

Leading government in the digital age



Leading successfully in the digital age means bringing a new mindset, being comfortable with changing technology, and enabling a new type of organizational culture. To be a leader in the digital age is to be someone that can hone in on the unique approaches to leadership that are required in the modern workplace. This demands **thinking, acting, and reacting differently**. Government leaders have a great opportunity to harness the changes brought by the digital age to better serve citizens and support the workforce.

External and internal pressures to change

To accomplish agency missions in the digital age, organizations need leaders across functions who are prepared and able to lead during this time of rapid and unprecedented change. In order to meet citizens' rising expectations of government services, leaders must prioritize talent development, intelligent risk-taking, data-driven decision-making, rapid experimentation, and innovation in their organizations.¹

In his book, *Delivering on Digital*, William Eggers highlights the effects of the digital era on governments across the world. This new reality is shaping the future of work where technologies, and not people, play the primary role in "collecting, processing, and interpreting information."² However, this shift should not alarm government workers. When organizations harness the benefits of technological advancements, people can focus and improve upon work activities that involve intellectual and emotional attributes that are unique to humans: decision-making, creative thinking, setting direction, and developing people. These skills are critical when leading people and organizations.

We are witnessing a growing sense of urgency among government leaders to quickly innovate and eliminate waste. Bolstered by the new White House Office of American Innovation, there have been numerous Executive Orders and mandates that challenge federal government leaders to integrate new technologies, cultivate a work culture that embraces change, and actively develop the workforce of the future.³

As organizations across the world attempt to harness and unleash the power of emerging technologies, Deloitte identified 23 elements to measure progress.⁴ This process can be broken down into four unique stages which comprise the Digital Maturity Spectrum (Figure 1): Exploring, Doing, Becoming, and Being. Despite efforts to support innovation, only 10% of government leaders surveyed agree that their organization has a clear and coherent digital strategy to tackle this challenge.⁵

The Digital DNA Maturity Spectrum (Figure 1)⁶



The Digital Age is the fundamental transformation of government, business, the broader economy, and society caused by the advancement and adoption of new technologies that have enabled accelerated flows of information.

The Digital Age is happening now! Citizens are increasingly receiving information through mobile applications, augmented reality, and other technologies, which have accelerated the speed at which information is processed and transferred. 21st Century government services require technology-enabled delivery to meet citizens' evolving expectations.

There are several hurdles that government agencies will need to overcome as they begin to explore digital enablement in their organizations, which are illustrated by Figure 2. Along with the disruptions of traditional notions of work and organizational structure, a recent survey indicates that there is also confusion among government leaders about the definition and importance of being digital. In that survey of career senior executives in the federal government, only 7% of respondents mentioned "digital skills" as an important characteristic for future Federal leaders.⁷ However, the core skills that comprise the mindset of a digital leader—**adaptability, innovation, and risk-taking**—were cited most frequently. For digital leadership to emerge in the government, current executive leaders should fundamentally rethink the way challenges are identified, approached, and resolved.

The Challenges to Digital Enablement in Government (Figure 2)



What is digital leadership in government?

Digital Government Leaders

are able to identify where emerging technologies can enable their agencies to better meet their mission priorities. They position their teams and people to design, create, and implement solutions that are centered on the customer.

Digital leadership is a commitment to having engaged leaders at all levels that value and courageously pursue opportunities to take advantage of—rather than avoid—times of disruptive transformational change. These leaders align their people and business strategies by empowering teams to experiment, innovate, and scale through standard platforms and processes in order to meet the challenges of the day.⁹ As a result of leaders at the top setting the tone, leadership can exist at all levels of the organization as a collective mindset, where “leaders at all levels” feel empowered to lead initiatives through to completion.

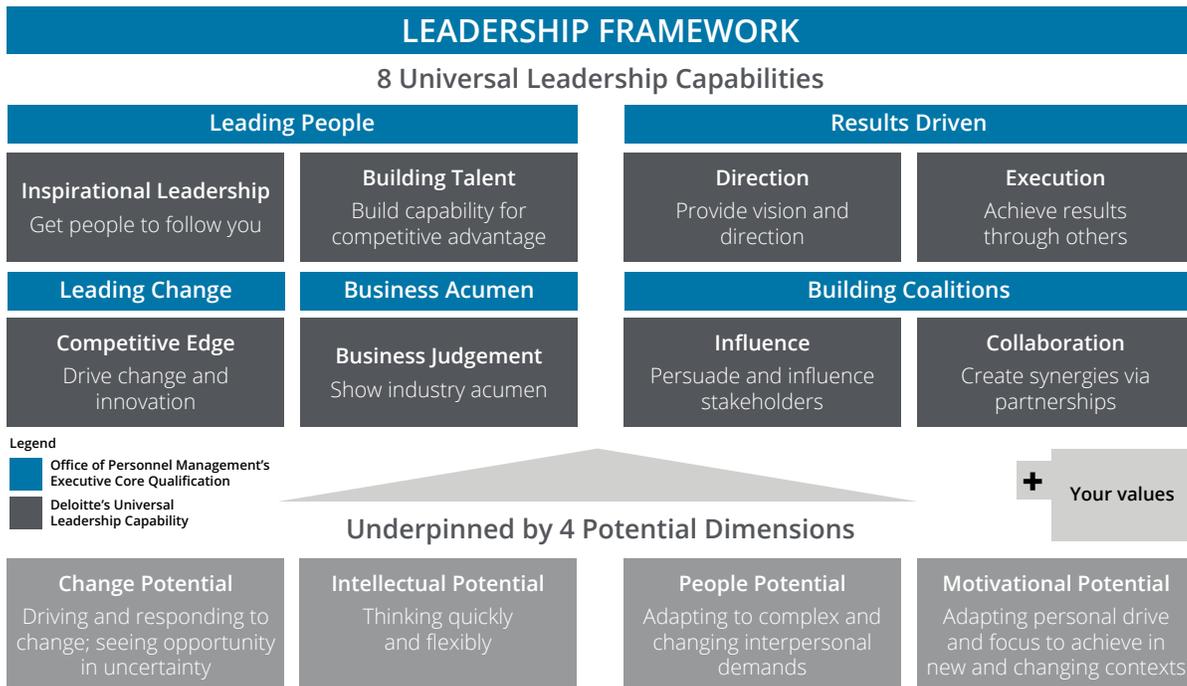
As the government transitions to its digital future, leaders may need to transform the way they think, act, and react in their organizations. As illustrated in Figure 3, some government agencies have already begun this work. The first stage of the Digital Maturity Spectrum is to begin “exploring digital.” This includes looking for ways to capture information faster; break down rigid and narrow views about technology, processes, and decision making; and reimagine processes that are limiting an agency’s ability to capitalize on new opportunities and the changes happening around them.

Examples of Government Leadership in the Digital Age (Figure 3)

	U.S. Department of the Treasury	U.S. Department of Energy	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
 Mission	Help the federal government and Americans shape their financial future ¹⁰	Ensure security and prosperity by addressing the nation’s energy, environmental, and nuclear challenges ¹¹	Prevent terrorism and enhance security; manage our borders; administer immigration laws; secure cyberspace; and ensure disaster resilience ¹²
 Thinking Differently	Creating a culture of technology integration by co-creating services with citizens through regular focus groups and competitions aimed at developing mobile applications that help Americans shape their financial future ¹³	Drawing business attention to the untapped market opportunity for developing solar energy software through case competitions ¹⁴	Using unmanned aerial systems technology to support front line personnel decision-making that will better enable them to protect themselves and the individuals with whom they interact ¹⁵
 Acting Differently	Creating highly empowered teams that have transformed the way they respond to digital enablement: Digital Government and Innovation at Treasury (DiGIT) Working Group, and the Treasury Technology Investment Review Board (TTIRB) ¹⁶	Using an innovative talent sourcing model to spur the creation of software that would accelerate the adoption of solar power among businesses and homeowners ¹⁷	Crowdsourcing ideas through the Silicon Valley Innovation Program (SVIP) rather than using the traditional, convoluted and time-consuming government contracting process ¹⁸
 Reacting Differently	Welcoming and institutionalizing continual citizen engagement and feedback through online satisfaction surveys, publicized implementation milestones, and open-data initiatives ¹⁹	Engaging industry players at the beginning to develop solutions rather than publishing large studies on solar energy adoption that may have very little market impact ²⁰	Withdrawing from the traditional strategy of using force, and turning to unmanned systems dedicated to surveillance to solve complex government security challenges that involve human life ²¹

Transitioning to Digital Leadership

Deloitte's Leadership Framework identifies eight core capabilities that we believe are integral to effective leadership: inspirational leadership, building talent, competitive edge, business judgement, direction, execution, influence, and collaboration. These eight capabilities align to the federal government's executive core qualifications (ECQs): leading people, leading change, business acumen, results driven, and building coalitions. Additionally, these capabilities are underpinned by four potential dimensions—change potential, intellectual potential, people potential, and motivational potential—that occur naturally and enable individuals to build leadership capabilities.²² This framework provides a useful foundation for discussions on how leaders should approach management in the digital age. Government agencies can elevate the role of potential in their evaluation of leader impact, in addition to considering how existing leaders can be catalysts for change, influencers of digital enablement, and creators of future leaders.²³



Although the digital environment does not change the core capabilities of an effective leader, it does challenge traditional ideas of what approaches should be used to develop leaders and how quickly their development should occur. In the digital age, leaders need to be developed through multifaceted approaches involving **the Four Es: Expertise, Expectations, Experience, and Exposure**. The Four E's highlight the development vehicles from where the capacity and effectiveness of leadership can be enhanced. Today, experience and exposure are becoming increasingly important in the digital age. Organizations are supplementing development with internships, externships, immersive learning labs, and sponsorships. Ultimately, just as a leader's mindset needs to be agile, innovative, collaborative, customer-focused, and risk tolerant to thrive in the digital age, so should the leadership development approach to cultivate this mindset.

Approaching Leadership Development



Expertise: Teach leaders how to learn and not just what to learn



Expectations: Articulate what we expect of our leaders now and in the future



Experiences: Position leaders in situations that challenge them to innovate and experiment



Exposure: Immerse leaders in emerging digital challenges and enhance their breadth of thinking when responding to them

How can leaders respond?

With the rise of the digital age and associated technology, it is critical that government agencies prioritize the development of high potential individuals that have the capabilities to lead in the digital age. These leaders will bring a new mindset that commits to being agile, taking intelligent risks, and innovating as a way to drive government during times of change and disruption. Since the way citizens interact with information, organizations, and each other has changed drastically and likely permanently, the government has a new opportunity to respond accordingly. In the digital age, leaders should exist at all levels, challenge the status quo, and beg the question of how future government leaders can think, act, and react differently to provide quality public service in a rapidly advancing world.

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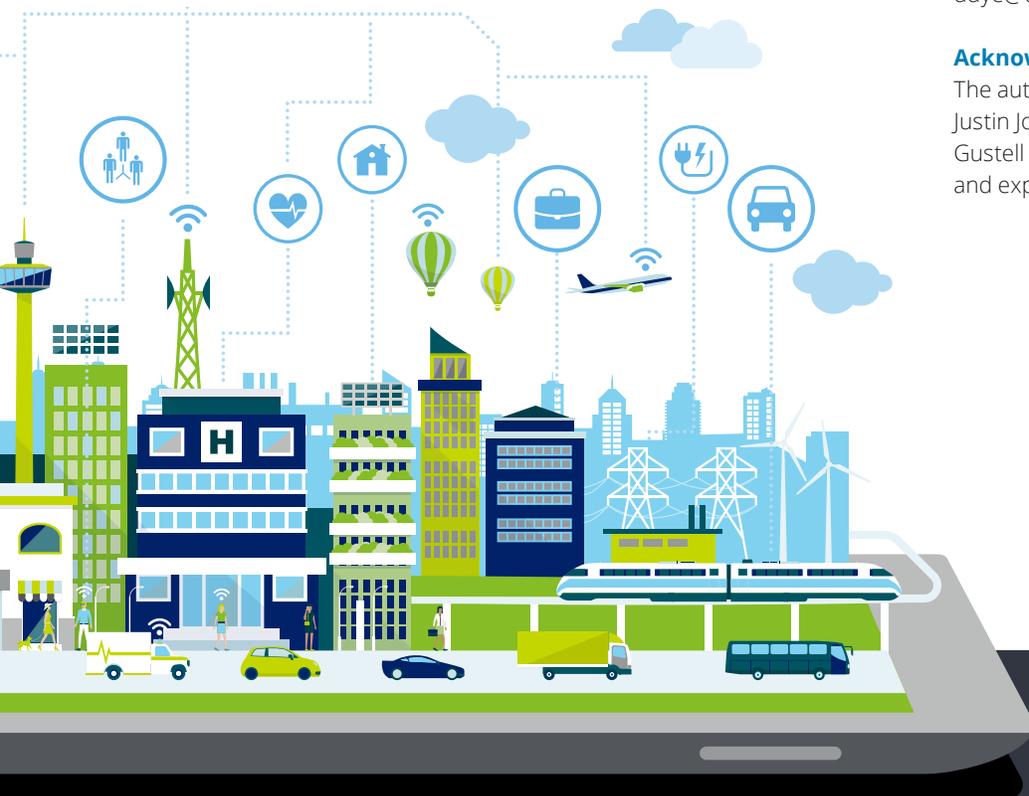
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