

A digital future for public services

How digital transformation enables high quality, value for money public services.



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Introduction

Achieving high quality public services through digital transformation.

Public services administer local government, deliver social services, educate children, care for sick, elderly and vulnerable people, provide policing, firefighting and more. Public services are a vitally important part of modern life, and are primarily funded by citizens through taxation.

A process of digital transformation can help those who provide public services ensure they deliver high quality services and good value for money to citizens.

The Power of Digital Transformation

Public services provide citizens with a wide range of services, many of which are not available through any other route. These services can be thought of as the glue which holds our society together. Street cleaning, caring for elderly and vulnerable people, the provision of education, healthcare, policing and firefighting, and much more is provided by government at the local, regional and national level.

Different public services at national, regional and local level have additional responsibilities on top of hands-on service provision, including making policy, supporting the economy and more.

In order to provide all of these services, national, regional and local government and other public sector agencies spend money that is collected from citizens through taxation. Publicly funded agencies need to ensure not only that they deliver services to the best of their ability, but also that they provide good value for money. Achieving this requires applying the same rigour to human resources, service planning, budgeting and process management as any business would apply.

The use of new technologies and digital transformation is helping public service providers improve both management systems and service delivery.

New technologies are enabling, data collection and the generation of analytics for granular oversight of process, planning and budgetary control, contributing to streamlining of service delivery.

As public service providers explore the potential of digital transformation further, they are discovering a wider range of benefits for management and for citizens.

Digital strategies for complex organisations

Public service providers have often been in existence for a long time. Their management processes have grown over time, and may be complex. These may not be compatible across service teams, making the collection of management information time-consuming and on some occasions challenging or even impossible. Teams and departments may have evolved their own ways of working which are not compatible across the organisation. Administration process may be manual in part or even entirely.

With the day-to-day need to deliver services to citizens taking priority there may be little opportunity to examine processes and effect meaningful change. Financial pressures to 'do more with less' may make public service providers reluctant to consider large scale digital transformation efforts which can take time and involve rethinking processes, staffing and the interplay between different staff teams.

But the benefits of re-imagining both management and service delivery can be much greater than at first imagined. A root and branch effort to rework internal processes, including introducing technologies that may be unfamiliar at first but which are common in the business sector, can have significant positive effects in many ways.

Reduce costs. While there is a cost involved in implementing new digital strategies the net result can be cost reduction. For example the number of calls to helplines and amount of paper generated needed for invoicing, issuing receipts and working with forms.



Improved citizen interactions. Citizens can get their tasks done more quickly using new technologies. For example paying a bill is faster online than by other means.

Staff deployment. Staff that may have been used to cover helplines or process manual request or transactions can be reduced, freeing up funds to grow staff in other areas.

Central Government embraces digital transformation

In 2012 the UK Government undertook a project to bring nearly 2,000 separate government websites together into a single site, gov.uk. A key result of taking this action has been to provide citizens with a trusted place to go to manage all aspects of interaction with government whether it is national, local or regional.

The transformation has contributed to a wider strategy of growing citizens' ability to interact with government digitally and at the same time reducing the cost of providing government services. The Institute for Government¹ has shown that in 2019:

- The number of paper based tax returns submitted to HMRC fell by 7% as more people completed their tax returns online
- Online applications for a National Insurance Number to the Department for Work and Pensions helped reduce unnecessary calls to the relevant helpline by around 21,000 per month
- Access to gov.uk web sites from mobile phones and desktop computers is evenly split indicating that citizens are willing to transact with government from their phone

Having achieved the move to gov.uk, the UK government now wants to focus on whole user journeys rather than discrete visits to web sites. The aim is to help citizens along the path of everything that's required in relation to a need, including pointing up things a person may not realise are relevant. This applies to many different types of activity from starting a business to handling significant life events.

Advanced digital tools can deliver considerable benefit in terms of staff recruitment and retention. People often want to use technologies at work that match those used in their personal lives, and to have access to information and resources in the same easy way too. Working with outdated technologies that can act as a barrier to getting things done, having to use manual systems where there are tried and tested digital alternatives, and lacking analytics that could help people work more effectively, can be frustrating and make employees resent their work rather than enjoy it.

One example is the process of data entry and report writing. When many public service providers spend considerable time outside of the office and working in the field, the ability to produce reports and other documentation away from the physical office can be time-saving and result in faster, more client-focused work. Today, when Covid-19 means many public service providers are based at home rather than in the office, the need to function efficiently away from office based systems is even more important.

¹ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/whitehall-monitor-2020/digital>

How Dragon can help

Dragon Professional Anywhere is our cloud based digital dictation software. Organisations use it to produce high quality documents at speed using dictation. Cloud deployment means staff can work anywhere. Dragon can provide multiple benefits to public services providers.



Data Security

Keep all your documents safe in one place



Speed

Produce documentation faster



Accuracy

Improve document accuracy



Customer Satisfaction

Grow your reputation through better customer care



IT support

Reduce the burden on IT support teams



Flexibility

Work anywhere, any time



Enhance Satisfaction

Through a happy community

Work easily across teams

Meeting the needs of citizens

Citizens can benefit directly from digital transformation strategies in many ways.

- Faster, easier access to information and services. When citizens can easily find information from sources they trust, they can be better informed and more willing – and able – to access information and service they need. The ability to pay for services online makes the process easy, faster and more appealing than a multi-stage process involving, potentially, phone calls, paper forms and waits between stages of a purchasing or service request process.
- More appropriate, better targeted and faster services. When digital systems are used to report, initiate and mobilise services, layers of time-consuming administration can be removed, meaning that citizens are served more quickly.
- More services, more frequently. As bureaucracy and service delivery costs are reduced, and analytics allow for a greater understanding of citizens' needs – including at a granular, hyperlocal level – public service providers can potentially divert more money to increased and better targeted service provision.

Digital strategies for complex organisations

Public service providers face a number of challenges including budgetary pressures, working with technologies that are in some cases creaking and increasingly outdated, and expectations of both staff and citizens for far more modern, user-friendly access to information and services.

By making a root and branch revision of how technologies are used within the workplace, and undertaking full scale digital transformation, public service providers can streamline processes, make financial savings, provide staff with technologies that are appropriate to their work, give citizens modern ways of accessing and utilising services, and lever the power of analytics to assist with future service planning.

Dragon Professional Anywhere is a key technology that can take a central place in a digital transformation strategy, allowing public service providers to save time on document production and ensure compliance and security. It supports mobile working, and can provide managers with analytics helping them improve efficiency further.



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