Sopra Steria

Government Digital Trends Survey 2016

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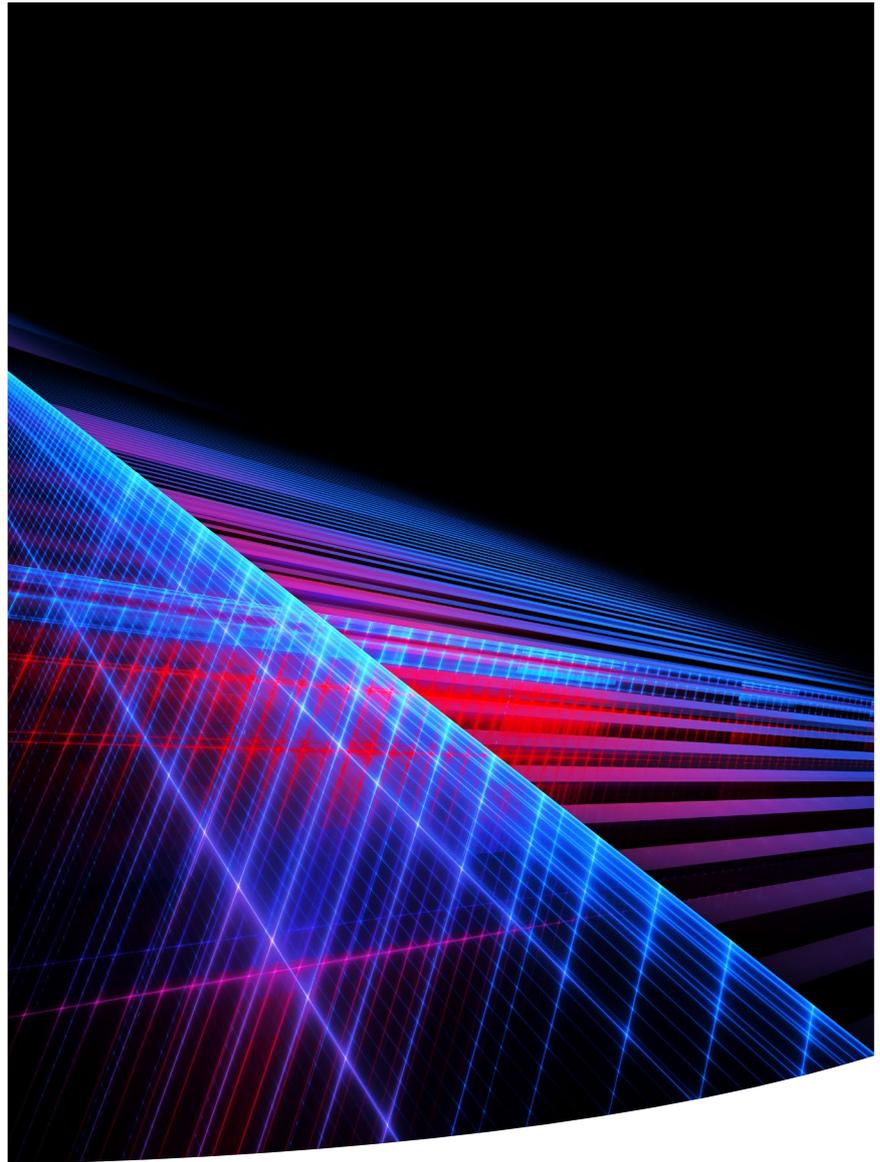
Introduction
A new era for government digital

Chancellor George Osborne pulled a rabbit out of the hat during his November Spending Review. Contrary to expectations, he announced an increase in the budget for the Government Digital Service (GDS). It was allocated £450 million out of a total digital package worth £1.8bn across government up to 2020. This generous backing highlights how vital digital transformation is to the implementation of deep spending cuts and the challenge to 'do more with less'.

The last parliament saw major progress in improving user experience of transactional processes on government websites. GOV.UK has brought together disparate services under one domain, and work was done to simplify language and processes to make online transactions easier for citizens. This was valuable and necessary work, but understanding and building the next stage of digital transformation promises to be more challenging for civil servants.

The next five years are likely to see a shift away from front-end improvements to fully transformative digital projects. The concept of Government as a Platform, which was at the heart of the chancellor's announcement, will involve not only creating shared capabilities for staff using back end systems, but linking them effectively to the user interface. Unifying currently disparate systems and applications provides an opportunity for big savings. It will also drive organisational change across the many silos of government.

This change depends on the leadership, skills and capacity of the civil service. However, last year, the National Audit Office reported that job cuts were being undertaken before departments have produced proper strategic plans on how their staff should operate. Other challenges stem from growing and more complex user needs and digital competence, along with the looming spectre of ageing and expensive legacy systems.

About the Government Digital Trends Survey

This is the second consecutive year that Sopra Steria has published the Government Digital Trends Survey. We commissioned Dods Research to ask civil servants a series of questions about the digital transformation agenda and its impact on government and the services they provide. In 2016, we received 1,235 responses, across all grades and departments, establishing a solid benchmark for measuring the views of central government. Of these, 313 respondents are directly working on a digital transformation project.

We are committed to continuing the survey in future years to provide insight into how digital transformation is understood, its benefits, progress towards achieving it and the remaining obstacles to progress.

The will to deliver

Resetting the relationship between citizen and state is the stated objective of Minister for the Cabinet Office Matt Hancock. Allocating money for digital reforms is one thing. Using that money to fundamentally redesign how government operates and engage with citizens is quite another.

Technology arms civil servants with the tools needed to transform the business of government. The survey shows that staff recognise the benefits for both service users and themselves. 90% of those surveyed agreed with the notion that they and their colleagues will benefit from services going online.

A solid 75% of respondents reported that the digital drive has had an effect on their work – unchanged from last year. A third (33%) of those surveyed said the changes were a big focus of their work. It is clear that the drive towards digital is impacting civil servants and, given its high profile, it is perhaps surprising that 9% said that they were not aware of the digital transformation agenda at all.

When asked to go into more detail about the impact on their work, 71% of respondents said digital transformation is leading to a change in the structure of how services are delivered. The understanding that digital technology can be a tool to spark organisational change – rather than merely making existing structures more efficient - is now widespread.

The second most recognised effect of digital transformation identified (52%) was improving online channels of contact, with 47% mentioning the shifting of channels online. A further 43% identified understanding demand and user needs. The fact that user engagement and need are rated highly by civil servants demonstrates they are getting to grips with the fundamental benefits of digital transformation.

Data is a key building block of digital transformation and an agenda in which big strides are being made. Commercial applications such as Citymapper – which uses open data from Transport for London - have often been hugely popular. Such initiatives extend the potential for innovation to a much bigger pool of talent than if they were developed inside government organisations themselves. Innovative intermediaries

are enabling the government to provide information to citizens in ways the government could not have predicted or planned for.

The survey highlighted a consistent understanding of the various benefits of big data. Between a quarter and 30% of respondents identified advantages of big data including reducing expenditure and costs, helping organisations increase operational efficiency, identifying opportunities for innovation and improving customer engagement. There is still room for improvement, with 40% saying they don't know how their department is currently benefiting from it.
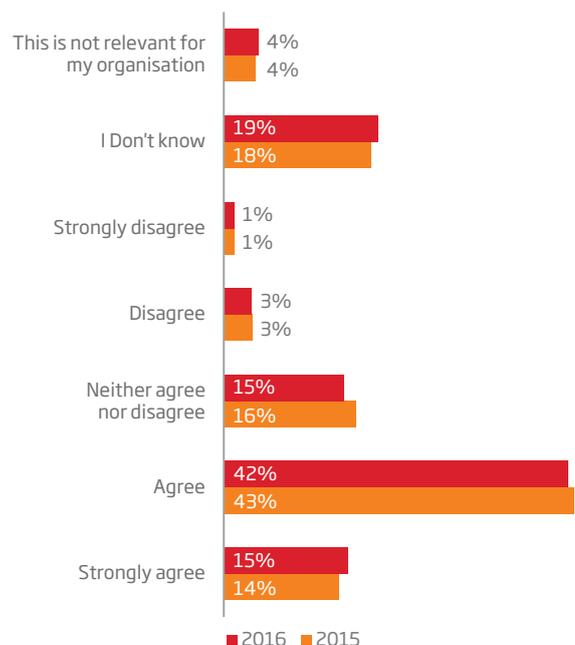
Only 4% of those surveyed said there were no benefits from open data, while 56% said that it helps build accountability and trust in government and 51% listed improvements in public services. A further 26% said that it could lead to innovation through combining disparate data sets, with 15% identifying economic growth and new business opportunities.

The idea of digital transformation promoting ongoing change is now firmly embedded in the conscience of the Whitehall workforce. A full 57% of the survey said their organisation was hoping to move more services online in the next 12 months - the same proportion as last year. In fact, less than 5% said that their organisation will not be undertaking digital transformation projects in the coming year.

Please rate your agreement with the statement 'we are hoping to move more services online in the next 12 months'

Response	2016	2015
This is not relevant for my organisation	4%	4%
I Don't know	19%	18%
Strongly disagree	1%	1%
Disagree	3%	3%
Neither agree nor disagree	15%	16%
Agree	42%	43%
Strongly agree	15%	14%

■2016 ■2015

Knowing your users

GDS has put understanding user needs at the heart of its strategy since its creation in April 2011. The very first entry on a list of 26 points included in government's Digital Service Standard advises officials running digital projects to "research to develop a deep knowledge of who the service users are and what that means for the design of the service". The policy is aimed at putting the citizen at the heart of policy to design responsive digital services.

Turning this into action involves making sure that users are clearly identified and exceptionally well understood. Digital services, by their very nature, allow a much deeper understanding of service users through the analysis of personal information entered into forms, as well as data from their behaviour navigating online services.

In the private sector, initiatives tend to focus on the use of analytics to support strategic decision making. However, government has a much wider user base – citizens, civil servants, researchers and entrepreneurs have different needs. This diversity provides a bewildering variety of opportunities, but presents big challenges to building a picture of users.

The survey found that the majority – 64% – of respondents have confidence that their organisation has a good understanding of typical service users (this is a small improvement on last year's figure of 62%). 57% indicated that their organisation is gathering information about their customers to ensure they are providing a good service. This is, again, slightly higher than last year's figure of 55%, indicating that although some progress is being made, perhaps it is not happening quickly enough.
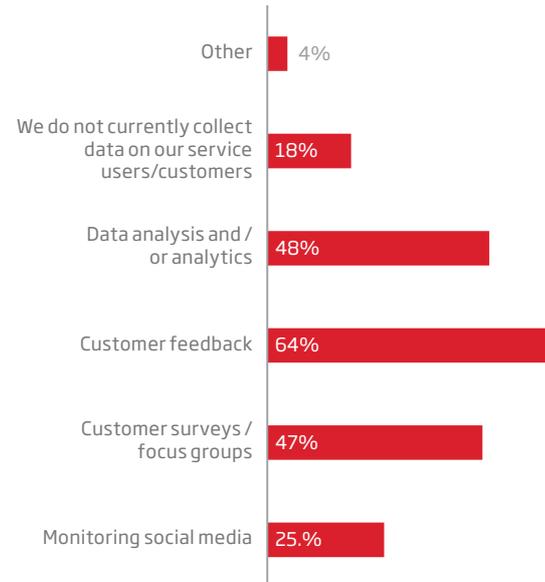
Intriguingly, only 43% of respondents said that they are using customer behaviour data to design their services. The discrepancy between the numbers gathering information and those using it to improve services could suggest that more work needs to be done by government to make sure staff are exploiting the power of the data sitting at their fingertips.

> 66 *We collect data on our service users, but in disparate forms. As most IT platforms are different, they are inflexible in communicating with each other.* 99
>
> Cabinet Office, Grade 6

Another possibility is that officials are relying too heavily on analogue methods to understand their audience. The favoured route identified in the survey was customer feedback, used by 64% of respondents – beating data analytics into second place at 48%. Other methods included customer surveys and focus groups (47%), as well as monitoring social media (25%). Valuable as these traditional methods still are, the relatively neglected potential of robust analytics data might suggest a problem among staff in understanding its usefulness.

What methods are you using to understand your service users/customers?

Method	%
Other	4%
We do not currently collect data on our service users/customers	18%
Data analysis and / or analytics	48%
Customer feedback	64%
Customer surveys / focus groups	47%
Monitoring social media	25.%

The survey also throws out another pointer for those designing digital services. 40% of respondents raised concerns about the digital literacy of their service users and their ability to use online services. When pressed further, civil servants commented that they still faced difficulties in getting users to use new digital services because of a lack of access (the ability to actually go online) and skills to be able to use the internet.

Progress report – worries about the future

The government's own Service Design Manual placed great emphasis on using data to improve the digital service. It makes clear that the collection of data allows civil servants to measure performance, in terms of meeting user needs and establishing whether there is sufficient uptake to make the service cost effective.

In this area, the results of the survey are slightly worrying. When respondents were asked for their primary measure of success in relation to digital transformation, the most popular response (28%) was "We are not currently measuring this". Those who were measuring success were predominantly using digital take-up (19%) and user satisfaction (15%).

The lack of consistent measurement of performance from the start and maintained through digital transformation projects needs to be addressed urgently as digital within government matures and departments take more control. A perception that introducing digital by itself leads to benefits for users and staff is as yet unproven. At such an early stage of the transformation journey, learning lessons from successful and less successful projects is vital. The survey shows a glaring gap in this area.

Turning to their views on the progress made by their organisation in redesigning external services through digital technologies, 35% said services were either live or near to it. Only 17% stated that their department had either not started or were at a very early stage.

These numbers contrast slightly with the levels of confidence relating to future progress. When asked whether they felt that their organisation would complete its digital transformation activity, 44% were positive and 20% said they were not confident (24% were undecided). The challenges ahead only underline the need for better use of data, not only to better understand users, but to measure the civil service's performance against its own digital aims.

How confident are you that your organisation is going to complete its digital transformation activity?

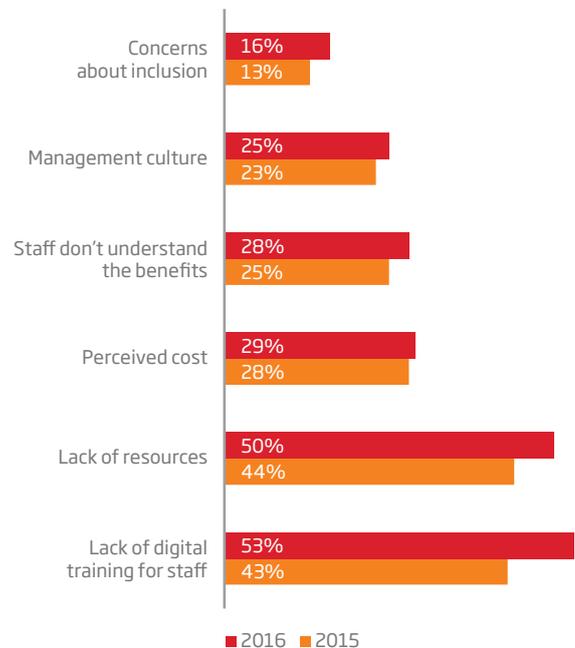|	
Very confident	17%
Confident	27%
Neutral	24%
Not confident	13%
Not at all confident	7%
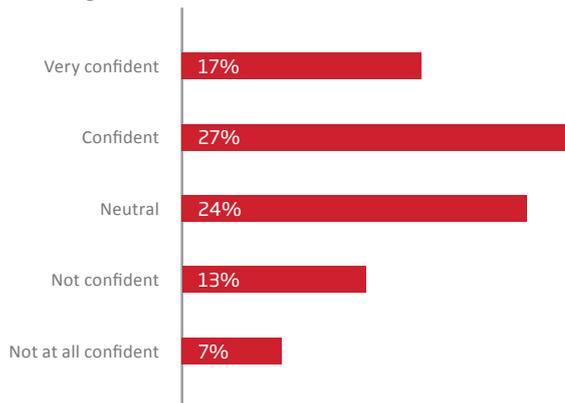
Hurdles remaining

Attempting to speed up the progress identified by our 2016 survey, it is important to understand what issues civil servants feel are standing in their way. It seems only logical to apply lessons from agile development – taking stock of progress during a development phase and tweaking approaches based on user feedback – to the process of digital transformation in central government.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, half of respondents identified a lack of resources as a barrier (an increase of 6% since 2015). A further 29% flagged up the perceived cost of projects. This neatly demonstrates the dilemma posed by decision makers in making upfront spending on projects which could take years to reap savings. In this context, it will be intriguing to see whether next year's survey shows an impact from George Osborne's boost to digital funding, which only took effect at the start of April.
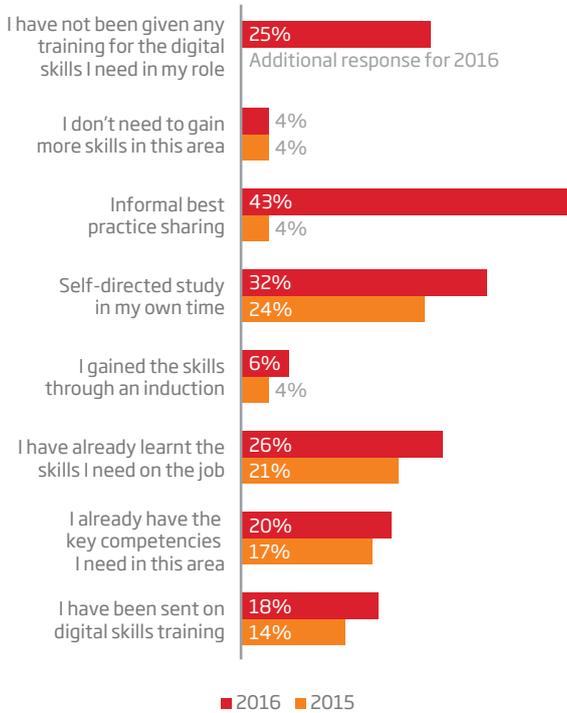
Do any of the following potential barriers prevent you from moving towards digital public services?

	2016	2015
Concerns about inclusion	16%	13%
Management culture	25%	23%
Staff don't understand the benefits	28%	25%
Perceived cost	29%	28%
Lack of resources	50%	44%
Lack of digital training for staff	53%	43%

■ 2016   ■ 2015

However, the biggest barrier to shifting services online identified by respondents is a lack of digital training for staff. A full 53% of respondents identified the problem, which made it the most significant shift in opinion from last year's survey, when 43% complained about training. It is less clear where the blame for this situation lies. While 30% of those surveyed agreed that they receive the support needed from government to move towards digital transformation, 26% disagreed.

When asked about whether they personally receive adequate digital skills training to do their own job, the number agreeing was just 39%. However, a surprisingly high level (25%) of respondents said that they had not received any training for the digital skills they need in their role.

What has been done to ensure you have the digital skills you need in your role?

Response	2016	2015
I have not been given any training for the digital skills I need in my role	25% (Additional response for 2016)	
I don't need to gain more skills in this area	4%	4%
Informal best practice sharing	43%	4%
Self-directed study in my own time	32%	24%
I gained the skills through an induction	6%	4%
I have already learnt the skills I need on the job	26%	21%
I already have the key competencies I need in this area	20%	17%
I have been sent on digital skills training	18%	14%

■ 2016 ■ 2015

Commenting on how they have learnt their digital skills, the largest response (43%) cited informal best practice sharing. The second highest answer was 'self-directed study in my own time' (32%), while 26% said they already had the key competencies they need to carry out their job. However, and more encouragingly, 18% of staff said they had been sent on specific digital skills training by their bosses (an increase of 5% since 2015).

It is likely that the rise in dissatisfaction with digital training within government is down to increasing demands being placed on staff as more projects go online. Staff training might not have been seen as essential during the front-end work of the last Parliament. But as back office systems and processes are overhauled, even more staff will need to pick up digital nous. Reductions in headcounts predicated on technological transformation only make this agenda more important.

However, a number of respondents working in operational delivery roles raised some concerns about the workforce's desire to pick up new skills. One said that staff are 'unwilling to learn digital methods', while another blamed 'concerns over how digitalising will make the business leaner, resulting in job losses'.

Conclusion – Skilling up for transformation

This is an exciting, yet challenging time, with an opportunity for the UK to continue leading the way globally on digital transformation within government. Valuable progress in making services more accessible for users has been achieved in the face of sharp budget cuts. However, now government is embarking on a more ambitious journey that takes a fundamental look at how digital technology can change the way those services are delivered.

Transformation means...

" ...meeting the needs and expectations of today's digital citizens. "

Northern Ireland Civil Service, Grade 7

" ...complete business transformation to enable government to do business in a digital world - so not just services to citizens. "

Department for International Development, Grade 7

" ...enabling the behavioural and cultural change required for pre, during and post digital transformation. "

Ministry of Justice, Senior Civil Servant

As the focus shifts from the front end to creating business critical applications and platforms for government, changes must be driven by the business need to deliver services to users in the most efficient manner. The era of bolting new technology on to old ways of working is over. However, making the transition relies on an increased understanding of service users, and setting relevant measures of success.

The 2016 Government Digital Trends Survey has pointed up steady process in meeting the government's goal of digital transformation. The majority – 64% have a high degree of confidence their organisation has a good understanding of typical service users – up from 62% last year. 57% say they gather information about users to ensure a good service – up from 55% last year. However, the jump in concern over skills – up from 43% last year to 53% this – suggests a significant change in circumstances.

As we have seen, many of the necessary analytics and measurement tools are at hand or within reach. But too often the civil service is not using them to their full potential. Although it is difficult to make a direct connection, it is worth pausing to consider whether there is a connection between the lack of formal training revealed in our survey with the missed opportunities for using data effectively. With skills becoming an increasingly acute issue, action from the centre is needed to help departments to cope with the new demands their staff are facing from digital transformation.

About Sopra Steria in government digital

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+ 38,000 people

+ 20 countries

+ 45 years' experience

Did you know?

Sopra Steria was the digital delivery partner behind the first live GDS 'exemplar', Student Loans Company, and continues to deliver real value to public sector organisations through user-centric design, 'Open' by default, Agile delivery methodologies and innovative commercial models.

We are helping our government clients achieve the benefits of digital transformation end to end, across government. This includes actively supporting digital industry forums and open source communities across the UK.

About Sopra Steria

Sopra Steria, European leader in digital transformation, provides one of the most comprehensive portfolios of end to end service offerings in the market: Consulting, End-to-End Digital Services, Systems Integration, Software Development and Business Process Services. Sopra Steria is trusted by leading private and public organisations to deliver successful transformation programmes that address their most complex and critical business challenges. Combining high quality and performance services, added-value and innovation, Sopra Steria enables its clients to make the best use of information technology.

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