

European Business Magazine talks to Greg Wilson, Chief Technology Officer for World Wide Public Sector at Microsoft

this edition's front cover features Greg Wilson (Microsoft Government CTO) , who delves into the critical intersections of technology, ethics, and sustainability, offering invaluable insights for leaders.



London, United Kingdom Jun 18, 2024 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - *European Business Magazine (EBM): As governments around the world accelerate their digital transformation journeys, what role do you see Microsoft playing in supporting these efforts, and what are some of the key challenges you encounter?*

Greg Wilson (GW): Generative AI is transforming the world of work, service delivery, and the speed of change. It is impacting all our personal lives too. Governments around the world want to speed up their digital transformation journeys and use the best and latest Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies available in the hyperscale cloud. They want to use AI to improve their decision-making and service quality across all government sectors.

As the Government CTO of Microsoft's Worldwide Public Sector Government Team, I have the privilege of helping many governments around the world with their digital transformation and AI adoption. Microsoft has a long history of working with government agencies and providing first-class solutions that help them analyse data and better foster innovation. This is undoubtedly an amazing time for Tech and the development of AI.

Microsoft and our partnership with OpenAI are at the forefront of AI development and delivery. But this is not just about using new technology, it is about how these technologies are reshaping how both the public and private sectors operate now and in the future. Developers are using these AI tools to create remarkable changes at an unprecedented pace. For example, the latest GPT 4o model can manage text, speech, images, video, as both input and output – this is revolutionary. So, my main message to Governments is don't miss out because of red tape and indecision. Start small but plan to grow why build your own infrastructure that will take years and is costly when you can start straight away in the Cloud to reap the benefits of AI using a secure, trusted cloud platform?

To support this, Microsoft is partnering and collaborating with Government agencies to help them learn about the technology, benefit from our experiences, and assist them in their modernization and migration to the cloud to access our large and small language models. In these collaborations, the topics are usually quite similar globally and only vary depending on how advanced a government is in its digital transformation programme. As Governments transform, they often face challenges such as security issues, time pressures in the migration process, compliance regulations, significant skills deficits in their workforce, competing priorities, financial and procurement legacy limitations, and inflexible on-premise ageing private infrastructure. To succeed, Governments need to adopt agile development, attract IT talent from the private sector, keep a start-up culture in government, and improve the acquisition and governance of innovative IT. They also need to update their compliance and risk management approaches to keep up with the rapid changes happening in the digital sector if they want to gain the benefits early. However, a fundamental foundation is ensuring the data they access has the veracity required to ensure the outputs are as responsible and accurate as possible.

EBM: Responsible and ethical AI has become a critical consideration for organizations, including governments. How is Microsoft approaching this aspect, and what measures are in place to ensure AI systems are developed and deployed ethically?

GW: To gain public trust in AI technology, we need to deliver it in a responsible and ethical way.

Microsoft is very committed to this. We have a lot of experience with AI, and we follow principles that make sure our AI systems are fair, reliable, secure, inclusive, transparent, and accountable. We also have a review process internally to set policies, standards, and practices and define clear roles and responsibilities for developing and deploying AI technologies ethically. Microsoft also works with diverse groups and partners to encourage the responsible use of AI globally.

The governance of AI and how it works can help business leaders and Government decision-makers worldwide use AI responsibly. When they wish to use AI, I suggest Governments decide what they want to do with AI, either with a custom application/model or a market-ready product, model as a service (MaaS) and Software as a Service (SaaS), from ourselves or our partners hosted on Azure the Microsoft Cloud. At the same time, they should create their organization's responsible AI framework around a specific use case, which starts with evaluating the value/concept but also has a comprehensive plan to scale up day-to-day organisational processes.

EBM: Sustainability is a pressing global issue, and technology has the potential to play a significant role in addressing it. Can you share some insights into Microsoft's sustainability initiatives and how you are leveraging technologies like AI and cloud computing to drive positive environmental impact?

GW-Microsoft utilises AI and cloud computing to enhance sustainability efforts, from improving data transparency and insights to developing novel solutions for a sustainable future and positive environmental impact. Four years ago, Microsoft committed that, by 2030, we would become carbon negative, zero waste, water positive, and protect more land than we use. Since then, we have seen significant changes both in technology and in improving our understanding of what it will take to meet our climate goals. Modern technologies, including Generative AI, are new innovations that can help to understand and address the global climate issue.

We are focused on improving sustainability measurements by harnessing the power of digital technology to garner better insight and action as well as increasing efficiency by applying data center innovations that improve efficiency as quickly as possible. Along with forging partnerships to accelerate technology breakthroughs through our investments and AI capabilities, including greener steel, concrete, and fuels. Along with advocating for public policy changes that will accelerate climate advances.

In addition, our Microsoft Research, and AI for Good teams are also working to accelerate solutions and develop climate resilience with AI. For example, we are collaborating with the United Nations to research the use of AI to advance the Early Warning for All Initiative, with a goal of better understanding the populations that may be at risk of extreme weather events and other threats.

EBM: Reskilling and upskilling the workforce is crucial in the digital age. What initiatives has Microsoft undertaken to support governments in developing the necessary AI digital skills within their workforce to facilitate successful digital transformations?

The ubiquity of AI's opportunities to make a real difference across organizations and for the public means that governments need to approach AI skill-building in a unique way. Governments are not only facing the challenge of keeping up with the rapid pace of technology, but they are also grappling with a shortage of skilled workers. 71% of companies are already using some form of AI and another 21% plan in the next year and yet 52% of business report the lack of skills is the biggest block to scaling AI.

The Public Sector also feel they lack the strategic knowledge, technical skills, and solution efficiency to

effectively implement AI. Microsoft recognizes this and has engaged several million people globally, and continues to grow on this number, to help them learn how to use our technology and have the right skills to accelerate AI implementation and innovation.

To ensure governments have the knowledge and skills to develop coherent AI strategies they need to shift to a culture of AI transformation requires investment at all levels to shift to a culture of learning with a skills-first approach to AI, which emphasizes skills and competency across the entire workforce.

To accelerate a skills-first approach for AI governments need to take a structured approach to AI skill building based on individual and team goals and ensure upskilling happens across every function area – from leadership to IT, from developers to business users. To help Microsoft as a trusted partner of governments we offer comprehensive curated resources, tools, and guidance to build the AI and digital skills needed to execute new AI innovation projects and achieve the business objectives required. We deliver a raft of training from the Cloud, across our products and for AI.

For AI, we provide a 4 stage AI skill Learning Journey that starts with Understanding AI – a foundation of concepts, definitions, and key terms followed by Preparing for AI and providing essential knowledge on getting the infrastructure ready to adopt AI and our copilot suite. After which there is a module on Using AI and discovering the skills to use our Gen AI Copilots and how to maximize benefits before the final module on building AI Solutions and learning how to build and integrate AI experiences into your own apps and services. All are designed to give Governments and Businesses the opportunity to develop the requisite skills to operate our products, our hosted partner products, or build their own solutions with custom models, Studio Copilot from the Cloud.

EBM: Microsoft's partnership with OpenAI has garnered significant attention. Can you elaborate on how this collaboration is shaping the future of AI development, and what implications it might have for government agencies seeking to leverage AI capabilities?

GW: We have had a wonderful partnership with OpenAI. In the past 18 months, Gen AI has grown significantly, and the teams have been working diligently to advance our AI platform and build new supercomputing infrastructure, and collaborate with our partners at OpenAI to move that frontier forward. I think that the models we use will only get smarter, in general terms. Just consider how much smarter GPT-3 to 3.5 to 4 became, and how you could use it for many things – the general capability and overall intelligence keeps improving. But as the models got smarter, safety was also essential and it got safer with safety tools, the security of Azure, and following responsible AI practices.

Also, as the capability has increased, we have seen changes in speed and cost, with the newly announced GPT-4o, a multimodal model (text, speech, images, video, as input and output). For instance, you can see this in what happened with GPT-4. It's 12x cheaper and 6x faster since its launch, and that is the kind of progress you will keep seeing as we evolve the system architecture.

Looking forward, our partnership with OpenAI will surely keep growing and the benefits can be huge for governments and businesses who use the tools in their daily processes. Microsoft and partners like OpenAI are putting a lot of effort and capital on an unmatched scale, to make sure that we are constantly developing a platform that adds value and is trusted by our customers.

EBM: The hyperscale cloud is underpinning the massive growth in AI and other emerging technologies. How is Microsoft's Azure platform evolving to meet the increasing demands for scalable and secure cloud infrastructure, particularly in the public sector?

GW: Last November, we announced the most powerful AI simple computer in the Cloud for training AI, and over the past six months, Microsoft has added 30 times that supercomputing power to Azure At the same time. Our latest datacenter designs are purpose-built for AI workloads so that we can effectively and responsibly use every megawatt of power to drive down the cost of AI. We are also incorporating advanced data center cooling techniques to fit the thermal profile of the workloads and match them to the environment and the location where it operates. Our custom IO hardware and server designs allow us to provide dramatically faster networking, remote storage, and local storage throughput. All of this is driving an end-to-end approach that is really helping us get to the unprecedented scale and expansive coverage required. In addition, for certain scenarios we are providing our Microsoft Cloud for Sovereignty and Confidential Compute capabilities to meet certain local compliance standards.

EBM: Cybersecurity threats are a constant concern for governments handling sensitive data and critical infrastructure. What strategies and solutions are Microsoft offering to enhance cyber resilience and protect against evolving threats?

GW-We are adapting to the new threat landscape comprised of sophisticated, well-funded nation-state threat actors, and making significant changes to mitigate those threats through our Secure Future Initiative (SFI) that is focused on Secure-by-Design, Secure-by Default, and Secure Operations.

SFI shows we are at an inflection point where the best practices the industry had adopted over the last couple of decades are no longer always viable given the changing nature of cyber threats and the strategies and tactics that sophisticated, well-funded threat actors are using. In this new era of AI, where AI is foundational to how we develop and defend software, we need a whole new paradigm for security and that's what SFI represents to deliver the security requirements.

For governments and customers, we offer the insights and the defensive capabilities of the Microsoft Cloud to defend against emerging threats. Zero Trust Architecture and Multifactor Authentication, along with training and assurance, are some of the key features for having a secure and resilient architecture. We also support our customers through our Cyber Defence teams.

We have over 65 trillion signals analysed per day. That is over 750 billion signals per second, analysed using advanced data analytics and AI algorithms to identify and protect against digital threats and criminal cyberactivity. With more than 10,000+ Microsoft security and threat intelligence experts, including engineers, researchers, data scientists, cybersecurity experts, threat hunters, geopolitical analysts, investigators, and frontline responders worldwide, we partner with our customers and this partnership acts as a vital force multiplier for collective resilience and protection against these ever-evolving threats.

EBM: As a technology and business leader, what advice would you give to government leaders and decision-makers embarking on digital transformation initiatives, particularly in terms of navigating the complexities of emerging technologies like AI and ensuring successful adoption?

GW: Don't hesitate or procrastinate on your digital transformation initiatives or you will fall behind. Identify your quick wins and scaling plans and go ahead. Leaders should focus on some key areas, and they should also personally lead the culture and skill change journey as well as the technology drive needed. Governments need to change how they think about data and AI and govern the transformation at the highest levels to succeed. They need to be agile in their policies, regulations, procurement rules, and finance position to allow for multi-year as a service. They also need to have strong executive sponsorship and governance for the public and internal experience to build trust in the technologies

early if they want to flourish in a fast-changing world.

Finally, those Governments that don't have a Cloud First policy, limit their AI innovation and therefore need to modernize by considering a comprehensive on-premise data center rationalization programme and how to operate a hybrid cloud infrastructure to get the agility, innovation, and creativity that the hyperscale cloud can securely offer while increasing productivity and value. By not taking action, governments may miss out on the productivity gains that AI can deliver.

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