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Futuristic Cities founder Karuna Gopal on the role of data and technology in smart cities

Karuna Gopal - founder president of Foundation of Futuritic Cities shared insights on the smart cities initiative and role of data and technology at the 'Data Driven World' series event in Hyderabad

Pankaj Maru | ETCIO | Updated: October 14, 2016, 10:14 IST

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With the rapid development of the new generation information technology, including internet, mobile internet, wearable computing, and sensor networks, the demand for real-time data processing,

mining and analysis has seen a tremendous growth in recent years.

In view of these developments, Raritan with ETCO.com as its media partner recently held the first edition of 'Data Driven World' in Hyderabad. The objective of the session was to highlight the growing importance of real-time data in our lives and businesses, and how it is helping us to make the right decisions at the right time.

Addressing the 'Data Driven World' series event in Hyderabad, guest speaker, Karuna Gopal - Founder President of Foundation of Futuristic Cities spoke about India's Smart Cities program and how it can prove beneficial in several areas like employment,

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traffic management, law enforcement and security, power and water supply to name a few. An expert in the field of smart cities, Gopal is involved closely with the government's 100 Smart Cities mission and also provides regular training to IAS officers.

Gopal spoke on how the Indian government is working towards building 100 smart cities and creating a digital infrastructure where all functions in these initiatives will lead to the creation of massive volumes of data. In such a scenario, most of the cities will need to create a command and control centre (CCC) to monitor and analyze the data generated in real-time.

“As India aspires to set up such command and control centres, I see a huge opportunity and requirement of data scientists; people who actually are equipped with skills related to big data processing and analytics techniques. This will open up new job opportunities and roles for people who are aware of how to deal with unstructured, hybrid data and make sense from an enormous range of data,” Gopal explained.

She cited examples of cities like Barcelona and Rio de Janeiro that are using satellite systems and sensors to capture data, monitor critical infrastructures like water and power supply plants, traffic movements and are prepared for severe weather conditions like storms, rains and floods.

According to Gopal, smart buildings are an integral part of the smart cities concept. Countries like the UK have over thousand smart buildings that are energy efficient and also produce energy that is supplied back into the electric grids.

Speaking about the smart grid systems driven by data, Gopal shared that they would play an effective role in managing the supply and demand leading to efficient use of electricity. In her view, smart grid systems should communicate both ways where sensors can be used to gather customer data. This will enable systems to manage the supply during peak loads and reduce power loss. “Although smart electric grids are at a nascent stage today, I am sure to see more of such systems in place.”

Sharing an example of smart meter usage in Germany, Gopal said that local customers had initially protested against smart meter deployment but later embraced it after they were educated on the value and benefit of smart meters.

“The users wanted to know more than just the details of their power consumption. They wanted to see if they could reduce their power consumption using such smart meters. These concerns were addressed by leveraging big data analytics,” she informed.

In the Indian context, Gopal said that intelligent smart meters can be used in the areas of water supply and help in managing water supply and limiting wastage. Besides, power and water supply management using data captured through sensors, transport is another area where there’s a huge opportunity to leverage data. “The world is moving towards intelligent integrated transportation, however from an Indian perspective; we are still in the process of understanding multi-modal transportation that is public, private and other forms,” she pointed out.

Gopal said that India needs to migrate to a multi-modal integrated system and infuse intelligence by using technology in order to have seamless integrated transport system like other parts of the world. “We are lagging in comparison to other cities/countries, but I do see some sectors improving quickly,” she said.

Gopal advised technology providers in the smart cities domain to reposition technology as a tool for inclusion. This approach would accommodate the poor and marginalized sections of society, and provide them with an equitable life.

“Repositioning technology itself as a tool for inclusion is important as for some strange reason technology even today, is perceived as a fancy thing in many parts of the world. This would change the way how people and the world looks at technology,” she said.

Gopal also cautioned the tech industry to avoid use of jargons and take help of subject matter /domain experts for designing and creating better solutions for smart cities.

Since the smart cities projects is driven by new technology and data, Gopal said that individuals or CIOs having strong understanding about their city and who are well acquainted with information management can actually take up role of city CIOs. “To understand smart cities, you need to understand the science of the city and have the art of convincing users to use your apps/solution,” she concluded.

Sanjay Motwani, Regional Director – Raritan Asia Pacific spoke about the role of real-time data from an industry perspective and how data centres need to be managed in order to make data more relevant in business transformation. “Enterprises today are building spare capacity in the data centres to ensure business continuity. However, this is resulting in high power consumption

due to lack of insight on real-time data,” he said.

Motwani added that Raritan’s solutions can provide real-time data insights on identifying spare capacity in data centres like power fluctuations, prediction of failures and equipments, and how its intelligent power supply solutions with real-time data can help businesses be more efficient and reduce operational costs.

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