GOVERNMENT AS A DIGITAL DISRUPTOR

DRIVING PUBLIC SERVICE INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION

“Digital Government” Roundtable Executive Briefing, 2014
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The debate on the day is presented through the lens of the main themes explored at the roundtable. In addition, this report sheds light on the cultural changes required to drive public sector innovation and transformation, and the role the European Commission has to play to foster digital transformation. Each topic includes analysis and data, based on Accenture research. In particular, we highlight some of the key insights explored in the 2014 reports “Accelerating Europe’s Comeback: Digital Opportunities for Competitiveness and Growth” and “Digital Government Pathways to Delivering Public Services for the Future.” We further include statistics and analysis from the European Commission and other secondary sources, as well as views from the digital government experts who participated in the roundtable.

“There is no separate digital economy. We have an economy that is digital.”

Neelie Kroes, Vice-President and Commissioner for the Digital Agenda at the European Commission.

This executive briefing summarises the discussion outcomes from the European Centre for Government Transformation roundtable on digital government, held in Brussels in June 2014.
AN ERA OF DIGITAL DISRUPTION

Digital is profoundly changing all aspects of our lives—the way we work, interact, and learn. Internet adoption among Europeans has been increasing rapidly, with 75 percent of all European Union (EU) citizens now actively using Internet.ii

The digital disruption is all around us - the wearable devices market, which has huge potential in public service—from remote health monitoring to instant reporting of crime—is expected to grow globally from US$1.4 billion this year to US$19 billion by 2018.iii According to industry predictions, 125 million people will be able to participate into the mainstream economy by 2015, as a result of growth of nontraditional (digital included) money creation and exchange.iv Moreover, digital has become a catalyst for growth and gaining competitive edge. Digital has grown seven times faster than other streams of the economy according to the European Commission.v In the aforementioned report "Accelerating Europe’s Comeback", 96 percent of surveyed European business leaders agree that digital technologies are critical or important to boost EU competitiveness.vi Cloud alone could create 2.5 million new jobs across Europe, as well as add an extra €160 billion per annum to EU gross domestic product by 2020.vii Digital is also likely to trigger profound changes to the organisation and operating modalities of government as a result of several factors. First, encouraged in part by their experiences with the private sector (for example, banking, consumer goods, media and entertainment services), citizens’ expectations of government services have risen significantly in recent years.

The majority of citizens say it is important for governments to provide more services through digital channels in the future (62 percent in Italy, 66 percent in France, 64 percent in Germany, 76 percent in the United Kingdom, and 81 percent in Norway).viii Additionally, with frail public sector finances and post-recession budgets, the pressure on government to transform and “do more and better with less” is unprecedented. The potential for public sector efficiency gains through digital technologies is significant; for example, digital services are estimated to save 70 percent of the cost of physical services in Denmark.ix

Finally, if implemented successfully, digital could deliver service quality improvements as well as social and economic benefits; for example the zero licensing initiative in Portugal enables online licensing applications, reducing processing time from 60 days to one day.x In summary, it is imperative for governments to embrace digital and transform their legacy systems to achieve an agile, insight-driven, and “as a service” model.
THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A MODERN DIGITAL STATE

What does it mean for a government to be truly digital? What characterises the modern digital state?

In the last few years, there has been a growing focus from governments on digital, but what is meant by digital, the strategies applied and the service maturity of digital government still vary greatly across countries. A common theme emerging is that digital government is not simply digitising existing physical services processes (that is, the underlying approach for e-government).

Rather, it embraces an end-to-end digitalisation—from the core digitalisation of public services to the digital infrastructure, governance and processes, new service delivery and business models. As our roundtable experts agree, however, there are several characteristics that successful digital governments share, namely:

1. OPEN AND CITIZEN-CENTRIC

Digital transformation entails an open and collaborative government that places citizen engagement and preferences at the heart of its services.

Most governments are burdened with (often legacy) proprietary systems that are based on bespoke technology, closed platforms or applications and do not have standard data exchange protocols. Such limitations in their existing systems restrict how they function and integrate with other services and applications across the whole of government.

In the new digital reality, governments need to “open” up their systems and (non-sensitive) data across different services, and build these on open source software. In this way governments can create a bridge across key public services, enabling seamless collaboration between agencies and jurisdictions, and providing a holistic view of the citizen.

Embracing a new “open paradigm” means governments are better placed to introduce new digital economies, bringing in a host of other influencers, including developers and citizens, to reuse the code, design relevant public applications and propose service improvements. There are already numerous leading practices and cases of digital transformation in the public sector at national, regional and local levels. However, many of these transformations remain “islands of excellence.” Successful practices and innovations should be publically available and actively shared, both within and across governments. Sharing or “stealing” code in this new, open paradigm should be considered a positive externality.

GOV.UK, United Kingdom

The integrated government portal GOV.UK, developed by the UK Government Digital Service, is an example of a successful digital government initiative, based on the principles of openness and user-centricity. Delivered with the goal of helping the citizen, the platform makes it “simpler, clearer, faster” for citizens to find information and interact with government. In line with the Government IT Strategy service design principle, which stipulates that government should procure open source solutions where appropriate, GOV.UK platform has made its code, design principles and APIs open. As a result, the code has been reused for other government platforms around the world.
X-Road, Estonia

Estonia’s X-Road interoperability system enables communication between all national e-services databases. Covering more than 170 databases and enabling the functioning of more than 2,000 services provided by 900 organisations, X-Road is the backbone of Estonia’s digital government. X-Road highlights the importance of making services open and interoperable to streamline and provide public services across government areas quickly and efficiently. Currently, Estonia is planning to share X-Road with Finland’s government, to realise the benefits of regional cooperation between services.

Fostering a more open, digital society can also be achieved by encouraging greater citizen engagement in policymaking and service design. The design of digital services is still in large part driven by detailed policy, based on simply embedding digital technologies in the current processes (for example, digitising non-digital processes) rather than completely rethinking services to fit the new digital reality. An Accenture Citizen Survey in 2013 affirms this challenge, with less than half of European citizens surveyed responding that they are satisfied with the quality of public services (47 percent in Norway, 37 percent in the United Kingdom, 31 percent in Germany, 28 percent in France, and 13 percent in Italy).

The roundtable experts proposed that in the new digital society, government could play more of a convenor and facilitator role. Digital governments should aim to include citizens in the policy design process, thereby increasing trust and engagement. To deliver responsive and enhanced services, governments—enabled by digital tools such as social media and mobility—should include citizens in a dialogue and allow them to co-design and co-produce public services.

Flanders in Action, Belgium

The “Flanders in Action” programme highlights that to introduce system innovation, government needs to be open and collaborative, partnering with society (citizens, academia, and businesses). The programme has embraced an ongoing collaboration and transparent information sharing. A key pillar of the programme is citizens’ satisfaction and participation in digital service improvements. Moreover, joint execution with citizens, organisations and companies is seen as the only strategic path for the future.
2. DATA AND INSIGHT-DRIVEN

Data is the lifeblood of the new digital state—unlocking the potential of data can create a wealth of new insights on how people use services or the one’s most in need, help tailor public services to constituent needs, and provide real-time information to improve organisational efficiency and mission effectiveness.

Businesses that use “data-driven decision-making” have observed a 5 to 6 percent increase in productivity. However, there are a few obstacles that currently stand in the way of progress.

First, public data is not always open and easily accessible; that is, data is either not available, undiscoverable or spread out across multiple sources. Government data (for example, geospatial, healthcare, financial, transport, cultural asset data, and so on), where possible, should become open—of good quality, reliable and interoperable, enabling a variety of actors to use this data. Government should enable developers to design new apps and software based on openly available public information, with data becoming a main value and innovation driver in the knowledge economy. For instance, publically available geospatial and transport data can be used to produce maps and applications, alerting citizens and businesses about travel disruptions, available services on the road network or to help them find parking facilities in real time.

Second, capabilities to anticipate trends and produce forecasts are not currently in place. Governments often find themselves reacting to issues or solving problems retroactively. The data revolution enables governments to become insight-driven, which can include customer segmentation capabilities, powered by data analytics, so that government can better understand constituent needs and preferences, propose more targeted interventions, forecast trends and proactively address issues (for example, tax evasion and social fraud prevention).

While there are genuine concerns about privacy and security, these should not be used as “red-herrings” to justify legacy positions. There is a growing feeling amongst the digital policymaking that change is gaining momentum and people will, indeed, exchange privacy and security for much higher convenience and quality outcomes, provided there are certain safeguards in place.

France’s decision to join the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and recent announcement to create the function of State Chief Data Officer (CDO) are both examples of how the opening of government data is taking place in Europe. Authorized to access the data held by the state administration and its agencies, the CDO’s mandate will include: organizing a better flow of information in the economy and within the administration, in respect of privacy and legal secrets, ensuring the production or acquisition of essential data, as well as disseminating tools, methods and a culture of data within ministries and agencies, to the benefit of their respective missions and objectives. France is the first European country to create this function that many companies and local authorities, in the United-States for instance, have already deployed, remaining at the forefront of public innovation.
Etalab, France

Etalab, the open data agency, as part of the Prime Minister’s office, is a key protagonist of the data revolution as a means to modernise the public sector. With a focus on data as an enabler, Etalab aims to promote open data and transparency across the government. Etalab strongly advocates the far-reaching impact of a data-driven government strategy. It coordinates the data.gouv.fr portal, which provides access to more than 13,000 free and reusable public information data sets. Etalab also supports the openfisca.fr platform, which enables micro-simulations of the French tax-benefit system to offer citizens a better understanding of the impact and changes to the taxation system with respect to their own finances. The platform uses the power of data to generate valuable insights and present these to citizens in an appealing and accessible way.
First, governments need to reassess their “service offer” to address citizens’ expectations and the changing economic and technological conditions. For example, a traditional public employment or pensions agency provides more “support” functions, which may, through the power of digital technologies, change to “enablement” functions in the future.

Digital governments need to embrace fundamental transformations of their organisations, their workforce and their processes. In this digital world, the role of a physical central or regional government may, indeed, be open to debate, as digital also facilitates a new ecosystem, with multiple influencers where the common currency is citizen or enterprise data.

From this perspective, there is a growing recognition that large-scale IT transformation may not always be the best solution due to the complexity, time to implement and investment risks.

As part of this transition away from “big IT,” there has been a significant re-design of procurement procedures across Europe, with a focus on levelling the playing field. By encouraging providers of all sizes to engage more small, medium enterprises (SMEs), government can benefit from more innovative thinking and approaches. In this way, government enters a new era of “agile commissioning” where success in delivery defines the path forward. Using this new paradigm, governments can realise the benefits of the services that they pay for rather than getting embroiled in multi-year procurements. At the same time, it is important to note that the digital transformation should be supported by a robust critical infrastructure, strategically controlled by government (that is, having its own g-cloud to ensure data is securely stored). While enabling flexibility in policymaking and delivery within this digital ecosystem, government should ensure there are no digital “haves and have-nots” and the social fabric of society is preserved.

Consip, Italy

Consip, the Italian public procurement agency, is embracing innovation in procurement strategy. The agency is transforming its rigid procurement activity, which was biased toward constituents and placed the emphasis on front-office activity, and moving toward a more adaptive model which incorporates principles of federal governance and investment in the back office. Additionally, Consip regards e-procurement as a significant contribution to the Single European market, and has focused efforts on promoting system interoperability to achieve market integration.
A significant transformation in the new digital era is the way government delivers services. With the growth of crowdsourcing and open source technologies, government can tap into a distributed voluntary peer-to-peer network of providers and new digital communities to co-design and co-create public services. Government should act as an enabler in a networked ecosystem and assess the best provider for services based on quality and economic benefits. It has a significant role to play in sharing synergies and leading practices, catalysing talent and innovation, and building the connective tissue of the digital transformation. Emulating the private sector, the modern digital public sector should be comfortable with a certain degree of risk-taking and acceptance of failure, but also learn quickly from mistakes and move on.

Governments could start with disaggregating outdated legacy systems and acting as a platform, where services are brokered by an agile, responsive central organisation and delivered by a network of providers (for example, national, regional, local government, private partners, non-government organisations, and so on).

Government Digital Service, United Kingdom

The Government Digital Service (GDS) in the United Kingdom is an example of how innovative digital government transformations can be driven by a lean central team that focuses on delivery. GDS has done a great deal of remedial work as a result of the continuous failure of outdated services, built on legacy systems. However, by embracing agility and user-centricity in the design and implementation, GDS has aimed to engage citizens from the outset; that is, in the policymaking and service design stages of the project. Moreover, GDS benefits from using a networked ecosystem of providers rather than procuring big IT projects. Therefore, the GDS team realises the government vision by redefining the scope and adopting a mantra of “thinking big, starting from small and up-scaling quickly.”

4. DIGITALLY SKILLED AND INCLUSIVE

Governments have a crucial role in preparing society and the public sector workforce to embrace the new digital paradigm.

Although broadband penetration is offering virtually universal access to the Internet across Europe, digital inclusion is still an issue for most societies, especially with respect to integrating and upskilling vulnerable segments of society (such as the elderly and those with disabilities). The roundtable experts admit that digital literacy has become an essential skill, which needs to be strongly promoted. To achieve digital inclusion, governments must provide interventions from the top of the demographic pyramid to the bottom. At the top, government must provide for the elderly who need some facilitation and support in engaging with the new digital services.

At the bottom, digital education needs to start early and be firmly embedded within the school curriculum. For example, the digital champion (see sidebar) in Finland is already working with local education institutions to incorporate coding in primary school curriculum, to enable children to gain valuable technology skills.\textsuperscript{xx}

With the growth of massive open online courses (MOOCs), which enable almost everyone to have access to the world’s best educational materials free online, educational norms are set to change. The potential opportunity for upskilling on a mass scale at limited cost is huge. Moreover, in the current scenario of high unemployment, governments can play a major role in enabling digital entrepreneurs through “smart specialisation” policies,\textsuperscript{xix} access to innovative sources of funding, and providing tax incentives for digital businesses that can demonstrate value to society.

A digitally-savvy and innovative public sector workforce is another essential characteristic of a successful digital government. In reality, digital transformation has to happen from within—the public service workforce has to become digital to promote transformation and change for citizens. Digital technologies, including analytics, social media, automated workflows and cloud need to be promoted within government to enable a tech-savvy, high-performing workforce.

It is somewhat of a paradox that many of the political elites have been using digital to reach to constituents (for example, the social media presence and election campaigns of Barack Obama, Matteo Renzi, Narendra Modi) yet many in the policy elites have not embraced digital tools as a means to increase citizen engagement and improve effectiveness. For the whole public workforce to embrace these new digital tools, it is important for policy elites to promote and use technologies to collaborate, work and engage with constituents, that is to say, leading by example.

Digital Champions

Digital champions are a network of creative and motivated people from EU Member States, who help every European become digital by promoting digital skills and entrepreneurship, sharing ideas and innovations in Information Communications and Technology education, digital inclusion, access and e-government.

These ambassadors of the Digital Agenda for Europe aim to promote the philosophy of “ambition, attitude and know-how” amongst Europeans, motivating young Europeans to become more entrepreneurial and innovate both in the public and private sectors. Uncapping and mobilising such formal and informal networks is essential for the development of a truly digital and networked society.\textsuperscript{xxi}

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e-Cabinet, Estonia

The Estonian e-Cabinet is a multi-user database and scheduler that enables real-time updates both in the e-Cabinet internal software as well as on an external website. This virtual tool has generated significant efficiency gains for the public sector—it has enabled the reduction of the average duration of the weekly cabinet meetings from four to five hours to between 30 and 90 minutes, and has made remote connection and paperless transactions possible. Moreover, it has improved transparency and digital inclusion for citizens by presenting the decision-making process of the Estonian government in a highly informative and accessible way.
The roundtable experts agree that many of the remaining challenges on the path to a modern digital government relate to traditional issues, such as the way constituents connect with people in power, the mindset of public service officials and policymakers, or the nature of government and bureaucracy.

Public sector workforces are often entangled in complex policy debates, which can slow down delivery and hinder innovation. Creativity and innovation as a mindset should be promoted as the guiding principles for reform. Public administrations need to be able to contemplate their “institutional death,” that is, accept failure, as it is an essential part of the modernisation and innovation process. It is also important for public innovators to be driven by the same set of ideals and beliefs in the transformational power of digital. Risk taking, along with the ability to say “no,” can also be welcomed as part of an innovative digital workforce. Moreover, incentives should be introduced for civil servants to innovate and adopt digital. The roundtable experts highlight that change must be led by example, from the top, and engage the broader society in the transformation.

Achieving a digital government means not just cutting cost and implementing technologies; it involves changing people’s roles, cultures and incentives.
What can the EU do to foster digital innovation in public services?

**Digital is high on the policy agenda, it’s not a “nice to have.”**

From this perspective, the Digital Agenda for Europe has played a key role in establishing digital priorities as an essential reform agenda for governments. Furthermore, the interest in digital has spread throughout the whole commission, and not just in the responsible entities—Directorate-General Research and Innovation and Directorate-General Communications Networks, Content and Technology (CONNECT).

Digital, in particular, and public service innovation, more generally, must be of paramount importance for the next European Commission (2014 to 2019). A coherent approach for digital should be developed across all policy areas. Moreover, the digital transformation agenda needs to be elevated to attract the attention of the European semester and the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (ECOFIN), as well as the Directorate-General for Regional Affairs which should make it part and parcel of its Smart Specialisation strategies.

It is necessary to strengthen cooperation and assist with investment in critical digital infrastructure across the EU.

The Commission should promote common data interoperability standards (for example, through the revision and promotion of the European Interoperability Framework) and showcase prime examples of initiatives from Member States. Additionally, sharing more information on digital public services across governments is necessary. In terms of digital tools, there are already some that are supported by the Commission; for example, the e-practice website which is used for sharing ideas and apps. However, its promotion and use across the EU should increase.

The EU has a role to play in institutionalizing this shared approach, both across Member States and within the Commission. While often thought of only in the context of the public sector, digital government policies can have a profound impact on technology adoption in the private sector, particularly among small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). SMEs often lag in their adoption of digital technologies, which has negative repercussions for their ability to raise productivity, perform better on innovation and increase their customer base.

Against this backdrop, Portugal’s Agency for Modernisation of the Public Administration (AMA) initiated the “Zero Licensing” programme, which makes online registration for business the rule. Using the online channel reduces the bureaucratic hurdles SMEs usually face in opening a business, allowing them to start trading from day one rather than spending time in administration corridors and filling in multiple forms.

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**Futurium, European Union**

Digital can be used to increase the quality and participation of democracy. New tools for co-creation and deliberative dialogue at a European level include Futurium. Futurium is an online platform, which encourages widespread reflection of future European policies, combining the informal character of social networks with the methodological approach of foresights to engage stakeholders in the co-creation of futures and policy ideas that matter to them. In this way, Futurium can help to engage citizens and promote a “bottom-up” approach to policymaking.
As a result of this government e-practice, SMEs have strong incentives to go online and to engage with digital technologies. The results are formidable: according to the Digital Agenda Scoreboard 2013, 93 percent of Portuguese SMEs have taken up e-government, compared to an EU average of 85 percent and with neighboring country Spain scoring only 77 percent.xxvi

From a legislative perspective, the EU should continue with its reforms. In particular, it is essential to preserve the net neutrality, focus on ID management and cybersecurity. Similarly, the efforts to strengthen the Digital Single Market should continue. For example, the recently launched mini-VAT one-stop shop, which enables companies to file a single VAT application online to cover all EU operations, has been a step in the right direction.

However, achieving an agreement on copyright and data protection systems in Europe is essential if we are to enable a truly digital economy. The ability to reform and modernise is key and will determine where the digital agenda is headed in next five years. Going forward, setting another long-term strategic agenda for digital might not be the sole solution given the fiscal constraints, changing cultures and pace of technology disruption. Rather, to complement the strategic agenda, Europe needs agile and concrete shorter-term action plans. These should be assessed and re-evaluated on an ongoing basis, to maintain delivery as the main strategy.
CONCLUSION

Digital transformation for governments requires a divorce from legacy systems and the adoption of open, flexible, user-centric approaches to service delivery while enabling a flourishing networked digital ecosystem. The roundtable experts agree that no significant transformation and innovation is possible without a change in the mindset and public service culture to encourage creativity, risk-taking and collaboration, both within and outside government.

For the digital transformation in Europe to succeed, it is necessary for policymakers to understand the demands placed on entrepreneurs and citizens.

From this aspect, a bold initiative to elevate the topic of digital transformation across society is the European Digital Forum,\textsuperscript{xxvii} which aims to bring together businesses and policymakers to establish digital at the heart of the policymaking agenda.

The financial crisis has been a catalysing moment for mobilisation; however, governments now need to expedite their efforts so that they do not fall behind technological advances and become obsolete in the eyes of citizens.
A special thanks to all who participated in the lively discussion at this year’s roundtable.

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