

Is Your Agency AI Ready?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) algorithms consume and analyze large volumes of data, in real time, regardless of how well the data is governed and curated. It's all about the data. At a time when Federal agencies and contractors are seeking opportunities to leverage the power of AI, I believe it's important to pause and evaluate the AI readiness of the organization. One possible indicator of readiness may be found in how the agency is implementing its Data Strategy. Every Federal agency is a data agency yet it's not clear to me whether that perspective is a shared organizational vision and common strategy. Is your data strategy an aspirational, and visionary document (words) or is it actionable and operationalized into both the mission and the way business gets done across your organization? I pose this question because an effective data strategy implies recognition by the agency that data is a strategic asset and must be managed, governed, and secured throughout its lifecycle. The successful implementation of the strategy is a critical prerequisite for adopting AI capabilities to drive operational efficiencies and effectiveness.

The ink hasn't dried on most data strategies, and now we find ourselves pivoting to the next shiny object of digital transformation. I believe that AI will ultimately improve and transform government operations to deliver trustworthy services. But I also see unresolved and incomplete legacy initiatives that have fragmented the data lifecycle within agencies and created data quality and integrity challenges. These data issues can't be ignored since they are core to establishing the outcome of trustworthy AI.

Organizational silos tend to fragment data governance and trust. For example, the CIO, CDO, Records Officer, and now the newly appointed AI leadership have an organizational (not data) perspective on information (data, records) management. Each leader publishes a vision and strategy for implementing their intended approach for intra and inter agency modernization. These strategies, prepared with an organizational mindset, include IT modernization, data management, records management and now AI. I believe that these organizational strategies further exacerbate the data fragmentation across the organization. The roles of the CIO, CDO, Records Officer and AI executive are different. However, all business units, regardless of their hierarchy, role, or funding resources, should leverage a common denominator of standardized data management.

When an agency functions as a data agency then businesses processes, security, and citizen services are better aligned to create trusted data products and services. A data centric orientation in any agency recognizes the critical need for governance to ensure data quality, accuracy, and integrity. It's all about trustworthy data. Is your Agency AI ready?

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