

A microscopic view of plant cells, showing a dense arrangement of circular cells. The cells are stained with a color gradient, transitioning from blue on the left to yellow in the center, and back to blue on the right. The cell walls are clearly visible, creating a grid-like pattern.

Deloitte.

Driving transformation
Lessons for the public sector

UK Public Sector

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Executive summary

'Transformation' is a popular buzzword in both the private and public sectors. But the word alone does not help us to understand how transformation can actually occur, nor the role of leadership. This paper aims to help do so through five private sector lessons for the public sector alongside three themes that challenge transformation in all organisations.

From our client work, some hallmarks of transformation programmes seem constant. For instance, they are usually led by a strategy and frequently involve a customer journey. Transformation always involves operating model change, usually industry change, and is often linked to regulatory pressure.

While there are some similarities with capital projects – such as the need for effective leaders, a positive enabling environment, realistic budgets and supportive stakeholders – there are also crucial differences. Transformations require a clear vision of the outcomes and benefits, but generally avoid detailed solutions in their early phases. Rather than focusing on one 'big bang' procurement of a supplier, they motivate and coordinate different customer and supplier groups which understand the issues more clearly and can experiment with partial solutions.

When we asked leaders about transformation, they emphasised internal barriers to success. These range from traditional obstacles such as shortages of capability and commitment through to new challenges including a lack of common language, management approaches to digital change, and the engagement of broader networks of suppliers, stakeholders, intermediaries and regulators. Transformation programmes can be complex and demanding for leaders. They must learn to lead without authority and blend traditional programmatic management disciplines with adaptive approaches of experimentation and motivation.

Based on our past client work, we have distilled the experiences of global companies, high-tech start-ups, manufacturers, banks, retailers, insurance firms and others into three

broad themes that universally challenge private sector transformation programmes:

1. **More leadership** – not more leaders.
2. **Clarity and decisiveness** – in phasing, governance and decision-making.
3. **Responding to the digital challenge across the organisation** – not just in IT.

The reality is that very little is truly unique to either the private or the public sector's approach to transformation. Both require long-term multi-phase approaches, intense stakeholder management, deep understanding and flexibility around customer behaviour, top leadership engagement, and new capabilities to successfully deliver transformation.

Our five key lessons from the private sector all apply equally within the public sector, and allow us to identify the actions needed from the main players in transformation programmes:

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|  Lesson 1 | Define transformation widely but definitively for your organisation. |
|  Lesson 2 | Recognise that transformation brings greater complexity and demands on leaders. |
|  Lesson 3 | Leaders need to be on a personal journey. They must learn how to lead without authority, and how to blend traditional management disciplines with experimentation and motivation. |
|  Lesson 4 | Manage the programme tightly, with well-designed phases and absolute clarity of accountability and decision rights. |
|  Lesson 5 | Use digital across the organisation as a transforming element to drive improved customer outcomes. |

Lesson one: Defining transformation

The terms 'major change' and 'turnaround' now appear to be insufficiently ambitious, with corporate and political leaders routinely talking about 'transforming' businesses instead. With the digital revolution threatening many established businesses and operating models, it appears that nothing less than a thorough rethinking, restructuring and reskilling will do.

Looking at recent examples, the media has found it easy to applaud the digital strategies of the John Lewis Partnership while attributing others' failures to a lack of 'transformation'. Ministers talk about 'transforming' service delivery and new permanent secretaries are being appointed with reputations for transforming organisations.

The trouble is that one word alone does not constitute a language or way of working that enables effective communication and leadership. In addition, fatigue and cynicism can breed quickly where incremental change is wrongly badged as transformation. That effect is multiplied when such change fails. In our client work here at Deloitte, we have not found the holy grail of a single, universally-applicable definition of the word 'transformation'. However, they are usually led by a change in strategy and frequently involve a customer journey. Transformation always involves operating model change, usually industry change, and is often linked to regulatory pressure.

When looking for analogous 'major change' projects, some organisations seek to draw parallels with large-scale capital programmes that resulted in transformational outcomes – e.g. the London Olympic Games, Heathrow Terminal 5. There are certainly some similarities. For instance, both capital projects and transformations require effective leaders, a positive enabling environment, realistic budgets and planning horizons, and supportive stakeholders. But there are also crucial differences:

- **Capital schemes require accurate forecasts**, benchmarked against comparable projects, with design frozen in the initial phase after intense detailed engineering, usually implying innovative and sophisticated technical solutions.
- **Transformations require a clear vision of the outcomes and benefits, but avoid detailed solutions in the early phases.** They motivate and coordinate different customer and supplier groups, as they understand the issues more clearly and can experiment with partial solutions.
- **Commercial strategy, procurement and post-contract management are pivotal for capital projects**, with procurement frequently occurring in one 'big bang' transaction. Transformations will also usually require clear market strategies and contracting, but can adopt a more experimental, incremental approach. Transformations often require major commercial partners, frequently creating new markets or propositions.

So, lesson one from experience is *"define transformation widely but definitively for your organisation."*

Difficulty in defining transformation is a symptom of the inherent challenge to successfully deliver it – if the starting point is unclear, then leaders will struggle. When we asked leaders to comment on their experiences of transformation, they flagged up internal barriers to success more than they commented on competitors' activities.

Lesson two: Transformation brings greater complexity and demands

What leaders are saying about transformation

“ A lot of my time is spent on the process, on bureaucracy and on unblocking things. ”

“ Top managers are all saying the right things but nothing is changing. ”

“ We need to work across boundaries to deliver value and new solutions for the customer. ”

“ Transformation means we all need to work in a transformed way and think out of the box. ”

“ Having the right people with the right accountability really matters. ”

“ Transformation is about long term culture change, changing hearts and minds, getting people to listen. ”

“ Everyone is speaking different languages, talking about the same things in different ways. IT has a different language from marketing and again from digital. This can get in the way of transformation. ”

Source: Interviews with transformation leaders, January 2016

Many leaders have struggled with transformation in the past. The reasons for this are quite similar to those we obtained in the pre-digital and pre-crash era when asking why major change was difficult:

- **A shortage of leadership, sponsorship and continuity.**
- **Inadequate learning, capability and capacity.**
- **Misalignment within organisations of accountabilities, processes and structures.**

What is different in the post-digital and post-crisis era is that we have now added:

- **A lack of common language** to describe issues and solutions – including coping with inaccessible new digital products.
- **New management approaches required** for successful customer and digital strategies – including acceptance of uncertain project deliverables and timings.
- **More networks, stakeholders and regulators to be engaged** – leaving most transformation directors accountable for delivery without direct line authority.

We conclude that transformation programmes offer a much greater challenge than the ‘major change’ projects of the past or large capital schemes – they are truly complex, not just complicated.

They also place expectations on leaders that are enormously demanding. They must lead people over whom they do not have authority, while assuring corporate leaders that an uncertain project solution and timing are facts of life to be managed, not aberrations or examples of mismanagement.

So, lesson two from experience is *“recognise that transformation brings greater complexity and demands on leaders.”*

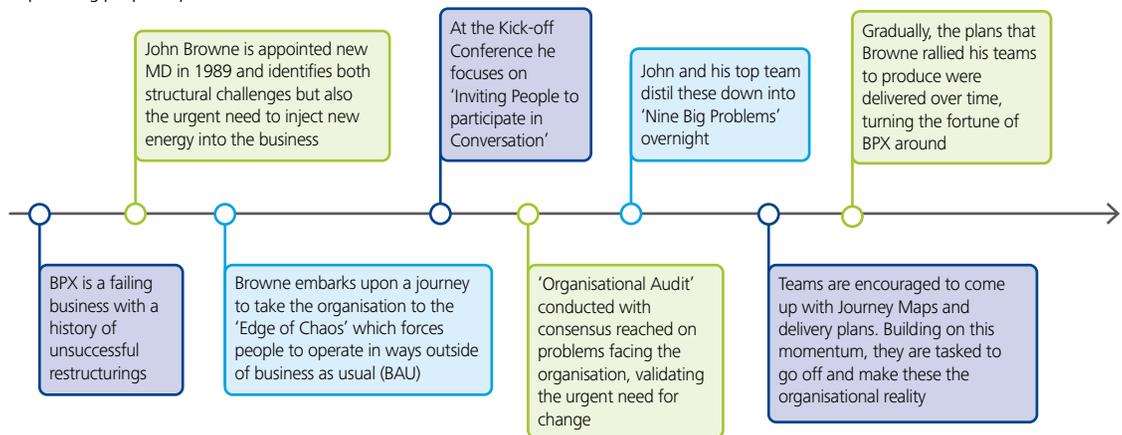
Lesson three: Leaders need to be on a personal journey

Popular business media and the 'Heathrow Business School' lionise the decisive and inspirational corporate leader. But the reality is that, although the individual at the top does matter enormously, the essential transformation dynamic involves creating the context where leadership can be exercised at all levels.

A leader who deliberately drove transformation towards 'productive distress' in order to change his organisation's culture is illustrated below.

Learnings from BP Exploration (BPX)

Empowering people to perform



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| Learnings | <p>The power of involving people in the conversation: BPX MD John Browne recognised that transformation could be led from the top, but it is much more effective and sustainable if people are encouraged to engage with and own the issues that directly affect them. Browne worked hard to foster an open dialogue, where people could be honest about their challenges.</p> <p>Mix teams and skillsets for success: In a truly adaptive style, mixed teams of differing skillsets across the business were attributed specific problems facing the business and tasked with coming up with solutions. By mixing teams that wouldn't ordinarily come together, proposed solutions were more creative and holistic. If options survived debates within these mixed teams who represented conflicting areas of the business, they stood a chance of working in the real life organisation.</p> |
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| Driving transformation through leadership | <p>Browne's leadership shook up the organisation's typical ways of working by using a variety of 'action-forcing events' which compelled his teams into action. He focused on creating the right environment for constructive conversations about concerns, and capitalised on this momentum by giving teams large tasks with tangible outputs to be delivered within short timeframes. By changing the pace, and to some degree overloading the organisation, Browne increased the urgency and pace of change ensuring the organisation could not continue to operate in BAU terms. Teams came up with inventive solutions and were empowered by being given the responsibility to deliver them. Browne's leadership wake-up call prompted a cultural shift which was eventually sufficient to overhaul the business.</p> |
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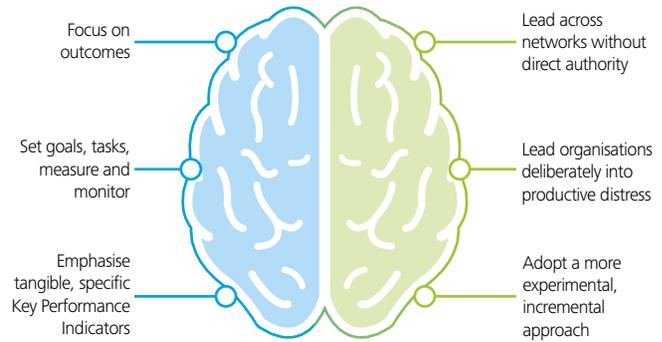
Source: 'Surfing the edge of chaos' – Pascale, Milleman, Gioja (2000)

Of course, the sole leader cut off from others is bound to fail because transformation requires the mass of people to change and therefore the person at the top needs to engage through motivated management teams. When it comes to effective transformation, we see leaders who exercise subtle leadership, allocating work to the people best-qualified and most essential. In today's connected context, leadership has to be marshalled, cajoled and motivated across distributed organisations.

To be clear, we are not arguing for the abandonment of traditional management disciplines. Rather, we are calling for leaders who can exercise effective programmatic 'left brain' leadership and influence through adaptive 'right brain' leadership. It is not that certain leadership tasks call for one approach or the other – instead they usually require a blend of both programmatic and adaptive approaches. For example, when setting out on a journey calling for a mindset shift (an archetypal adaptive task), it will give people confidence to begin with a series of programmatic tasks – such as measuring the current state of, or improving, a key indicator.

Some public sector environments add different layers of complexity onto leadership, particularly where it is shared across political and operational roles. The role of the political leader such as a minister, and the role of the public servant such as a permanent secretary do not fit neatly into left and right brain leadership styles.

More leadership – not just programmatic but also adaptive



So, lesson three from experience is *“leaders need to be on a personal journey – they must learn to lead without authority, and how to blend traditional management disciplines with experimentation and motivation.”*

Lesson four: Managing the programme

Effective transformation leaders will encourage experimentation and creativity, without losing some of the more traditional tried-and-tested tools for managing organisational change – such as having a clear design for the future organisation, and a robust roadmap to get there.

Given the complexity, uncertainty and ambition of transformation outcomes, it is important for the credibility of a programme to have clarity of design. The following actions are required:

- **Designing phases of 6-60 months in transformation programmes that make sense**, depending on the physical and IT constraints, the extent of mindset/behaviour change that is realistic in one step and stakeholder support – resulting in a coherent set of activities and outcomes that lay the foundations for the next phase.
- **Tailoring governance processes that add value** and are matched to the nature and timing of the transformation – not the standard corporate process for major investments.
- **Ensuring key decisions are made by top management** and that programme management, capabilities and organisation design (structures, processes, measures, systems) all deliver data and insight to enable integrated decision-making. The effect will be to join up the emerging designs in each part of the organisation, supported by clear change control and review processes, to create alignment around the future design.

Adhering to these three requirements will enable transformation programmes to avoid the typical pitfalls of:

- **Delayed decision-making and conflicts**, resulting in loss of benefits.
- **Escalation of decisions to the highest possible level** instead of decision-making by the most qualified and nearest individual.
- **Siloed decision-making** rather than integrating organisation-wide risks and managing interdependencies.

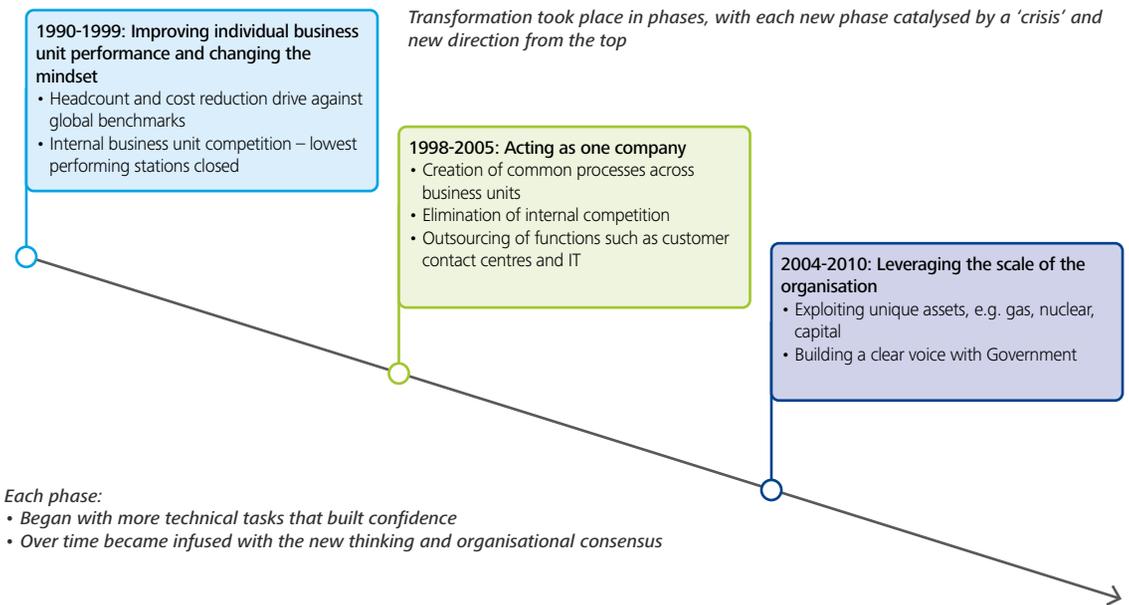
While these pitfalls exist in any sector, they can be felt particularly keenly in the public sector and additionally exacerbated by constraints on reward and recruitment, difficulty in setting goals beyond political cycles and lack of clarity over who is driving change. Those factors have serious implications for talent, long-term planning and ultimately, success.

More fundamentally, public sector organisations can find themselves signed up to transformation by proxy, especially when a government asks for sector-wide change. The danger is that public bodies and government departments appear to sign-up to high-profile change programmes but fail to deliver authentic change – and maybe never intended to. Public sector leaders need to decide on transformation themselves, even if such change takes place within a wider process.

Learnings from Powergen

Transformation in phases

Privatisation of the electricity industry in 1989 created private sector players (including Powergen) from state-owned entities. Powergen needed to transform to become more efficient, rationalise its asset base, build modern gas-fired capacity and shape the new competitive market.

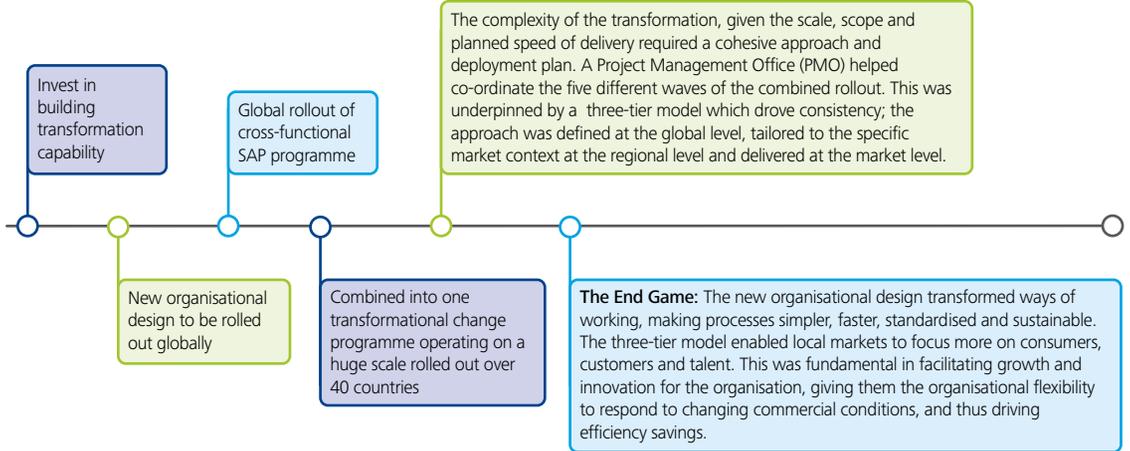


Learnings

Because transformation is by definition radical and carried through by large numbers of people in dispersed organisations, it will necessarily go through distinct phases, each building on what goes before and shifting mindsets over time.

Learnings from a global private sector organisation

The transformation journey



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| Learnings | <p>Key Learnings: Why Accountability and Governance Matters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This programme spanned six years and involved five ‘waves’ of go-live which would not have been successful if people hadn’t been held to account for delivery. The organisation found that as the scale and complexity of the programme increased, so too did the importance of having clear governance and accountability mechanisms in place. • The programme invested heavily in a PMO function which helped co-ordinate a structured approach to planning for delivery, resources, risks and budgets. Defined roles and responsibilities were essential in helping people plan what they needed to do to enable successful delivery, as well as helping them understand their goals in the context of the bigger picture. • Accountability provides the structure for effective communication, which is a fundamental aspect of transformation. |
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| Key facts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation is a global enterprise spanning 160 markets, 250 brands and employing over 60,000 people worldwide. • An external benchmarking review was conducted, and showed that internal costs were higher than those of their peers. • Regulation is influential within the industry and is entirely non-negotiable. This accentuated growing cost pressures – product prices couldn’t be raised to account for growing manufacturing and staff costs. • Underpinned by the need to drive efficiency savings, the organisation had an ambition to become more globally integrated with standardised data and processes. This meant shaping the organisation’s strategy, management, design and operations around a common set of global values. • Critically, this required a shift in culture and the ability to manage the constant tension between regional interests and a standardised global approach – with stakeholders needing to understand how the new model would drive improved profitability. • The diversity across the global functions also posed a challenge as the organisation worked to develop standard processes. |
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So, lesson four from experience is “manage the programme tightly, with well-designed phases and absolute clarity of accountabilities and decision rights.”

Lesson five: Driving improved customer outcomes through digital

The drivers of transformation are changing, with digital fundamentally shifting the way that private sector organisations operate.

Digital is not simply about back-office transformation but instead impacts all levels of an organisation, creating new ways of interacting with customers, as well as new products that are changing the revenue base. Private sector organisations are at different points of their journey towards digital maturity. But most are starting to see digital have an impact across their operations, rather than it simply being the remit of a Chief Digital Officer (CDO). Both private and public sectors are at a tipping point where digital is becoming default – in the way processes are managed and the way goods and services are delivered.

Digital also dramatically reduces the capital intensity of transformation, enabling a more flexible and iterative approach. Cloud computing, for example, means solutions no longer need to be hosted in-house, increasing the speed at which they can be configured.

Ownership of consumer mobile devices removes the need to invest in handheld tools to support the rollout of new applications across organisations. This creates a more experimental, agile attitude to problems which previously needed a ‘big bang’ approach to transformation because of the upfront costs of getting started.

So, lesson five from experience is *“use digital across the organisation as a transforming element to drive improved customer outcomes.”*

What lessons can the public sector learn from private firms?

The reality is that very little is truly unique to either the private or the public sector's approach to transformation. Both require long-term multi-phase approaches, intense stakeholder management, deep understanding and flexibility around customer behaviour, top leadership engagement, and new capabilities to successfully deliver transformation.

These five key lessons learned by the private sector can all equally be applied to the public sector:

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|  <p>Lesson 1</p> | Define transformation widely but definitively for your organisation. |
|  <p>Lesson 2</p> | Recognise that transformation brings greater complexity and demands on leaders. |
|  <p>Lesson 3</p> | Leaders need to be on a personal journey. They must learn how to lead without authority, and how to blend traditional management disciplines with experimentation and motivation. |
|  <p>Lesson 4</p> | Manage the programme tightly, with well-designed phases and absolute clarity of accountability and decision rights. |
|  <p>Lesson 5</p> | Use digital across the organisation as a transforming element to drive improved customer outcomes. |

On the flipside, the three key themes capable of holding back the transformation of private sector firms may also prove challenging for public bodies. Based on our client work, we have distilled the experiences of global companies, high-tech start-ups, manufacturers, banks, retailers, insurance firms and others into these broad themes that universally challenge private sector transformation programmes.

Theme one: More leadership – not more leaders

Both the private and public sectors face a common leadership constraint: successful transformation leaders cannot be switched between programmes in a simplistic portfolio fashion. Typically, the knowledge, skills and experience needed to transform a hospital are different from introducing new welfare services or new defence capabilities. Yet transformational leadership skills can be learned. In fact, not only can they be learned, but the nature of transformation – dispersed leadership interacting with shifting networks – means they *must* be deliberately grown.

The public sector is ahead of the private sphere to some extent in developing leadership skills. For instance, the Infrastructure & Projects Authority's capability-building programme (the Major Projects Leadership Academy with Oxford Said Business School and Deloitte) is an investment in senior leaders unmatched by any commercial organisation. Given that transformation leaders will emerge from multiple sources as they demonstrate their potential in project or operating roles across different organisations, it would be impossible to create a 'transformation function'. But government can still look to:

- **Identify, develop, recognise and test potential transformation leaders.**
- **Emphasise adaptive leadership capabilities in balance with continued growth in programmatic leadership capabilities.**

There are moments when the top-down, energised programme leader is essential. But transformation leaders also need the judgment, humility and capability to recognise when they have led their organisation sufficiently into the zone of productive distress (recognising they must change), without tipping it over the edge into destructive distress.

Whether transformation is more straightforward in the public or private sectors is subject to debate. Public sector leaders can find themselves in more complex and risk-averse stakeholder landscapes than their private sector peers because failure in the public sector can attract media attention, parliamentary scrutiny and personal exposure – often without the same level of reward when transformation is successful.

Theme two: Clarity and decisiveness – in phasing, governance and decision-making

Phasing

One of the most critical decisions to make early on in transformation programmes is to determine the phasing of change. Will there be phases building up to the outcome or one big bang? What combination of physical, IT, people and market changes will make up a coherent and realistic phase? How can the foundations for subsequent phases be laid?

We have observed that some government programmes default to single-phase approaches, all to be delivered within the current political cycle. While the pressure to default to this is understandable, it may doom a programme when it fails to deliver against early commitments and/or threatens operational delivery. The reality is that most transformations are subject to multiple cycles:

- **Physical** – where real estate or buildings are involved, a certain timeframe will be optimal.
- **IT** – increasingly, an incremental, experimental, customer-driven and agile approach will make sense.
- **Organisation and people** – where significant changes in mindset and new capabilities are required, phasing and timing are crucial.
- **Industry** – in many cases, new markets are being created and need years of cultivating industrial capabilities.

It is tougher in the public eye, but government needs to make its judgments on phasing more transparent and realistic, while adopting the ‘reference case’ methodology from capital

projects. There will never be a direct read-across from other transformation programmes given their diversity, but broad comparisons can be made with the ambitions, phasing and constraints of previous schemes.

Governance

Governance of transformation programmes is a key element in the broader enabling environment. But the governance apparatus for capital projects frequently appears to be inappropriate for transformation schemes. The comfort provided by definitive Gantt charts and budgets is detached from the reality of a constantly-shifting landscape for implementation, and the associated uncertain project solutions and timings.

To be clear, we argue for significant investment in the governance of transformation programmes – just of a different type, which is distinguished by:

- **Regular peer review from the public and private sectors.**
- **Intense engagement in implementation strategies.**
- **Adoption of adaptive metrics** (e.g. customer and stakeholder support) on a par with programmatic metrics.
- **A focus on milestones for the closest phase**, with options held open for subsequent phases.

Decision-making

During the 2010 Parliament, government was fighting ‘culture wars’ over the adoption of agile methodology to replace ‘waterfall’ methodology in all programmes with an IT component. In our view, ‘agile versus waterfall’ might have been a phase people had to go through in order to ‘get’ digital, but that debate is no longer valuable. It is now clear from private sector experience that:

- **Digital projects need to operate with a degree of experimentation** within a managed portfolio.
- **Organisations need to be structured with clear future designs and roadmaps in mind**, in order to develop the workforce required.

In other words, agile individual projects need to be delivered within a coherent, planned organisational design and evolution process. Decision-making needs to encompass both the project leaders coping with uncertain delivery, and the organisation leaders who need to articulate the future design. Neither can take their hands off the wheel.

Theme three: Respond to the digital challenge across the organisation – not just in IT

The digital revolution was born from technological innovation. As with all technology, however, the impact of digital is not limited to the IT function. Instead, it echoes around the organisation, offering a new ‘art of the possible’ for policy, operations and service designs – unlocking approaches to transformation that are lower-risk for the whole group.

A new ‘art of the possible’

The digital era is characterised by technologies that are having a profound impact. Common themes include hardware that is more accessible than ever before (e.g. smartphones), high levels of interoperability (e.g. data sharing across boundaries), and increasingly well-established and easy-to-adopt designs for user experience (e.g. zoomable maps).

Savvy public bodies do not wait for their IT function to offer new solutions. Rather, they allow multi-disciplinary teams to identify where new technologies can enable better policy, slicker operations and more effective service designs. The specifics vary from body to body, but could include:

- **Creating new and improved online services** for customers and staff that bring together sources of information – e.g. tax, benefits, entitlements, care packages.
- **Giving mobile tools to people whose jobs involve remote working** – e.g. inspectors, health/care workers, blue light operatives.

Technologies are evolving too quickly for historic cycles of investment and IT responsiveness, and the best ‘art of the possible’ answers would not be reached by IT professionals alone. Digital’s potential can be best fulfilled where the whole organisation engages – so opportunities are not missed during the wait for a paper to be written or a benchmark to be found, and so ideas are not allowed to gestate slowly within departmental silos.

Unlocking new approaches to transformation

Digital allows for rapid, lower-cost change.

A concept that might have taken months and cost millions to build five years ago could be deliverable now in days and at trivial cost, using cloud technologies, deployed onto smartphones or a web browser and with a proven user interface.

The consequences of this cannot be understated, as the dynamics of transformation business cases have changed in a profound way. It is now possible to explore ideas in practice that were previously uneconomic to move forward with. This means:

- **Policies can be tested more** before they are implemented.
- **New designs can be tried and improved** before they are baked into a target operating model and rolled out at scale with appropriate workforce plans.
- **Partnerships can be evolved at a pace to suit stakeholder and political appetite**, rather than requiring ‘big bang’ change simply because of the economics of delivery.
- **Public sector stakeholders need to be ‘educated’** that there will be many more experiments that could be subsequently dropped or radically improved – and, crucially, this approach needs to be rated as a success rather than a waste.

Ultimately, the digital era has the power to unleash policymakers, Chief Operating Officers and finance directors to drive the change they and their users want – putting them in control of technology, not constrained by it.

Conclusion: transformation actions

From the experiences of the private sector and from the public sector's own successes, we can now identify actions for the key players involved in transformation programmes.

For chief executives/ permanent secretaries



- Setting overall direction by articulating the outcomes of transformation, shaping the target design of the future organisation within which individual projects deliver, and testing the phasing of transformation for coherence and realism.
- Shaping the wider leadership to cope with a perpetual shortage of capability and capacity whilst personally investing in developing leaders.

For transformation directors



- Learning from others by building peer groups, testing solutions and phasing of change.
- Recognising the need and interaction of both programmatic and adaptive skill-sets.
- Investing in different planning options, allowing scope for the plan meeting reality, measuring what matters.

For the enabling environment



- IT directors should move to less rigid and more interoperable platforms, embrace multi-disciplinary teams, and shake off slow-moving suppliers.
- Finance directors should devise appropriate governance and accountability arrangements and provide realistic flexibility in funding cycles.
- HR directors should invest in learning and force leaders to address workforce planning.
- The centre of government should understand the requirements of transformation and tailor assurance to encourage success rather than compliance.

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Notes

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