Public Sector Future podcast -- Episode 12 – Inspire: Thales

Talent:
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OLIVIA NEAL: Hello and welcome to *Public Sector Future*. This is a show for anyone who cares about using digital approaches in the public sector to deliver better outcomes.

I'm your host Olivia Neal, and together we will explore stories from around the world, where public servants have been successful at driving change. And we meet the people behind them, their first-hand experiences, and lessons learned. Throughout the series we will discuss technology and trends, as well the cultural aspects of change.

Today, in our second of three special episodes we're exploring the work of some of the people and teams instrumental in helping Public Sector organizations deliver. The ecosystem that supports delivery is broad, and at Microsoft we work with partners around the world. Three of those organisations have been recognized as Microsoft Partners of the Year for their work with Education, Government, and Defence.

Today we're going to be exploring the work of the Defence winner, **Thales**, who were recognized for their work over the past year in developing cloud-based capabilities for Defence organisations, allowing increased agility, interoperability and bring the ability to analyse and use data for decision making in a wide range of locations.
I'm joined today by Mike Schrock, the Vice President for Global Alliances at Thales.
Welcome to the show and thank you Mike for joining me today.

OLIVIA NEAL: So, Mike, welcome to the show.

MIKE SCHROCK: Oh, thanks, Olivia. Happy to be here.

OLIVIA NEAL: So, Mike, could you start by telling us a bit about who Thales are and the areas you work with Public Sector organisations on?

MIKE SCHROCK: So, Thales is a global organization of about 80,000 people. We work primarily in government and public sector industries, but we also have enterprise ties. So, we're in a unique spot to see both what the commercial side of the markets are doing and what the government and defense and intelligence departments are doing around data protection and around data and identity and identity protection.

Thales is made up of entities across space systems, defense systems, transportation systems, avionics systems, cybersecurity systems, and we help lots of governments around the world with their critical infrastructure but typically around, public projects, high-security projects in the world.

OLIVIA NEAL: So, today, we're really focusing on an area of work that Thales have been doing in Australia . Could you give us a quick overview of what this project was?

MIKE SCHROCK: Yeah, absolutely. It's a great project that Thales has been involved with really for quite a number of years. We announced I think two years ago that we were bringing to Microsoft a way that their disconnected stack of cloud could operate with public sector customers in the most secure way. Also, how it could be ruggedized to go out into the field and out to the edge deployments to help in the battlefield or to help in humanitarian care during a disaster.

So, that project was initiated out of our defense group, and we have a product called Nexium Defense Cloud. Nexium Defense Cloud was being asked to be brought out to the tactical edge to bring information and systems out to the tactical edge, sometimes connected, sometimes disconnected, to provide tactical information so that decisions could be made quickly in the battlefield and in harsh environments, where networks aren't always common.

So, we came up with this concept called Nexium Defense Cloud Edge, which was the idea to bring the Azure Stack with our traditional Nexium Defense Cloud system all the way out to that tactical edge – so operations of headquarters, the operations of all the different military ranks and systems could essentially tap into the analytics and the power that the Microsoft Cloud brings and make better decisions

OLIVIA NEAL: So, this solution is giving the people who are operating outside of headquarters who are remotely located, whether that be on the battlefield or in a humanitarian situation, the ability to access data and analytics and make better-informed decisions more quickly to facilitate their operations?

MIKE SCHROCK: Yeah, absolutely. So, there were sort of three core system elements that we wanted to bring, you know, to the solution– agility, the ability to deploy rapidly at the headquarters, at the forward operating theater and base, across legacy systems, and out to the edge cloud and out to the far edge, disconnected cloud.

Azure Stack and some of the collaborations that we put together between Microsoft and Thales and other partners sort of pulled together the ability to make the Nexium Defense Cloud more agile and to operate in a modern world, I guess, in a disconnected world, but also a connected world. The information from the edge has to be collaborated with the information from the core so that you can get real-time intelligence all the way out to the edge to make a decision. Likewise, information from the edge has to be brought back into the core to be analyzed and to be associated with other data sets and other legacy systems and other nation-states that are delivering or possibly part of the operation or the mission that the defense team is going after.

Then, the interoperability, I just touched on that. To work in a multinational capacity, to integrate with legacy systems and be interoperable at all of these different areas was super important.

So, interoperating with a NATO-based country and a NATO-based alliance, also operating with the "Five Eyes's." So this is the security partnership between the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Those were really important capabilities from an interoperability standpoint.

But we also had to be interoperability with modern data and modern application practices, right? And that's what the Azure Stack helped bring us – the ability to build applications quickly, the ability to integrate data quickly – if that came together really nicely on top of the Azure Stack.

Then, the last is decisiveness, right? The ability to use the information to make at-the-edge tactical decisions that can ideally save lots of lives is super important. We think that this combination of being able to operate on the traditional gov cloud or trusted cloud of public cloud or government cloud of Azure or DOD cloud of Azure combined with this core cloud, essentially, that is the defense cloud and bringing all of that information to the tactical edge – even in a disconnected edge – where analytics can be ran out on the far edge before that data is uploaded into the cloud is super powerful. And it really sort of optimizes mission effectiveness.

OLIVIA NEAL: Yeah, they sound like three really compelling sets of capabilities. And I'm interested in this piece of work was – this project was undertaken I think at this stage or initially for the defense, that they sound like very replicable solutions and the types of capabilities that other five eyes countries or other NATO countries, presumably, are interested in as well.

MIKE SCHROCK: Yes, absolutely. And this solution, while it was built for the defense, it also is very applicable in humanitarian cases or other projects where it's more of a first responder at the edge of the network.

A lot of times, when you go into disaster areas, you have issues with connectivity, you have issues with reestablishing communication networks. That's one of the things where Thales brings a big difference, being very integrated into LTE and mobile technology.

So, being able to interoperate between the shifting network conditions of uptime/downtime, availability/unavailability, and to bring the power of joint operations together works really well with this solution. So, NATO organizations and many Five Eyes nations coming to grips with building a more robust and agile environment for responding. And it really speaks to the spirit of collaboration.

OLIVIA NEAL: Is there anything that you would like to see other countries or organizations that might be getting ready to use this type of capability, whether that be in the defense space or in the humanitarian space, is there anything that they could start doing now to prepare them for having this type of approach?

MIKE SCHROCK: Yes. That's a great question. I think, definitely, customers from all elements of the public sector, whether it's civilian services, military defense, intelligence services, all need to be more responsive and more agile to the changing world that we have out there. Threats are coming in from all different angles, and not just military threats, right? We have public security threats, we have cybersecurity threats, we have a whole host of threat vectors that are coming at systems and communications, and they need to be responded to in an organized fashion.

So, the Nexium Defense Cloud represents, I think, a great model of how you can take one of the most extreme, highly secure operating theaters and environments and missions and how a uniform platform approach that has agility and has the ability to expand into various networks or theaters of operation, but also to interoperate with legacy systems and legacy communication networks.

I think that's the beauty of the joint solution is it has opened up a proof point, if you will, we can do this for any tactical mission, objective, or project you have.

OLIVIA NEAL: How do you judge the success of this type of project?
MIKE SCHROCK: it's a great question. Being just on the alliances side, not in the actual defense area with the proper clearances to have those conversations myself, what I've learned from my colleagues at the highest level is that, you know, this is cleared up all the way through the highest levels of generals that are essentially the CIOs or CFOs – the CISOs of the military. And the idea being that they wanted the efficiencies that the public cloud gives all commercial customers, but they had to do it in a very secure way. I think that they're seeing those efficiencies, they're seeing their return on investment fairly rapidly with a couple areas: One in a uniform deployment model that can be tactically stripped up or down, regardless of the mission. And I think also they've seen efficiencies in training staff, the ability to deploy it on a common, unified platform provides them a lot of value both in setting up systems you know from hours where it used to take weeks, to days where it used to take months for certain aspects of network and private clouds to be developed out in the field and out in the operating theater.

So, this provides a ton of efficiencies for all of those customers and a lot of stakeholders, I guess, more than just the CISO who has the budgetary you know oversight, but really for, you know, bringing the modern information worker, I guess, to the defense world more easily.

OLIVIA NEAL: Great. Are there any things that I haven't asked you which you would want to include, any points you'd want to make, anything I haven't given you the opportunity to say?

MIKE SCHROCK: I think we talked a little bit about Thales and being a broad, diverse company in the security sectors, working across a lot of public government programs. But I think it's also important to just understand Thales' mission, right, and our purpose.

And we've boiled that down, obviously, into a mission statement and a purpose statement. And that's to build a future we can all trust. It's not just about Thales and our customers and building it together,

it's about the partners. So, we brought, you know, dozens of partners together that had specific capabilities into this solution.

OLIVIA NEAL: Yeah, so it's a real story of collaboration to get to this point.

MIKE SCHROCK: Absolutely. And we definitely believe, especially in just the DOD and defense area, public sector, that we have a lot more of these solutions to roll out between all the NATO nations and giving them a common operating environment. That just makes things easier for everybody, too, to interoperate.

If they're coming off a legacy system that they built where they're losing the skillsets in their own IT department to roll their own private clouds for this kind of environment. That's sort of the nice part about that.

OLIVIA NEAL: Yeah, I mean, I think when we talk to public servants in countries all around the world, that competition for skills or the question of either upskilling your own staff or attracting in people with the right modern skills, you know, it's a competitive marketplace. There is a lot of concern in the public service about how do you make sure you're generating those right types of skills within the organization? So, things like this where you're able to not have to reinvent the wheel every time helps with that.

MIKE SCHROCK: Yeah, absolutely.

OLIVIA NEAL: Mike, thank you so much for doing this with us. Thank you for coming today.

MIKE SCHROCK: Yeah, happy to join you anytime.

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OLIVIAL NEAL: Thank you to our guest, Mike Schrock, and thank you for joining me today on *Public Sector Future*.

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And please do reach out, send your questions and feedback. You can find me on Twitter at [@LivNeal] or on LinkedIn, or you can email us at ask-ps@microsoft.com

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