

Building the Right Capabilities for Digital Transformation



People and Technology. These two things are at the absolute heart of every successful digital transformation program, and unless you have both of these core elements right, you're going to fail. For people, there's a need for new experts with the right digital transformation skills who can work alongside existing talent within an organisation to drive change. Consistent and visible leadership support is key in galvanising the overall process. For technology, other governments have already put in place successful digital services, sharing open source solutions and service standards for public use. These should form the basis of your transformation to save time and money that would otherwise have been spent on research and development.

Take stock internally

Start by assessing the skills at your disposal. Mike Beaven, Government Transformation Advisor at AWS, believes leaders must know where to find talent: *"In government organisations of all sizes, you will almost always find someone who has already tried to solve the problem, working away in a cupboard under the stairs to come up with a digital solution,"* he says. *"Find the person or people on the inside who are willing to embrace change. They know the organisation and they'll have a real appetite and passion to try to do things in a different way."* Combining situational awareness and motivation is a powerful combination we have seen in successful reform programs.

The disciplines that are useful to have in your team include procurement, regulation, user research and data science expertise, but working collaboratively with outside experts is a vital part of complementing and building capability. These may be tech companies but may include those with expertise in specific communities and disciplines such as, service design, user research and even social anthropology. This is because it is important to understand stakeholder motivations and customer behaviour for optimal service design, which will improve the user experience and support the intended policy outcome.

Target new capabilities

The next step is to hire people experienced in implementing the cloud-based applications that high-quality digital services require.

"Your priority should be to bring in people who have had their hands on the technology and know how to build and deliver it. That's a vital skillset," says Beaven. Target those who know how to build websites and online transactional services and have a proven track record in delivering digital transformation but experience in change management is so important. Being able to rapidly demonstrate the positive effects of cloud adoption will be essential in earning trust and securing continued support within an organisation *"You're going to run out of credibility quite quickly if you don't start to show real progress"*, Beaven explains.

The UK government's Exemplar Programme team, set up in 2013 to transform government services, was comprised of roughly one-third each of internal capability, new contractors and external partners. Having the right balance of internal and external experience and expertise ensured the project was a successful springboard for future progress. [The programme succeeded in delivering 20 digital services in 400 days.](#)

Prioritise clear communications

Transparency and clear communication are vital to any change programme. This is also true of the hiring process for any digital transformation team. This will help in building positive sentiment towards the transformation more broadly.

When recruiting, public-sector managers do consider how they can compete with tech or financial services companies with regard to pay, but it's important to communicate the whole package. In government jobs, you deliver for every citizen and there is a powerful sense of purpose that motivates people. Public sector leaders say that three years in a government role is the equivalent of ten years of experience in similar private sector roles because of the scale of the challenges and level of exposure.

Continued communication and support from the top

Digital transformation only succeeds with buy-in from the very top of an organisation. Continuous, visual support is essential in any organisation undergoing this type of change. Clear leadership communications such as blog posts mapping out the progress of a transformation help to mitigate concerns whilst providing a sense of momentum. The [UK Government Digital Service \(GDS\) Blog](#) is a good example of this, regularly drip-feeding information to boost understanding on the process and timeline. This kind of open communication also transmits the message that it is ok to be open about change, to celebrate small successes and learn from failure.

Take advantage of shared technology

There is a growing movement, particularly among European governments, that projects should use open source. In October 2020, the [European Commission](#) committed to the use of open source, promoting the sharing and reuse of software solutions, knowledge and expertise for both practical applications, such as IT and in more strategic areas. Using established frameworks and coding that people want to work with and where skills are available makes adding capabilities much easier.

Open source code is found in online repositories and can be freely accessed and reused under open source licences. AWS' Caroline Mulligan, who previously worked with the UK GDS team, argues: "why not use something that works and then focus on the bits that are relevant to your unique problems or legislation?" One such example was the UK government's Digital Marketplace, built over a two-year period to help public sector procurement bodies buy and deliver cloud-based services. The Australian government reused the UK government's open source code and was able to launch its own digital marketplace in just six weeks from start to finish.

There are already significant technology resources available that you can leverage when considering how to build digital services in the public sector, including a [curated library](#) of open source solutions for government.

This series from Amazon Web Services (AWS) focuses on guiding public sector organisations through successful digital transformation processes, and is based on [key findings from the AWS Institute](#). This second instalment provides insights on sourcing, attracting and retaining the best talent and explains why using open source can help you move forward faster.

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