

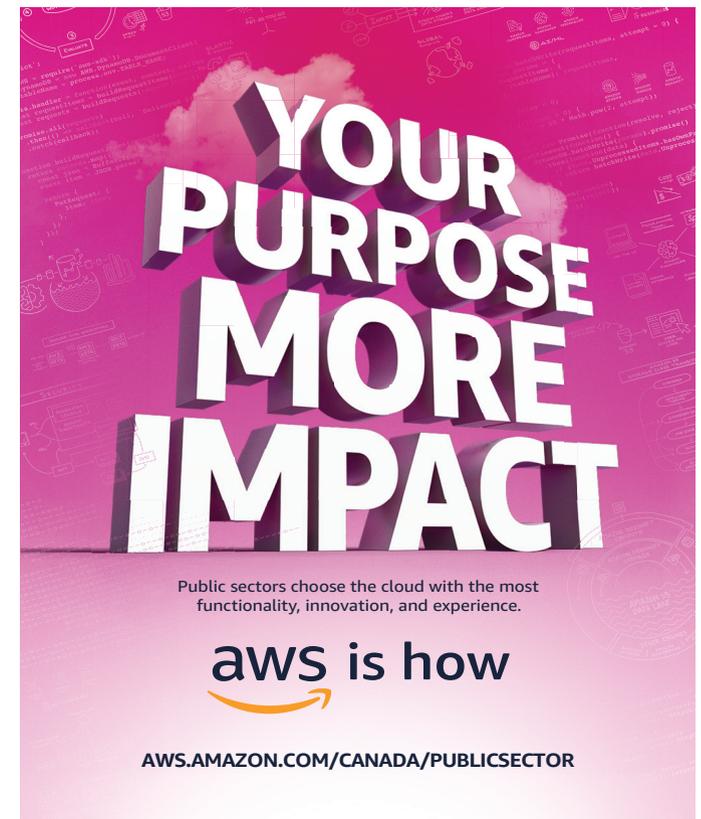
Adopting a culture of resiliency

Government agencies have an obligation to be resilient in the face of an unexpected crisis. There's no ducking it: If a business takes a bit of time to restabilize when a crisis like COVID-19 suddenly causes its revenues to plummet or its workplace to close, we all understand. But the public relies on government to help it through a crisis, to provide the services that businesses and individuals need to help them survive. If people suddenly find themselves unemployed and need to collect unemployment insurance, it's not OK for the computers that provide it to crash, as happened in several US states, even if they are facing an unprecedented number of claims. Governments should provide continuity, stability, reassurance, and appropriate responses.

Whether or not we could have foreseen COVID-19, the important thing is that new crises will come, and many of them will be unexpected. The next crisis might not be a pandemic. We live in a complex, networked, interdependent world, where any change in one place might cause unexpected results elsewhere. Geopolitics, technological developments, health issues, natural disasters—all can suddenly and unexpectedly affect our lives, in a big way.

It might seem impossible to ask government agencies to be prepared for every possible unexpected emergency. And yet we must. And they can. Their only solution—and it is a good one—is to build agility and resilience into all of their everyday operations. When the unthinkable happens, it is their ability to respond to change and the resilience of their people, processes, and technologies that allow them to continue performing their missions. In today's digital world, resilience and agility are simply the norm—they're best practices. The bar is higher today, and the tools are available.

The Government of Canada responded to COVID-19 by working with Amazon Web Services (AWS) and its partner Accenture to launch a cloud-based call center for its Emergency Response Benefit program (CERB). Using Amazon Connect they created a 1,500-person



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call centre in Canada that could seamlessly expand as necessary, eventually handling an average of 27,000 calls per day in April with some days exceeding 40,000 calls answered. Those calls helped Canadians apply for the tens of billions of dollars the Canadian government was making available to residents—a critical lifeline for them in this time of emergency.

Pacific Blue Cross, British Columbia's largest provider of health, dental, and travel benefits, was already taking advantage of the agility and resilience of the AWS cloud before COVID-19 struck. With the sudden need to get their most critical team members—their call center and claims workers—working from home quickly, they were able to get 600 people online again within a few days by using Amazon Workspaces.

By using the cloud, agencies and businesses can scale their infrastructure up or down at any time. We call this the elasticity of the cloud, and it helps AWS customers grow quickly when they experience sudden increases in demand, and shrink quickly to reduce their costs when demand declines. During the COVID-19 crisis, we've seen a lot of both. Ontario Health (OTN), one of the world's largest virtual care networks, saw demand for its services spike five-fold compared to pre-March volumes registering 350,000 visits between March 1-April 22. The cloud helped them handle the sudden spike, including hosting more than 1,900 concurrent visits during peak hours.

These are examples of what I mean by building technical resilience and agility to be prepared for the unexpected. You'll notice that the capabilities that helped these organizations respond were not specific to COVID-19. In any type of crisis, you'll need to get employees working again. You'll need to adjust the scale of your operations—up or down. And you'll need to communicate with your customers. To respond to truly unexpected events, you need to start building

agility and resilience into everything you do.

For a government agency, resilience is not just a matter of continuing to accomplish its mission. It is the government that empowers its citizens and businesses to successfully accomplish their missions. Every effort, every success, every failure is magnified and multiplied by its impact on the public. The public looks to the government for leadership when disaster strikes. Its services are critical to the nation, and the fact that they have been disrupted by the unexpected is simply no excuse to stop providing those services. Responding to crisis is simply part of the government's mandate.

The very good news is that an entire generation of new tools is available to help. The complex of technologies and processes that we refer to as the digital world is founded on the ideas of agility and resilience. When used properly, the cloud and the other tools of the digital age shorten lead times, provide platforms for innovation, and allow for flexibility.

The private sector has largely discovered the importance and value of these new tools: companies in every industry take advantage of the cloud to support innovation, reduce time to market, maintain flexibility and nimbleness, and reduce risk. It's time that all government agencies caught up and accepted the value—the importance—of agility. The next crisis might not be a pandemic. But we can be sure that unexpected, disruptive events are lurking in our future.



Mark Schwartz has been an IT leader in organizations small and large, public, private, and nonprofit. Currently, he is an Enterprise Strategist for Amazon Web Services (AWS) where he shares his CIO wisdom with the world's largest organizations. As the former CIO of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, he provoked the federal government into adopting Agile and DevOps practices. Mark holds a BS in computer science from Yale, a master's in philosophy from Yale, and an MBA from Wharton.

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