trust architecture is effective and meets the 2027 mandates.

Agencies should also implement continuous monitoring. Instead of waiting a year for an authority to operate, AI-driven observability allows for “comply-to-connect” environments where software is assessed and incorporated automatically.

Observability is the essential enabler across these layers because it breaks down silos. It provides full-stack analytics that look at dependencies across the entire infrastructure: software, transport and hardware. By using AI-powered anomaly detection and predictive analytics, agencies can move from monitoring to observing, which significantly reduces the mean time to recovery.

(ctd.)

“Agencies must prioritize security and compliance as the foundation before they can scale to efficiency or cost reduction.”

— Brian Chamberlain, Navy and Marine Corps Account Executive, SolarWinds



 **How should agencies measure the value of observability and automation investments, and how can these platforms serve as measurement tools for other IT projects?**

Chamberlain In an era of efficiency mandates, agencies must move toward outcome-based measurement. You can't measure what you can't see. Therefore, real-time visibility is the primary prerequisite for proving value. Agencies should measure success through operational metrics such as system uptime, processing speed and service delivery time.

Observability platforms serve as the ultimate measurement tool for other IT investments by validating modernization effectiveness. They provide a feedback loop to confirm whether a new system is performing better than the legacy one

it replaced.

Observability platforms also simplify optimizing resource allocation. They identify software licensing waste, ensuring an agency isn't paying for more seats than it has employees.

By automating routine checks that currently require human intervention, agencies can demonstrate value through significant reductions in cybersecurity manpower costs and reduce the impact of previous employee reductions.

Ultimately, observability acts like a common operating picture in a battle space. It allows leaders to visualize the entire IT landscape, understand their area of influence and ensure that every dollar spent is improving the mission-readiness of the organization. 

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and machine learning**



**Trusted solutions for networks,
systems, applications, databases,
service management, and IT security**

Marine Corps Operation StormBreaker Slashes Software Delivery Timelines by 17x

New program aims to deliver critical digital capabilities to warfighters at the “speed of relevance” by overhauling traditional processes. and evolving threats, says top cyber official.

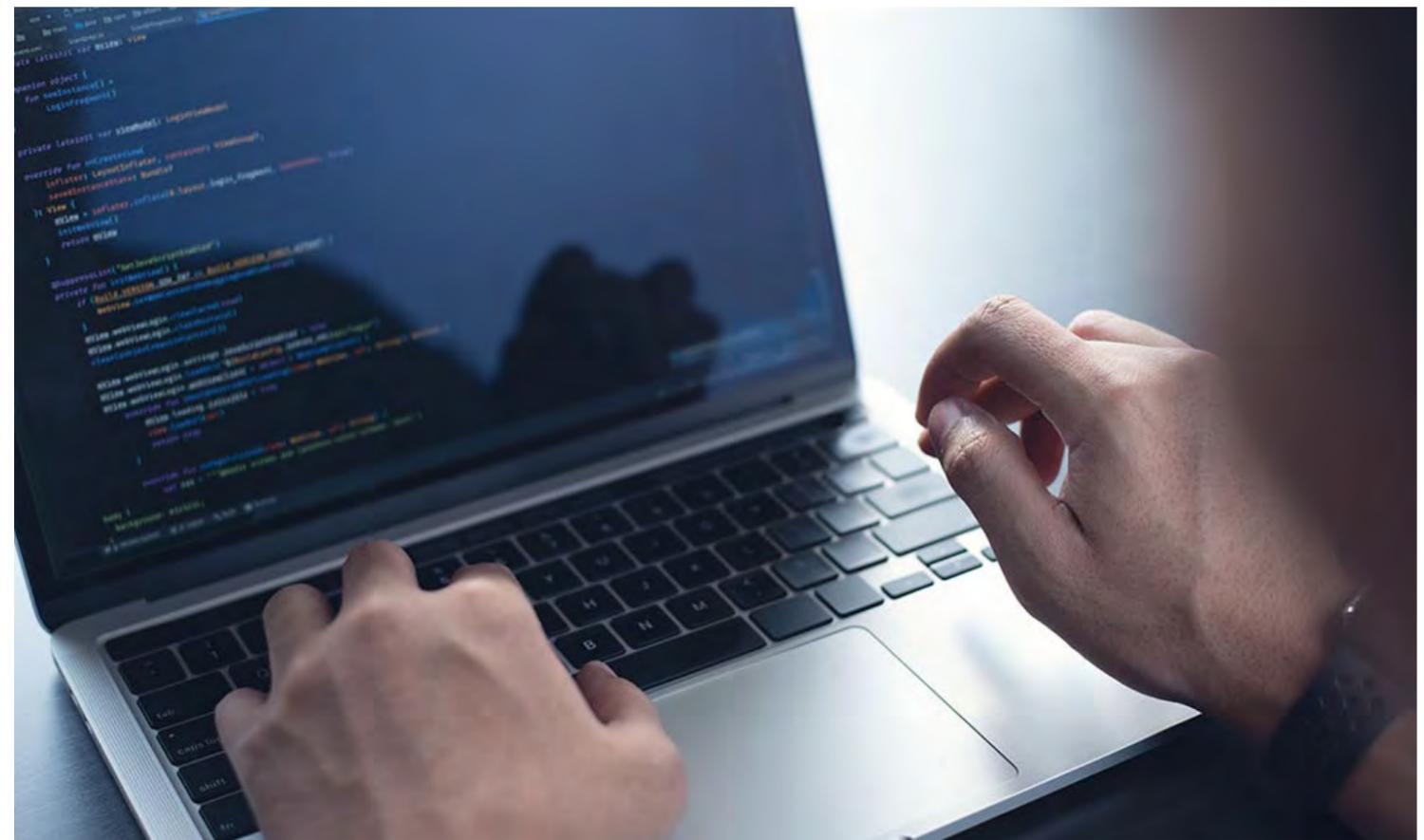
BY ROSS GIANFORTUNE

The Marine Corps Community Services’ Operation StormBreaker uses technology to dramatically accelerate software acquisition and deployment while enhancing cybersecurity. The program directly tackles the challenges of slow development cycles and burdensome authorization processes, according to MCCS Chief Digital Business Officer David Raley, aiming to deliver critical capabilities to warfighters at the “speed of relevance.”

“Authorization was a key bottleneck, so it takes forever to acquire something and develop it and integrate and deliver it,” Raley said in an interview with GovCIO Media & Research. “And what’s unique about what Operation StormBreaker is that it’s taking a holistic end-to-end approach of that capability.”

Tackling the Bottlenecks in Defense Tech Delivery

The War Department faces challenges in rapidly acquiring and deploying modern digital capabilities, hampered by lengthy waterfall development cycles, bureaucratic acquisition processes and cumbersome legacy compliance practices like the authorization to operate (ATO), according to Raley. He explained that the impetus for Stormbreaker stemmed from his own frustrations



in fielding necessary digital capabilities.

“I was unable to achieve the outcomes we needed because we couldn’t get capability acquired and fielded to modernize our digital capabilities,” he stated. “Specifically, we had to, replatform all of our websites from across the enterprise and bring them in together into one unified branding thing and other many other digital things that we started to do to serve our customers.” (ctd.)



Dave Raley
Chief Digital Business Officer,
Marine Corps Community Services

This sentiment, he said, was widely shared across the DOW, echoing the issues being tackled by programs like the Software Fast Track (SWFT) program initiative and the reformation of the Risk Management Framework (RMF).

“I was faced by the same problems that the rest of our many other mission owners in the [DOW] are faced: waterfall development and acquisition practice, processes and approaches, as well as legacy compliance practices,” said Raley. “It takes forever to acquire something and develop it and integrate and deliver it, and then you bolt on the 12 to 18 months after for an authorization. You now start looking at four to five year acquisition and deployment timelines, plus 10 years of support and sustainment, because you don’t want to go do it all again.”

Inside the StormBreaker Model

Raley said Operation Stormbreaker addresses these challenges by using three core capabilities built to accelerate the entire lifecycle of software deployment. The first is an authorized landing zone on Amazon Web Services (AWS), boasting FedRAMP High Security Controls Assessment (SCA) compliance, a cloud-native access point and advanced zero-trust architecture. This secure foundation is authorized by the Marine Corps and managed by the Marine Corps Cyber Operations Group.

Operation Stormbreaker also integrates the Marine Corps’ only certified DevSecOps pipeline, leveraging the Navy certification Rapid Assess and Incorporate Software Engineering (RAISE). The third core capability is the integration of the RAISE-certified Marine Corps Software Factory within this authorized landing zone.

“That allows us to take containerized workloads and push them through the [Continuous Integration and Continuous Delivery] pipeline and deploy them into production with a continuous authorization in 15 minutes,” said Raley. “The authorizing official, through that RAISE certification process, authorizes our internal cyber team to release workloads into production without going through

the [authorizing official's] office.”

By applying DevSecOps, lean and agile methodologies to the traditional paper-based ATO process, the initiative has achieved authorizations within 30 days for workloads residing on their tiered inheritance, common control landing zone, said Raley. He added that this development delivers capabilities to the warfighter approximately 17 times faster and, thus, more relevant to mission owners.

“The longer you take to get authorization, most likely, the less secure whatever that application is. And you’ve missed the mission outcome,” said

Raley. “These cycles of technology evolution are not supporting 18 months just for authorization.”

Scaling Impact Across the War Department

Operation Stormbreaker aims to scale its impact across DOW. The program has submitted to become a Department of Navy enterprise service, leveraging the unique authorities of its non-appropriated fund organization within the Marine Corps, which allows it to resell services to other government agencies. (ctd.)

“These cycles of technology evolution are not supporting 18 months just for authorization.”

**—Dave Raley, Chief Digital Business Officer,
Marine Corps Community Services**

“We have our own acquisition authority, and we are not subject to the normal appropriate fund destination funding,” said Raley. “We’re interested in scaling the environment to support mission owner workloads across the [DOW] who could benefit from collapsing delivery times and achieving those continuous authorizations for workloads or the 30-day authorizations for traditional workloads.”

Operation StormBreaker aligns with DOW’s software modernization goals, Raley said, by encouraging the use of marketplaces for utility software and sprint-based contracting models to improve accountability and responsiveness. Democratizing access to such platforms could significantly accelerate innovation and operational effectiveness across all branches of the military, Raley said.

“We should not be spending six, eight or 10 months writing work statements on products that we just know we need to purchase,” Raley said.

With DOW emphasizing software modernization, the award-winning Operation StormBreaker could be part of the solution to efficiency, security and efficacy, Raley said.

“And right now we still purchase software – consumption-based software – like we’re purchasing the tank in the 1950s,” said Raley. “That’s got to stop.” ❁

