MEDIA RELEASE

UP and Amazon Web Services Institute team up to bring major digital transformation initiative to the public sector in South Africa

PRETORIA – In a bid to accelerate digital transformation in South Africa's public sector, the University of Pretoria (UP) and the Amazon Web Services (AWS) Institute teamed up for the first time to host an executive education programme, for senior government officials and leaders of state-owned enterprises.

The two-day executive programme, which was held at UP's Future Africa Institute, featured various speakers, including international cybersecurity experts, national and provincial government officials from several departments, academics, and representatives from state-owned enterprises including Transnet Freight Rail, SENTECH and power utility Eskom.

"The programme equipped senior public servants and elected officials with the confidence and expertise they need to lead the successful digital transformation of public services," said cyber security expert Prof Jan Eloff, the Acting Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology at UP.

Prof Eloff explained that governments and industry spent billions on protecting infrastructure, but it only took "one small slip-up of an employee allowing hackers to disrupt business. Today, there is an acute need to search for new approaches for improving the cost-effectiveness of cybersecurity safeguards. This is illustrated by recent cybersecurity incidents in South Africa where the majority of cases deal with the leakage of confidential data and, most often, in the 'money transfer' business."

Prof Eloff added that many governments, including that of South Africa, are disrupted by DDoS (distributed denial of service) attacks and that one of the main drawbacks of attempting to understand the South African cybersecurity landscape was the absence of reliable reporting platforms. A few academic publications highlighted data leakage problems in the public sector.

But he noted that the Protection of Personal Information Act has already had a positive impact on the South African cybersecurity landscape. UP has a cybersecurity research group working on the convergence of artificial intelligence and cybersecurity and digital forensics. The public sector, in general, could benefit from internationally recognised governance frameworks.

The AWS Institute is a thought leadership and executive education programme to accelerate digital transformation for public sector executives. Led by experienced government reformers and leading university academics, the hands-on learning experience was made up of interactive workshops, keynotes, panel discussions, question and answer sessions with ongoing individual mentoring, and a peer-to-peer network.

Liam Maxwell, Director of Government Transformation, AWS, delivered the keynote address, titled: 'Building better citizen services.' He said: "Governments and public sector organisations around the world face unique challenges to accomplish complex missions with limited resources. The cloud is instrumental in enabling them to serve citizens more effectively, accelerate innovation and digital transformation, and put more of their time and resources into their core missions."

"Modernisation starts with transforming your vision and your culture so that you can benefit from the speed, scale, and security that technology can deliver. We are delighted to be collaborating with the University of Pretoria in bringing the AWS Executive Education Programme to South Africa for the first time," Maxwell added.

Isak van der Walt, Manager: Digital Scholarship and Innovation, Department of Library Services, UP, discussed 'Robotics in Africa.' Senior South African government official, Zaid Aboobaker, the Chief Director of the Department of Public Service and Administration, led a discussion on the role of his administration, which is largely responsible for the organisation and management of the country's civil service. Alex Meek-Holmes, Government Transformation Leader, AWS, hosted a workshop on 'Designing services for citizens.'

Prof Eloff said the agenda was a collaborative effort between AWS and UP to ensure impactful discussions and outcomes for participants, ensuring shared experiences to allow for informed decision-making for public sector officials who had signed up for the programme.

Other topics discussed over the two-day session included examining ways in which governments build resilience, drawing on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, meeting the needs of citizens through the provision of services, the power of data, security in the cloud, and mitigating against hacking and cyberattacks with case studies.

Participants in the programme have been enrolled in the global AWS Institute Network. The Network is a peer-to-peer professional community for senior public sector leaders to convene around common challenges and best practices in a trusted space, including access to a private LinkedIn group where one can interact with AWS government transformation advisors – a team of experienced former public sector executives that have led national-scale digital transformation.

They will also receive the AWS Institute Network newsletter to get early access to events and thought leadership in addition to access to exclusive events and programming for AWS Institute Network members, such as webinars, peer-to-peer working groups, and networking events.

"Our candidates, chosen by invitation of both UP and AWS, were made up of senior-level ("c-suite") public sector servants and government officials, essentially, decision-makers, with the intention of the programme enabling them to confidently manage successful digital transformation initiatives in the public sector," concluded Prof Eloff.

Caption: Prof Margaret Chitiga-Mabugu, Dean of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, UP; Prof Tawana Kupe, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of UP; Liam Maxwell, Director of Government Transformation, AWS and Prof Loretta Feris, Vice-Principal: Academic, UP

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About the University of Pretoria

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on the Hatfield Campus, Pretoria. This 114-year-old institution is also the largest producer of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only University in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked top in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes.

UP is one of the top five universities in South Africa, according to the 2019-2020 rankings by the Center for World University Rankings. The QS World University Rankings also placed UP among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology, and law), and UP is in the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences), according to the Web of Science Essential Indicators.

For more information, go to www.up.ac.za

About AWS Institute

The AWS Institute is a thought leadership and executive education program to accelerate digital transformation for public sector leaders. We provide executive training, executive engagements, and a network of global peers. We work with independent academic organizations who enrich our program with their expertise. We amplify thought leadership through articles, reports, films, and podcasts published on AWS public sector channels.

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