Global coverage of the business intelligence ecosystem

Reforming Federal Information Technology Management: Quo Vadis, Business Intelligence?

By Dr. Ramon Barquin

President of Barquin International
&
BeyeNETWORK Government Expert

Reforming Federal Information Technology Management: Quo Vadis, Business Intelligence? By

Dr. Ramon Barquin

On December 10, 2010, Vivek Kundra, the U.S. Federal CIO, announced with much fanfare a rather far-reaching plan to whip federal IT into shape. The plan is an interesting document that was given a fair amount of thought by Kundra and the Federal CIO Council. But Washington being Washington, I have learned to not react too quickly to announcements of this type. There have been way too many false starts, impractical proposals, or great frameworks that sputtered out with ineffective execution, lack of oversight or a change in administration.

By the time this column appears, the [25 Point Implementation Plan to Reform Federal Information Technology Management](#) will be almost six months old, and we can at least start to review it with a certain amount of perspective.

As its title indicates, the plan itself consists of 25 points organized into five clusters. It is clearly ambitious, but intended to be achievable. In fact, Kundra insists that before any item was adopted into the plan it had to have been previously implemented successfully in a federal agency. His group reportedly looked at more than $40 billion of failed IT contracts to discern lessons learned and figure out what works. Furthermore, the program was designed to obtain a few early wins to garner support and maintain momentum.

Some of the plan highlights include: termination of underperforming projects, a move to a "cloud first" policy, and undertaking a major consolidation of federal data centers. Let's look at the document in a bit more detail.

As mentioned, the 25 points are organized into two major categories:

- Achieving operational efficiency
- Effectively managing large-scale IT programs

This initial breakdown provides a logical approach to deconstructing the plan since the next grouping is a breakdown into five sets of objectives:

A. Apply "Light Technology" and Shared Solutions
B. Strengthen Program Management
C. Align the Acquisition and Budget Processes with the Technology Cycle
D. Streamline Governance and Improve Accountability
E. Increase Engagement with Industry

To be precise, section C is subdivided into C1 and C2 for acquisition and budget as individual processes. An outline of the plan's actual 25 points is detailed below:

PART I: ACHIEVING OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

A. Apply "Light Technology" and Shared Solutions

1. Complete detailed implementation plans to consolidate at least 800 data centers by 2015
2. Create a government-wide marketplace for data center availability
3. Shift to a "Cloud First" policy
4. Stand-up contract vehicles for secure IaaS solutions
5. Stand-up contract vehicles for commodity services
6. Develop a strategy for shared services

PART II: EFFECTIVELY MANAGING LARGE-SCALE IT PROGRAMS

B. Strengthen Program Management

7. Design a formal IT program management career path
8. Scale IT program management career path government-wide
9. Require integrated program teams
10. Launch a best practices collaboration platform
11. Launch technology fellows program
12. Enable IT program manager mobility across government and industry

C1. Align the Acquisition Process with the Technology Cycle

13. Design and develop a cadre of specialized IT acquisition professionals
14. Identify IT acquisition best practices and adopt government-wide
15. Issue contracting guidance and templates to support modular development
16. Reduce barriers to entry for small innovative technology companies

C2. Align the Budget Process with the Technology Cycle

17. Work with Congress to develop IT budget models that align with modular development
18. Develop supporting materials and guidance for flexible IT budget models
19. Work with Congress to scale flexible IT budget models more broadly
20. Work with Congress to consolidate commodity IT spending under Agency CIO

D. Streamline Governance and Improve Accountability

21. Reform and strengthen Investment Review Boards
22. Redefine role of Agency CIOs and Federal CIO Council
23. Rollout "TechStat" model at bureau-level

E. Increase Engagement with Industry

    24. Launch "myth-busters" education campaign
    25. Launch interactive platform for pre-RFP agency-industry collaboration

It's beyond the scope of this article to go into a rigorous point-by-point review of the entire document. Rather, now that we've already made some comments about the overall plan itself and its highlights and issues, I'll comment on the progress made thus far and point to some of the issues it still faces.

At a recent GSA-sponsored conference in Washington D.C., a panel consisting of several Federal CIOs was moderated by Woody Hall, the retired CIO of the Customs Service. Vivek Kundra was also a participant in the panel, and he mentioned that there had already been $3 billion saved in IT as a result of his plan, but that there was still $17 billion to be cut from projects that he has already identified as targets for elimination, reduction or migration to reach his goal of $20 billion. The most encouraging part of the panel was that there seemed to be a unanimous enthusiasm for the plan and its achievability from CIOs representing a wide spectrum of agencies of various sizes, scopes and missions: the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Interior, the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The issue of federal oversight was one that kept being bandied around. Individual agencies never appreciate too much direction and control from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Kundra spoke of breaking down the plan into manageable 6-month chunks that allow delivery to be tracked point by point. He also spoke of reorganizing the CIO Council to make it more directly responsible for driving the plan.

"Cloud first" is one of the most interesting directions in the plan and there has already been substantial progress. The USDA reported they are "moving email to the cloud at the rate of about 10,000 accounts a month and expect to be finished by year's end." Yet the cloud is not without controversy. There are ample security concerns around the cloud; and even when you are using private clouds, it is clear there are many performance problem areas. Database management in particular has presented a challenge, and experts have been trying hard to tackle these issues, thus far without great success. In fact, Chris Kanaracus recently summarized many other issues confronting "cloud": operating systems and databases, internal IT management and data management, legacy applications, and vertical applications such as securities transaction systems. ("The Trouble with SaaS", *CIO*, 3/1/2011)

The 25 Point Plan is clearly ambitious and well thought out. Vivek Kundra and the CIO Council are to be commended. It has been well received by the agencies; but since each agency has its own mission, characteristics, culture and needs, they will implement and deliver at different speeds and emphasize different aspects. It will be interesting to monitor progress and challenging to manage it.

Most interesting and relevant for business intelligence practitioners is the question of how is progress going to be measured? The Federal CIO has been extremely active in developing

metrics and tools for managing IT spending and portfolios. In effect, OMB's IT Dashboard has been an effective instrument for bringing attention to IT investments agency by agency. Let us see if, how and when Vivek Kundra or the CIO Council expand the IT dashboard or create a new one to track the 25 Point Plan.

About the Author

Dr. Ramon Barquin is the President of Barquin International, a consulting firm, since 1994. He specializes in developing information systems strategies, particularly data warehousing, customer relationship management, business intelligence and knowledge management, for public and private sector enterprises. He has consulted for the U.S. Military, many government agencies and international governments and corporations.

Dr. Barquin is a member of the E-Gov (Electronic Government) Advisory Board, and chair of its knowledge management conference series; member of the Digital Government Institute Advisory Board; and has been the Program Chair for E-Government and Knowledge Management programs at the Brookings Institution. He was also the co-founder and first president of The Data Warehousing Institute, and president of the Computer Ethics Institute. His PhD is from MIT. Dr. Barquin can be reached at rbarquin@barquin.com.