

Developing Public Sector Digital Competency

# Research Data

資料編

Developing Public Sector Digital Competency - Research Data

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# Introduction

This research data document is intended to provide a view of the data that underpins the report “Developing Public Sector Digital Competency”.

This document contains brief summaries of the interviews conducted for the research. They are not meant to stand alone, but rather to be perused along with the analysis of the final report.

Thank you for reading.

# Research Design

The interviews conducted for this research, were all conducted online after prior agreement.

All interviews were based on an agreed-upon interview guide (see “Questions”). The interviews were all of a semi-structured nature, with the interview guide as a backbone and common ground.

The interviews ranged from 60-90 minutes in length.

# Questions

1. We're looking at all employees, and how municipalities are thinking about their digital competencies - as opposed to thinking about how to attract specialist talent.
2. We are interested in the business transformation by digital, rather than the transformation to digital. Japan is struggling with changing old processes and adapting how they work.
3. How is the problem area defined?
4. How is it thought about in municipalities?
5. Are there differences between how managers and employees think about it?
6. We are looking at factors such as skillset, mindset and literacy as the pillars. This is the same focus where you are?

# 1. Chile, Ministry General Secretariat of the Presidency

Interviewee: Mr. Jose Inostroza, Chief of Division

Date: Dec 22, 2023

## **How have you seen things change in terms of competency?**

In the first years, in the 90's (first years of democracy in Chile), good modernisation of public policy. They were on a good path, but now, there is a greater disparity. Some institutions like the tax agency of the central bank are very good, but some public institutions have less competence in general. Not only in comparison with OECD, but also Latin America. It is a heterogeneous condition. The reason is cultural because the main ideas in public policy 20 years ago were a little neoliberal. So they didn't make very good long term plans.

Uruguay took a different path with public policy modernisation.

So in some aspects we are doing good, but in others we have lost the rhythm.

## **In that context, what are you focussing on?**

The main problem is cultural, with a very conservative bureaucracy. The answer has for a long time been to impose more rules and control, and the result has been less innovation. More protection of the status quo leads to a slower pace. More processes are introduced to control.

So it is not about technical competencies, it's a broader issue

The answer is to use more and better data. More transparency through data. Without that, innovation is losing the fight. Not only in terms of technical solutions, but in terms of mindset. We need to win back the mindset.

The first frame of reference is the law. The second is the process. Technology is the last part of any project. It is only complementary.

But going forward we need digital by design, and design public policy and processes. So we need to change the conversation around technology.

We need to have a more dynamic approach to new technologies. There's a lot of new and cheaper technology, and we should be curious about that. We need to innovate more, but to do that we need to change some laws, perhaps. So really it's not about technical competence.

We need to create a digital academy and agency. Not only covering basic courses, but something that covers advanced trends as well. We are in talks with Estonia to do this. To do this we are doing the strategic work of thinking about what should go into such an entity, in order to prepare for the future.

**Are you optimistic about changing the culture? Are there other milestones than the academy?**

We need to do more in order to improve innovation capacity. We already have a small agency called Government Lab. We need to put more effort in order to create a more systematic impact.

The legal system is a problem in this regard.

**Why is that?**

For example, procurement. When there is a very conservative approach, it is hard to explore and be nimble about using new technology and working in new ways.

We need to put more standardization, transparency.

So you can have all these thoughts, but in order to push a project, you have all these complicated legal barriers to proceed.

**How can you affect that change?**

In all these aspects, we should push change. We are talking with experts about how to go about it around the procurement system. In order to buy technology.

We are working in a good way with the government lab.

The digital academy is another part of this. But we need to evangelize this all over the state.

**Do you feel the staff are eager to learn and become more digitally capable?**

It is again very different between departments. A lot of older employees with long experience may feel some hesitancy towards new tech and new ways of working. It's a problem with attitude. Paper is still a huge part of the government. Technology is normally not good technology. We need better user experience, so people accept it more easily. If we don't deploy good technology, we'll continue to see resistance to technology.

Of course we have competent and curious public servants, but there's a disparity there, so it's a challenge.

**How are you planning to change from bad to good technology?**

The first approach is to simply put down a lot of money and go to the market to buy. A lot of public institutions have problems with considering their problems, the operational problems and think well about technology and to buy technology well. So the final result is a disaster, especially for interoperability, for example.

I think shared services is a trend in the OECD, and it's a good strategy, we have an important scale of economies. So we can afford to put money in a concentrated way to obtain the main systems. So I am pushing towards shared, digital services in order to get better UX for public servants.

**Do you see the shared service initiative is connected to digital competency?**

Yes, with better UX, you'll get a better attitude. People will be able to feel that it works for them, and that will get them to want more. And people can get together around the same thing.

**What are you optimistic about regarding the future?**

Optimistic around technology. It's impossible to solve the problems of Chile without technology. So if we can show good cases with good impact, the trend can change into more technology.

But we need more efforts in this regard.

**What is the timeline of the digital academy?**

They are looking into setting it up. They want strategic help from Estonia. The process is slow, so could take 2-3 years.

**How did you come to the decision to make an academy?**

Personal opinion: I believe in learning from time in academia. Second reason is that the digital division has a great challenge in deploying 2-3 systems in all of the state. Have a lot of work to broaden adoption.

It's complicated to connect the new system with the cultural situation, so we need to push a holistic approach.

So the academy should complement general adoption programs.

We need to invest a lot of money, and we can not experiment in the same way as the private sector. We need to capture quality and impact.

**Is that a common mindset in Chile?**

Chile is still centered around the private market, around decentralization. But we have a small private market, so we need to create real capacity in some strategic projects.

It's interesting how the context of the country informs stance. All the issues and strategy are systemic.

## 2. Denmark, Vendor

Interviewee: name withheld, Senior System Architect, Financial SaaS Company

Date: Dec 14, 2023

### **How does the municipal landscape for digital competencies look from the outside?**

The biggest competency missing is the ability to imagine what can be done, for a reasonable price. People don't know what's possible within the budget, or what things should cost. So they think it's very difficult, that they need people from outside, or need a grand system.

In Denmark, there was a system called AMANDA which was supposed to shorten service time for work-related injury compensation through automation. But the problem was that the processes defined in the law are extremely vague. There's a lot of exceptions, and computers are very bad at that.

So you should basically be able to look at the law and fairly easily say what can and cannot be digitized. But this requires that competency. A combination of administrative and IT competencies.

It is unique to the public sector, that the work is defined by law.

So there is a limit of the law in terms of how we can think about digitization. At some point we need to change the law to proceed, because vagueness can not be supported.

The other part of the problem is the ability to scope things out, and have an idea of whether something is worth it or not. Know the digitizability of something. Are the prerequisites there, and are we eliminating meaningful amounts of work?

A good example is a BU leader who recognized a pile of structured data, and commissioned work to put them into play to save some time.

The competence is being able to spot when something is a prime candidate for digitization.

People often get annoyed from functions that take 30 min a week, but that's not very much. It's annoying, but that also puts a cap on how much time the solution can cost max.

This is another competency: being able to analyze the ROI of potential digitization.

### **How do you get better at that 'sense'?**

There's something to be said for making university programmes more concrete along these lines.

Another thing to be done is to combine teams in ways that bring IT competencies into the mix on a team level - everyone doesn't need to know everything.

### **Who do you interact with in municipalities?**

Mostly it's people who own a problem, and not the ones with specific IT competencies.



Politicians and leaders don't need to know how something is done, but that it can be done.

Being able to see the opportunity for digitization and cost-saving through that, is the one key skill municipalities lack, and it's the reason we haven't reaped so much from our digitization efforts as we would like.

You could for example give people a designation such as 'dx aware person', and make them responsible for thinking along those lines. It's about AWARENESS, most people are not aware, because they are focussed on doing the job, not the META of it.

### **Are Danish municipalities in a good place, or should they move further?**

Danish digitization is all about the centralized solutions and infrastructure, like e-boks and Aula.

And you don't need paper anymore, most places you can do everything online.

Something that is not so good is that yes, you can go to Borger.dk for a centralized portal, but then you're sent to a municipal solution that might not work. There are so many vendors.

But something good is the proliferation (opening up) of the digital market. These are interoperable! This is important, so systems are required to talk together. The Digital Agency specified this and required the standard.

In a competency perspective, you need to expand the infrastructure to be interoperable, and allow municipalities and agencies to see their services and processes in another way. Data permissions are one thing that could help this, so we have a central repository for all data, that you can request access to.

Because we lack unified infrastructure, people need to know more and be able to do more of things that actually aren't needed.

The systems shape the kinds of competencies needed, so by changing systems, we can define what is needed. And that should actually be easier to do, than trying to change people.

### **Are there some things that you feel are often misunderstood when talking about digital competencies and digital literacy?**

I don't agree with what some people are saying, that we all need to learn to code. It's really the ability to see the opportunity for digitization that matters. So learn how data flows and imagine how they might flow.

### **What are the characteristics of the public sector that matters in terms of competencies?**

Hiring practices are very different from the private sector. You can't hire who you want, at the rate they need. So in some cases, you have to contract out. The public sector is working much more on a rent basis, instead of building things themselves.

So you outsource systems, and competency. This raises the need to be able to work with vendors better. Being able to procure better and create specifications better.

### 3. Denmark, Fredericia Municipality

Interviewee: Rasmus Balder Holmegaard Larsen, Head of Division Youth

Date: Dec 4, 2023

#### **What do you think of when you hear Digital Competencies?**

The first they think of is that digital competencies are unevenly distributed amongst employees.

Some people can not use the Microsoft 365 suite, while others who are super users in all kinds of digital products.

That uneven distribution makes it challenging, because we have an expectation that our employees are 'digitally competent'.

When he started, he said to his employees that he expected their calendars to be up to date - this was the first time anyone had told them that. He also said to check their mails minimum 3 times per week.

#### **Where do the super users come from? Are they trained or natural?**

They are mostly trained through courses and get monetary incentives to train their skills and become superusers. This is fairly standard municipal practice. Every time a new IT product is introduced there is a programme owner, a steering group and a project manager from IT and then a cadre of superusers, admins etc.

#### **When you say that they haven't been asked to update their calendar before, it sounds like there are many tacit expectations?**

Yes, that might be. Corona has pushed to this, because meetings fx became online. And people are working more from home. So there are new ways of working that people have learned.

And then there are the citizens, who as a group have even a larger distribution of skills which also poses challenges to our employees.

#### **What for example?**

In a digital society, there is a lot of coaching, introduction etc. for people who can't figure out their online IDs for example. Then there's also something like digital money. In Denmark we almost never use cash, so you need a bank account, and that raises the bar to get student jobs. You need to have a bank account, you need an online ID to get that,..and if you are not used to working with these things in your family, there is a new need to get help with those kinds of things.

#### **How does that relate to digital competencies among employees?**

It relates to the expectations. Yes they may be tacit, but oftentimes they are also hidden. For example in his department a lot of people are working with youth to get their first part time job. But part of that help is the whole digital money/bank account issue, and that issue is hidden until they discover it themselves.

This goes for digital competencies as well, because employees have to become a sort of super user themselves and be able to talk about and teach digital products. The citizens expect them to know everything, also in the digital realm.

**Is this something people complain about or are insecure about?**

No, they complain if IT is too slow or if they have to use too many systems at the same time. In their department they have 7-8 systems in all, with the individual employee having to juggle 1-3 of these systems.

They are challenged by how their systems oftentimes don't speak together. So the advantages that should be realized with digitization, aren't really there. And it raises the expectations of the employees because they have to troubleshoot this situation.

**So there are two issues? You have to navigate the digital setup, and then you also need to be able to share that knowledge?**

Yes, that's where the superusers come in. But there's not really any IT sparring during the everyday work. People go to their superusers.

**Is it your feeling that things will get better, or are we simply doomed to navigate so many systems?**

I think the reason why we have so many different systems is because they are all niche. Working with education or working with child care is really quite different, and one system couldn't support all the niche functionality needed.

Don't really see a future working better. They have the challenge that systems use different data setups which don't match. In one example they have the same data in 3 places (invoice system, operations system and a delivery system). They've purchased an add-on system that checks entries in all systems.

**It's one thing to understand the problem as a leader, but you also have to navigate it and be able to explain it, there's a lot going on.**

Yes, absolutely. And that's where we need a capable IT department. The intuitive answer is to hire someone to solve the issues, but the IT department advises how things can be automated.

Rasmus can not see that kind of solution himself.

**One of the broader points we've heard is that digital is everyone's business now. How do you deal with that?**

I don't think that's the case. I think technology is unevenly distributed, so it is not about IT being everyone's responsibility, but rather being clear about what is everyone's responsibility in the first place. USING IT is everyone's responsibility, but DEVELOPING IT is the IT department's responsibility. Developing is about knowing what's out there, what's new, what's needed, what's possible etc.. that's what IT dept. Can do. This will always change, so the IT dept is not under threat.

**What do you think about the point that Business Units do not take sufficient control of IT procurement?**

I agree with that. A centralized (IT) staff can not have an implementation responsibility in decentralized units.

When we talk about implementation, it should be a leadership responsibility WHERE the employees using it are. It's only leadership that can tell employees that they should use it. And then you have the RIGHT to lead. This is also in the BUs. IT can never come and say what we should use. That would intervene with the RIGHT to lead. Keep the two perspectives in mind (USAGE and DEVELOPMENT). The IT dept has an obligation to come and inspire.

One way they are working with it recently, is to introduce software bots (click bots). They want to work with this systematically, but Rasmus has no technical knowledge. They should be proactive and suggestive and say what can be digitized to what end, what to find out, what has been done before. They have development responsibility, but decision responsibility is with the area chief.

There's also a maintenance aspect. That's also with the IT dept. Some IT leaders want more maintenance, some want development more.

**Do you have any frameworks from above in the organization that you have to navigate?**

Not anything immediate. But it would be nice to have. It's important to write down what kind of bets the organization has agreed on making.

It is needed to have strategies and frameworks for automation and AI, and how that pertains to employees and citizens.

**When you don't have such a framework, how do you operate?**

A two-legged approach. One is to follow along and be reactive to new initiatives from above or feedback from below. The other is to be curious and ask, and use the relationships he has in the organization.

The opposite would be either to be passive or to be more proactive, where you'd actively try to change things. But the proactive stance would require a framework to work within. Fx relating to AI. They're talking about it, but they're not using it. It's still quite abstract.

They don't have official guidelines for ChatGPT at work in the municipality. They'd like their employees to use it, but they want to avoid giving away sensitive data.

We know AI will revolutionize the way we work, and we need it, because we are lacking people. So we need the tool to be more effective.

**You need to understand your own work so deeply, that you can re envision it.**

Yes, and that's where the competency development becomes critical.

We tend to underestimate it in terms of knowledge workers. If a mechanic gets a new car to work on, of course he's expected to train for it. But with knowledge workers, we tend to think they'll figure it out on their own.

It's a new way of working in the digital realm. To a lot of people, IT is not their main job, they are simply using IT to do their job.

An important point here is that creativity is not the main differentiator between us and AI, but judgment. This is a key skill to train going forward. It is not a question of knowing it, you need to practice it.

## 4. Denmark, Agency for Digital Government

Interviewee: Pernille Sejr Thomsen, Section Leader, Digital Academy

Date: Nov 15, 2023

### How did you start?

The academy came out of a strategy which was approved in 2017 (Strategy for IT control in the State (strategy for IT styring i state)). The purpose was to professionalize the way IT projects were deployed in government.

It was looking at large government IT projects, which have to be risk-analyzed in the government's IT council.

Government authorities are being reviewed by the IT council.

How to set up goals and work better with digital - for a strong IT foundation.

As part of the strategy, they set up a goal to give state employees the opportunity and the prerequisites to develop and maintain projects, systems safely and efficiently, and to be able to see the opportunities that IT creates in their area of expertise.

This is what the academy deals with. The academy is focussed on generalists without an IT degree. People who didn't study anything related to IT. But they cannot do their job without understanding IT anymore. It's not just about hardware, but there are also IT systems implicated in new laws or policies, which require updates or implementation. So a lot of people need to understand it in order to work with and control it.

This was the need the academy was made to fill.

They started with an analysis phase to see what kind of courses they need to offer.

They took a step back to look at necessary competencies, in order to better grasp what kind of courses are needed.

Digital competencies are vague and unwieldy. They needed to operationalize what they mean by digital competency.

Pernille had worked at the Agency for IT and Learning, and had discussed digital competency with regards to children previously. So she knew that there isn't a cookie cutter definition, but something that has to actively be developed in the context of their needs.

They looked around and found competency models (KL in Denmark fx.) — began with discovering what competencies are needed in public servants in the state to succeed in their jobs. They looked around the world through desk research, and also referenced a lot of Danish strategies on digitization, in order to say 'if this is what we need to succeed at, what does that require in terms of competency?' — they ended up with a sheet of 200+ competencies, which they began mapping and grouping.

They did interviews with experts, interest groups and industry worker's associations. So they took both an inside-out and outside-in perspective to cover what they needed to be better at when collaborating in a digital context.

They did around 10 workshops with over 100 public employees and leaders that spanned a wide range of roles from project manager to data analyst. They centered the workshops around what competencies they need, what they're deploying in their work already. They mapped it out and developed the model. This is the conceptual foundation they proceeded from.

The model also helped broaden the term competency for them. Is it always simply something related to code, IT architecture or AI? They ended up defining it, in a way that encompassed competencies outside of 'hard' technology, but which are equally important to have in order to achieve good IT implementation. Fx user research to uncover needs.

So they see it as a 'set' of competencies that have to be present in order to succeed with digital transformation in an organization.

This also means that the model does not encourage the individual to have to learn all competencies themselves. It depends on your level of experience, what tasks you have, what education you have..

It is not covering more 'hard' technical skills on purpose, because their mission was to focus on generalists.

They also discussed the definition of generalists, and they ended up agreeing that it is simply people without an IT specific education. A biologist could be considered a specialist in their field, but not within IT.

Building on this they could begin to develop courses.

### **So how are you offering your courses now?**

Their business model is to buy courses externally. Agency for Digital Government Academy secretariat's role is to be the bridge through their insight into the distinctness of state employees, and the courses that can answer that need. Both in the sense that they keep updated on what is needed, and keep an eye on what is on the market. So they have around 5 external partners they work with to deliver the courses. The secretariat also develops the course together with the certified course provider. They see their primary role to adapt the courses to the state context. (constraints such as 1-year budgets, minister responsibility and certain models and frameworks that must be adopted. Fx The State's IT model, and projects must be reviewed by the IT council.)

There are a lot of things that the teachers must know, so the students don't need to make the translation in their head between what they hear and their own context. The teachers should be able to talk into the context and answer questions.

Every time they buy a course, they 'test' it on real employees. Invite people to test and evaluate before offering it more widely.



**But the competence model you have is also a great asset to help guide your decision when making the offerings?**

Yes, it is a red thread in the work.

They have moved further along too, though. Fx. offering cyber security courses which are more technical than originally scoped.

So rather than sticking only to what they saw in 2018-2019, they are keeping up to date with reality.

They were asked by some authorities if the academy could supply such a course. Which also points to their role as a bridge between government and the market for courses. Authorities could find and buy it themselves, but then they would have to find, define and develop every time. So the academy solves this across the board.

It was originally conceptualized as being available to individual employees who wanted to improve their skills. But they have seen an increase in demand for 'closed courses' where a certain authority or office buys a course for a whole team. This has some other advantages such as creating a learning space dedicated to the specific context of that office.

**Is it fifty fifty for the closed ones?**

No but it's something that has come up and there is a good balance. They're in dialogue with authorities and they are able to adapt the course to the context. So it can become a better part of an organizational transformation too.

They believe it has potential to be better for users, but there is also an increase in individual sign ups.

It also depends on what the course is about. Because sometimes it's only two people in an office who need a certain competency. While sometimes it makes sense to lift the entire office or organizations

One aspect of this is also how digital projects now can easily span organizational boundaries.

**How do individuals decide to sign up?**

(Not open outside of the state. It's tailored to state that other orgs don't need)

So there are boundaries in terms of who can buy their courses.

They put a lot of effort into defining and describing the target group. Because sometimes they get negative reviews about mismatches. They take this to heart and ensure they fit better.

Competency development in the state is very decentralized so it's the individual employee together with their leader who decide based on the needs of their office. The leader has to set aside the budget.

They also have masterclasses for leaders. But it is hard to enforce and check who signs up.

### **What kind of feedback do you get?**

They test their new courses and evaluate continuously. They use it to tune the target group and describe what requirements there are and what activities work and don't work.

They evaluate after every course completion and try to enter into dialogue with the people buying closed courses. What value was created etc.

They receive good feedback and get better at doing it more systematically.

They also get more recurring users which is a testament that they are doing something right.

Some buy closed offerings, and then more signups for individuals or vice versa follows.

Their academy has always been based on voluntary participation. This presents a challenge for them to make themselves known . They are basically competing on awareness. They try to talk to HR depts , leadership and LinkedIn activities.

### **There must be a constantly increasing need?**

Yes, but need is not the same as demand. We knew way back that need is there, but demand is modulated by a busy everyday, and relevancy.

They can see that there are more sign ups for need to have than nice to have courses.

So if it's a topic closely coupled to specific tasks, and they get tools and methods to use when I get back, then they sell better than general "for interest" knowledge. That's how it is.

So they have also seen in evaluations that they analyzed a need for a course, but there was no demand. That estimation can be difficult.

### **It's interesting you mention time in the everyday as a barrier.**

They made some design criteria such as demand driven with no top down.

But also that they'd offer shorter courses that could be combined.

They don't carry courses over three days at the moment, and some only last one day. Because of the price, but also because that is what's realistic with the busy public servant schedule.

They want to provide short intensive learning processes.

They have developed a government course for cyber security which is quite thorough. And packaged up two courses into one longer unit for the first time.

### **How do you experience the balance between hard and soft skills?**

Early on they decided not to offer courses about very technical hands-on skills. They focus more on how to get the operation (business) to work digitally. How to think about it and what development frameworks there are. And how to work with design thinking as a method. How to work with problem solving in digital.

It's more methods, tools and mindset to work with digital in the business of government.

They don't have concrete software introductions, because it's decentralized and rooted in each agency and the tools they use.

They're also aware of the market for competence development. So they don't offer certifications because it already exists such as agile and scrum safe certifications.

But in their agile course, they can help make the bridge into their government job. It becomes a meta skill to put on top of their certification.

## 5. Denmark, Komponent

Interviewee: Mr. Jesper Hosbond Jensen, Head Consultant

Date: September 7th, 2023

### **What is your impression of Japanese DX?**

Japan is not so foreign in terms of public sector development, with a higher degree of welfare thinking than in the US. There's also a familiar structure in terms of municipality and prefectures.

There's a difference in what the different levels of government do, and Japan also has greater emphasis on insurance-based services.

They have been demographically challenged for the past 30 or so years, and that is where we are going too.

They are not digital, but fascinated by technology that might alleviate the challenges presented by demographics. Particularly robotics, as they need to compensate for labor. They have had a longer time than us to get used to the fact that technology is part of the solution.

They are further behind than Germany in terms of public digitization. They then have a French bureaucracy, which is so inefficient. Japan is industrial like Germany, developed in the same way after the US image.

Denmark uses Estonia as a demonstration. There we can see a society that has started from scratch, and has managed so much.

Drawing the parallel between Denmark and Estonia, in Denmark the most recent major municipal reform was at the beginning of the 1970s, when there were 3 levels. At that time, Estonia was part of the Soviet Union. They first came out in 1991. Estonia kicked out the soviet and wiped away all system references, because they had a fundamental distrust of the state.

So the release was also a break with the despotic state and system.

Then when they entered the EU and looked at IT architects, principles around rights for the citizen, regulation of personal data handling. They used this as background, and then quickly switched to their own foundation.

Around 1990, people looked into the cornerstones we work with today, which were laid down in the EU. The principles people worked with were person, function and organization.

Denmark kept everything we had, and then worked with a lot of legacy and adaptation. We always have the legacy, the baggage with us.

Word is the same as 1990, but customers have no alternative. There is no one who can gain market share. IT developers do not bother to develop new and better solutions because they can content themselves with packing it into what they have. The Estonians made XROAD, which has created a better dynamic in dealing with developers. Estonia is not the market, it

is the EU. We can also do that in Denmark, but it's not applicable in the same way. Denmark is ahead in the shoes right now, but we can quickly be overtaken.

It's about having the courage to reduce complexity. The most difficult thing is to change, for example, the financial system.

### **What do you think about competence and digitalisation?**

You have a completely different digital and technological support for the tasks than before. If you are going to develop something in the municipalities today, digital is absolutely central. You get nowhere without it. This applies to healthcare, infrastructure. Anything. The interaction between citizens and municipal workers is completely different due to technology.

Technology has changed the profession, helped it forward. Municipalities try to develop with the citizens. You won't get anywhere without involving citizens through digital solutions, and that also makes people able. Co-workers can, and many citizens can, but they also expect it.

At Komponent, we always first look at what the digital setup is, if they are asked about what can be done with time pressure etc. Smartphones are a clear indicator of the spread of digital services. You don't get any paper sent anymore. Consumption has changed and is more digital. Consumption of public services is also more digital. It means a lot to the way we work.

Komponent works with a taxonomy from knowledge, to skills, to competency. For the employees, many are already well integrated in the technology and they are actively curious about how it can help them in their work. Everyone works with it because mastering it is obviously valuable. You follow up and see if the changes you make work. It requires data registration. It's the same dance you have to do regardless of department and areas, because the problems are the same.

It may be half and half in terms of proactivity, but everyone has a smartphone. The private sector pulls the public in one direction, and that is digital, because citizens expect the public authorities to be in control of their case and data. Denmark is still behind in connecting data.

The citizen has a completely different role in having to tell their own story all the time. The expectation in Estonia is that the municipality has complete control over your data and history when you meet with a case manager. That should also be the expectations and the goal in Denmark. The professional staff should be able to read, interpret and understand the information that has been given previously - regardless of whether it takes place physically or digitally.

The employees can see themselves in this process, but the big challenges lie with the management. The strategic, political and operational management. All the municipalities are under pressure from being limited by funds, and must save. The government might say that there is money, but the municipalities cannot use it, even if there are prospects. The management must balance development and operation. Typically, the focus is on operations.

There are some drivers of the economy in the municipalities. Maybe growth in the elderly or children. The municipalities do things very differently between them. If they are to solve the

challenges in the economy, they must look across the board. You will have to connect all stakeholders with digital infrastructure, and ensure that data is used in the effort towards the citizen.

**What should they be aware of?**

AI is a challenge, but in line with GDPR. The technology must be negotiated so that you can just solve your task. GDPR has been over-implemented in some places. Competence coverage is a challenge, in that we need to ensure the necessary competencies are present in teams. The IT department has typically been in a corner, but suddenly becomes a central player. A longer perspective is that management must be developed to balance operations (data management) and development (facilitator and making room for change)

In Denmark, the municipality follows the citizen throughout his life. You don't do that in the US.

In Denmark, municipalities use 50% of public expenditure.

## 6. New Zealand, Tasman Council CIO

Interviewee: Mr. Steve Manners, CIO

Date: October 2nd, 2023

### **What issues are you dealing with when it comes to digital competency?**

He's dealing with low levels of digital competency. A lot of people talk about digital literacy, which is not a helpful label. People can be digitally literate, but they might lack access to the right tools. IT tools in the public sector are not always available.

Instead he uses digital savvy as a term. There's a problem with the low level of digital savviness. Everyone has a smartphone, and we use them in our everyday life without thinking about it. But when we introduce security that requires F2A, it becomes a problem. People are not used to it. There is a dichotomy between digital tools they use at work and in their personal lives. That gap has to be addressed.

They've recently introduced a new HR system, or a new payroll system. You get feedback that "they're not ready" or "not enough training". People expect that things are more difficult with new technology, than it is in your personal life. Even if it's not. That gap has to be overcome by IT experts. Consumer electronics has managed that, but commercial electronics have not.

Compare it to standing desks. You don't ask IT to come and adjust your table or chair for you. You take responsibility for not knowing how to work your chair. But that's exactly the mindset around digital in many people. People need to take responsibility to make the connection.

### **Curiosity is something to be cultivated, that's the challenge.**

They are deep into their work in digital strategy. People tell them it's about change management. The success or failure of the change is going to come from the degree to which we engage employees and the organization. Leaders say it's very important and they agree, but in the end, they leave and think it doesn't apply to them.

*"It's a bit like climate change, but when we leave the meeting, it's probably not going to happen in 10-20 years, so I don't have to worry about it".*

Heads of functions that are not directly responsible for implementing a technology, don't believe they have an accountability for managing change. They think the CIO will deal with it. So they end up struggling with stakeholder buy-in and stakeholder engagement. They can have good messaging, campaigns, artwork and information, but they lack the change management that gets people to reconsider their processes and make technology their own.

So the CIO also becomes responsible for changing the business process, and that's a critical failure. That means the CIO starts tinkering with the value chain. It's not technology's place to say if the value chain should be different.

The business should come and ask for technology that can enable them to do new things. They've had real challenges around the ownership of change. They're in a situation where money is in short supply. Change management is easy to overlook and underfund. It's easy to buy technology, to buy the thing. So how do you get people to take on digital change, if they've got concerns about how to use the technology that is put before them?! They're finding that generation of value is much longer than what is accounted for in the cost of new IT.

**When we talk about upskilling, there's also a component of curiosity, it seems like. How do you nurture that?**

There's a generational gap as well. Younger people are more comfortable experimenting and trying to find solutions on their own. While older people, who also happen to be further up the hierarchy. To them, it's not seen as good to fail, so they protect themselves by not trying. It's better not to try, than trying and being seen to fail. "I'm an exec, and I'm supposed to know".. but you're not. It's entirely new. Younger people experiment without hesitation. They're used to figuring out technology, like small children who can manipulate touch screens and gesture based interfaces.

If you're going to upskill, you need to recognize you have a skill gap in the first place, otherwise leadership will not acknowledge the cost of it. If you're not prepared to do this, 'why do I have to do it then?'

Because hierarchies, with more senior/experienced people on top, have more issues around image, mindset. And if they don't want training, they're not modeling digital savviness for the organization. Even if employees come themselves to ask for training, their leaders might not be as likely to support this.

**So the people who call for digital transformation are themselves standing in the way of this, because of their ego's not allowing them to recognize what's needed to do it.**

In the '90s digital wasn't a career, computers were a computational tool for statistics. IT was a dark art. A black box in the old days. People were supposed to be thankful. That still holds true. People still expect IT will give you a solution that you need. But IT is not subject matter specialists! The business unit will tell us what they need, and we'll help them figure it out.

A recent HR software implementation, was the first software purchase where the business unit was the programme lead. IT did governance, management etc. but functionality decisions, go-live and errors... was all controlled by the business unit. So business should practice specifications! Of course payroll is fairly contained, but still. Just because IT knows about technology, it doesn't mean they know what's best for the value chain.

There's also a key in diversity of employees. And people should be encouraged to bring in their perspectives. Need champions.

Concepts like MVP are important to understand and work with, because people are used to trying and understanding everything first, and then it becomes dangerous and overwhelming.





## 7. New Zealand, Tasman Council Project Manager

Interviewee: Ms. Sarah Rackley, Project Manager

Date: October 17th, 2023

Maybe our conversation is too early. They're doing the same thing at the moment.

### **Why do you say it might be too early?**

In terms of digital competency and upskilling. That's where we are at now. We put out a survey 3-4 weeks ago (mid September 2023) - a digital competency assessment. Across a lot of tech and platforms and how comfortable users are with those different forms of tech. And their general understanding of why and what's needed.

Next steps will come out of that survey.

### **Are you using a standard survey or something tailored?**

It's completely tailored. Maybe in Microsoft Forms.

What made you do the assessment?

They have a digital innovation programme, and the digital blueprint (strategy) and roadmap are part of that. They have a programme to deliver digital transformation over the next 8-10 years. But a lot of they've already delivered an HR project which Sarah was lead on.

They are working on an upgrade for ERP and a new CRM.

They are looking at digital competency from a change management perspective. And how to make the programme as successful as can be. And part of this is the assessment and understanding where people are at - almost in terms of change readiness almost. And where the capability lies.

### **So it is the first time?**

Yes, in this comprehensive way.

Normally they have a yearly survey which also touches on how satisfied you are with the technology you are using. But nothing deeper.

### **What kind of questions are you asking in this one?**

How comfortable are you with using these solutions (Office 365, Teams..)

Other software

Cybersecurity (people's knowledge on that)

Testing that people are keeping on top of Phishing training

How often do you use different software?  
Do you use it at home+work too?  
How comfortable are you with new technology?

**How do you see the tension between hard and soft skills in the business units?**

She was privileged in having a sole focus on the new software implementation. She had the SPACE mentally to think about gaps and transitions the team needed to do. What's really difficult is that people are working 40+ hr/week roles, and so how do you find time and space to think about process and problems?!

It comes from the top in terms of leadership. The leaders have to let people work into the change.

The attitude of leadership is key to how open to change a unit is. It's really helpful to have a leader taking a stand and leading from the front.

They did a lot of training. Change management is really big. Understanding the business and the stakeholders.

That has implications for readiness for change, but also the willingness for change and to think about solutions in a new way. A big part of this is to say, we're not going to change the solution, you have to change your process.

A project she's working on now has a lot of customizations, where the software is forced to adapt to existing ways of working. But with the digital innovation programme they're taking a stand to say, we need to deliver differently.

When you're changing the software, you're dragging out the pain of change. But at some point, you have to change, right?!

**When you're saying you're doing training. And Steve also mentioned your focus on change management. Have you been to other councils in the past?**

No, this is my first council.

But do you know if having that perspective is different from what others are doing? Are you doing something differently than just giving training?

It comes down to culture, and to having the mandate to think differently. From a technology perspective and openness to change, we are quite at the forefront in terms of being open to innovation.

When we have people coming from other councils.... culture is really important. A lot of their communication is about innovation and the importance of this too.

They're told that their onboarding programme is 10x better. They start from day-1 in terms of experience of joining the council.

## **Who made that?**

That was internal. It's an orientation programme they've made over the years. It's comprehensive with 30 different meetings during the first few months. The focus is different aspects of the organization, as they are trying to be more collaborative across the council. It's very siloed. They set expectations from the beginning with overviews of different areas of the council, who's responsible for what. They have cross-council projects too.

So the two main things for me is the culture of the organization and the leadership from the top and the mandate.

**That onboarding, sounds like the foundation for the culture.**

**Digital becomes a central thing that everyone has to do, across customer journeys. so the onboarding foundation sounds like the seed for that.**

I was lucky in that my manager allowed me to get involved with many teams and initiatives in the organization.

## **How do you feel digital competency is being talked about in the organization?**

It's a generational thing. Typically. Younger generations are more comfortable with technology.

The noise they get from the older generation in relation to upgrades and changes.

Also depends on the area of work and personality.

They've worked with the Herman Brain Model. It depends on the role in the organization who likes what.

A lot of scientists are more hands-on, out-in-the-field people, so they're not comfortable with tech change.

Office based staff are more familiar and more digitally competent because they use it on a day to day basis.

What could be an example of pushback?

They used different training methods for the new payroll software.

Some people didn't attend any of the sessions. So some people are simply not interested and will come and ask if they ever need to know.

'It's already working, why do we need to change?' - that's a big question we often get and that we need to answer.

The big resistance they get is 'I don't have time in my day to think about this'.

Change management really has to explain why.

They've worked with another implementation, where they tailored training to the different business areas. In their experience, outside trainers don't understand the business they are talking into.

You mentioned that you delivered it internally, but how did you learn to do such a thing well?

One element was that they built the solution with a vendor, and there were three colleagues on the calls, and the vendor was quite mature in handling the process. Giving them everything they had to think about in advance, and then building a solution with that.

By doing that they learnt everything about the system. "Build and Training".

Sarah was already involved with User Acceptance Training. Trainers were digital competency internally (HR). They had to make their own training material too.

Having a product or business owner in charge of the project is key to drive acceptance and implementation.

### **How do you deal with the difference in concrete (software implementation) and abstract (new AI tech) capabilities?**

In terms of Forward Thinking from a digital competency perspective, it's the IT team's job to think about this mostly. Sometimes they set up user groups or focus groups to figure out if their ideas will work or not.

They don't really offer a lot of digital competency upskilling at the moment. It'll maybe come off the back of the assessment.

They do online courses that are mandatory for cyber security for example.

### **What about managers and employees?**

They are essentially looking at digital competency in the same way at the moment.

## 8. Singapore, GovTech Academy

Interviewee: Ms. Jeanette Tan, Deputy Director (Capability Development)

Date: October 23rd, 2023

### **What is the difference between what GovTech Academy and Civil Service College (CSC) do?**

CSC has been around for 14 years. Quite some time.

They realized that technology was becoming something critical and you need quite a bit of background and knowledge of this space in order to plan effective learning interventions. On top of that, they had noticed that existing public service courses were covering basic awareness and basic understanding of ICT skills, because it's difficult to reach out and become all things to all people.

So the level wasn't adequate in terms of intermediate and advanced skills, and didn't bring required ICT competencies for key tech.

Also, a lot of courses are very academic. Especially the ones offered by polytechnics and universities. They spoke to practitioners, and it was clear that they didn't want to go there. Especially in terms of new tech, it's not institutes of higher learning (IHL) that have expertise, but rather hi-tech industry and ICT companies.

So courses didn't exist internally. And the external courses that existed were not contextualized to public service. Also, companies offering this are trainers not doers and providers.

They noted that they had increasingly complex ICT projects, where people needed to work across teams. And these Cross-team-in-tech programs are hard to find.

They surveyed the landscape and decided to blend 'best in class' technical training, with the business of government. It should not be an academic institution, but one that is by practitioners (technical experts designing and delivering programs) for practitioners.

### **Is there any sort of rivalry with CSC?**

Hard to define hand-off. But because they are serving 145,000 people, a single institution can not cover everything.

They started off with conversations with CSC too. And they make sure that they collaborate with each other's strengths. One of their principles is to reduce duplication of efforts.

They also have HR academies and Finance academies.

The beginning coincided with the SMART NATION DIGITAL GOVERNMENT OFFICE was set up. They gathered technical experts, created a strategy for digital government. They

needed to create evangelists for this. One of the things they did was to say 'if you need a data analyst, these are the parameters and skills and experience to look for'.

They have a hybrid-operating model. They have a governing council, within GovTech they have curriculum and capability development and their strategy. They discuss with industry and government ministries. They also have an operations partner that manages down-stream activities of the academy. They called a massive tender for this. They brought someone in who can handle the course, have faculty and can handle payments etc.

### **How many are you on your side of it?**

Hard to get people in SG government, some are time-limited, external vendors, full-timers etc..

The HR perspective is interesting, and defining the framework too.

The way they see it is, if you don't have the right people, how are you going to decide what are the right technical areas to bring on board. Which are the ones that require more governance etc.

When looking at the MANDATE of the digital academy, they realized that they had to focus on a few different groups of people:

1. Public sector ICT professionals (very focussed on technical reskilling and up-skilling - data analyst etc. This is a generic group)
2. Making sure that public service leaders are able to and equipped to lead digital transformation and such teams. How do you lead, what credibility do you have, what do you consider and what do you not consider? Do you know about governance requirements? Fx. about building a government website: what are the requirements and what are the costs?
3. General public officers. Here they share responsibility with CSC. Work together on a lot of it. Mandatory cyber-security every year. But there is a group here that needs special consideration (policy ops and tech officers) who work together to bring projects together. Scoping, needs, costs.. making policy can have massive impact downstream, so should be considered. (fx with COVID injections, deciding the policy around this has implications for what should be made)

So we want to infuse public service ethos.

The Singapore government is wonderful at frameworks.

- Digital literacy framework (All general officers)
- ICT framework (ICT professionals)
- Framework for Public Leaders

Based on frameworks they take competencies and roles, and they translate those into learning interventions.

Very much building evangelists.

Now, they have expanded into a new area: assessment. They assess both the government, but also vendors. So the scope is getting larger.

**How does the expansion of scope occur? Did they plan for it?**

Yes, they knew they had to, but didn't know they had to scale so quickly.

**“The people we are interested in” what do you mean here?**

It is important that they work with the right functional needs in order to push and prioritize programs. The responsibility in govtech lies on functional leaders and not on the individual to make sure that people attend programs.

The second area that they are looking at is different industry leaders. Fx Google, they are collaborating around what they should be looking at. These types of people are important to them.

Also, ministry people build the various frameworks for technical areas.

They are building the generative AI development framework together with certain ministries, it goes all the way up to ministers for discussion.

With all of this, they get inserted into different areas.

This ties into how they focus.

When they started in January 2021, they focussed on needs in 3 different areas.

- Practice needs
- Digital Maturity index (across the board, every agency's maturity in analytics, agile development, cloud computing)
- Digitization plan (what roles are teams hiring for in what projects in the next 2-3 years)

This helps the academy predict what they should be focusing on.

**How do you see yourself in relation to transformation by digital?**

They started with 105 classes in 2021 - 2000 people. Next year 269 classes - 4000 people.. in 2023 they have already reached 4000+ in October. This is because of their focus on transformation by digital.

In 2018 they didn't have frameworks, but now they have the “Digital To The Core” (whole of government) push for transformation by digital agenda. Because everyone can see where they are - whether they are digital performers or laggards. This is hard motivation.

They also have a technical stack so for agencies who are not well-versed in website design, they can use a 'certain type of platform' where they don't have to go for audits,.. cost is



decided, it has been negotiated along minimal requirements from agencies. As GovTech they can also lean forward to lean in and help agencies.

So in terms of transformation by digital, it's not only transformation, it's not only digitization or digitalization. It is also a big part of service design and service journeys and UX. Project management, generative AI. Everything comes together under transformation.

### **What delineates digital in your offerings?**

Digital is about everything. But it's more important to focus on the mandate, and on the why of the digital academy. Focussing on being aligned with work plans across ministries, manpower requirements and their competencies. They also have a service where they ask leaders what they need in the coming years, and what is needed in terms of re-skilling. It's not a traditional RD position, but it helps to think about what would help to move the needle.

### **Do you have push-back like 'no time' from staff?**

They get less of it, because it's not mandatory. They do assess competencies of people. Not only knowledge, but also actual behavior and the projects they work on. That means, if someone will not actively need the course, they discourage them from taking it. You can play with it in different programmes, but will not force people through anything.

When looking at data analytics, they have a programme that has been popular for 5 years. They work with departments and agencies. Depts. and agencies had the problem that people come to their data scientists and say, we have the problem, we have the data, please do something, but that's not sustainable.

So they built a programme to help them identify a person in their organization, who had an interest and aptitude, who had on the job coaching. They got hands-on coaching with a data scientist, and this helped them take on responsibilities in addition to what they were already doing. But it also expands GovTech's field of evangelists. So they're redesigning the position.

That's very different from broad up-skilling

Yes, everyone right now is interested in generative AI. They started a series of bootcamp to hear what it's about, the implications.. and then take that home and think about it. No follow up action required. Just to introduce and spark curiosity.

They do have mandatory courses like cyber security.

### **Is that different from other countries?**

They looked around. And every solution is different depending on the need. Time, culture, and environment are dependent.

### **Are there unique aspects of the Singaporean situation?**

In the Singaporean experience, they want to make sure no one is left behind, they learn as much as possible and share. They want to be agile while providing a framework that ensures no one drops below a certain level. The Singaporean government has credibility among people, in terms of asks and wants.

### **What do you think about the difference between hard and soft skills?**

Looking at people. How we define a mature digital organization. Not only why and what but also how. They talk about people and partners. Are you leveraging the system to digitize? Are you leveraging data? You can't really ramp up in one area, it has to be covered all around.

We call that the "Digital To The Core" framework. They pair that with a concept called "serve with heart". The citizen comes first, people aspects come in here, because it is about the people who are going to profit from the transformation. People should never be out of the equation.

### **What sort of feedback do you get?**

Participants are rating programs 4.43 out of 5. Very good. The organization is only 2.5 years old, so that's good. They're very popular from the speed of uptake.

The issue they have is that managers chase them because they want more and they want it sooner.

They are chased by demand.

The programs they bring in are approved by subject matter experts in functional clusters. They don't make the decisions, the practitioners are. They identify staff. Managers are looking at up-skilling and reskilling, because it is linked to their KPIs.

They are very serious about user feedback module by module.

### **How about your organization?**

It is a government agency. Very young. Digital academy is within the umbrella of govtech. They launched in 2021.

### **How about the decentralization of digital? Have you felt friction around this?**

Looking at the history of Singapore, it is really poor. Racial riots, wars.. they are used to change. Change is constant.

Looking at tech in the office, there's not a lot of pushback. It's incorporated into the work environment and HR processes. There's no ambiguity about competency and goals.

Some people like the elderly are not good at digital, but they are doing their best to also train citizens.

They are taking the citizens as the final customer of their services very seriously.

Pillar of competency

There is a knowledge element, but also an element of your leadership and being able to frame projects and problems and speak about them. Can you be recognized as an expert in the area?

So only knowledge will only get to a level 2 out of 5. Very low.

## 9. France, SciencesPo

Interviewee: Tommaso Balbo di Vinadio, Professor/Researcher

Date: Dec 11, 2023

When they started, they realized there wasn't very much written about it. The UK government has a framework, Germany has some, universities are making some. But not a lot of coherence. Realized that a lot of people are trying to learn more about it.

Discussed with David Eaves (prev Harvard, now UCL). He developed a syllabus about digital competencies in the public sector.

They started asking themselves what digital competencies are. Are there any patterns? How many times are keywords mentioned? There was a lot of work around categorization. They wanted to simplify complexity. The UK framework is really complex, but with UNESCO they wanted something that any government in the world could look at and understand. So you could have some categories that could be unpacked as needed around the different competencies. But there is work to make it iterative and context specific.

He has worked in the past 20 years in intl. Development. People talk about AI and emerging technologies and digital transformation, because the World Bank is going to spend 25b USD in the next 5 years on African DX. A lot of these projects are failures because they don't manage to adapt whatever they do. There is a bias towards technology, a lack of competencies and a lack of contextualizing - the level of the country, whether in terms of IT infrastructure or in competencies.

It's really a huge topic with a lot of interest. But we have to be pragmatic. There's a lot of buzz around AI and ChatGPT, but you have to ask yourself: do you know what you really want? Is there a strategy for it and do you have a specific problem? AI is not going to replace jobs, it will replace tasks - what kind of tasks?

We get easily excited about new things, but when you go to Madagascar, Niger or Morocco, you see a lack of **human infrastructure**. Competencies can be divided into 3 areas.

He's interested in how a group of people come together without a lot of resources, and manage to work really effectively - this is agility, and it is lacking in the public sector. Public sector needs to work differently, especially now when you have really complex problems and you have to collaborate around it.

It's a new way of working, not just in Africa but also in Europe.

A lot of traditional organizations are very hierarchical and structured, people like structure, and it's good, but too many rules and protocols can be rigid. Like if the World Bank wants to fund a digital platform for something in Madagascar, and I suggest we approach it iteratively, they say no, because of how procurement functions. That's how old organizations put brakes on.

It's different in startups. They iterate and delegate and they test. But they can fail when they lack discipline and structure too. It's a balance.

You have to empower individuals to take initiative to some extent.

But in Tunisia and I was talking about agility, they say it's great but that it's impossible here. They think agility is anxiety and operating with no plan. But no, it's the opposite, it's an adaptive strategy. You have a longer vision, and then constantly adapt.

### **Do you think digital has increased the need for agility?**

If you want to manage DX projects, you have to be agile (collaboration, customer centricity etc). With digital projects, you can see big failures like MedicAid in the US. They didn't test it. People are used to technology and they expect more of the public sector, they expect the public sector to be more reactive.

In developing countries, it's even more so, because they see what's happening abroad too.

### **Why do you think that a lot of places have not had frameworks before recently?**

This applies to a lot of things. We get excited about things without understanding what's needed to be done to do something. For instance AI: governments just want to do something.

People don't think enough. Thinking comes before acting. They need to do self-reflection and consider the problems in the organization. It's interesting how people don't really know what they talk about with regards to digital competencies.

There's also the issue of WHOSE competencies we are talking about. Not everyone needs the same. On the one hand you have a basic understanding for each level (agility, digital literacy, customer centricity).. But from there you have roles.

### **Is there a framework that you came across that was particularly good?**

We wanted to make something that was comprehensive. The UK, for example, had a good framework FOR the UK, but what about Italy, Tunisia.. The UK framework was more about roles. They tested the framework by sending it to a cohort of governments in Africa, SE Asia and LatAm. They said it was too complex. The governments there didn't have the capacity yet to conform to such a framework (the UK one). So there is a need for something generic.

To frame the framework, the first thing you need to ask is: why? Why do you think you need this skill? How are you trying to position the role? What is the "market need" now and in the future?

In a DX project, you need to know the tasks and steps and what people are doing. If you don't know this, how can you even begin to consider skills? People are caught up in keywords.

**Whose responsibility is it to take a step back and consider those things for a framework?**

It depends on who is in charge of DX in the given government. Sometimes it's internal, semi-external.. Even cross departmental.

**When you look at a municipal setting, you have a changing role of the IT department. There's a discussion around who is in charge of pushing DX.**

It's important to remember that DX is basically changing the way you do business - ALSO by using technology. But it's comprehensive and cross-cutting.

**What do you think about differentiating roles?**

It depends on the government context. The digital maturity and the size. There are so many new roles popping up viz the UK framework with new expertise.

You need to sit down and understand your context and what you want to do. He's seen managers wanting to hire people in a certain location that simply did not exist there. You need to be pragmatic and realistic.

Something that is really overlooked is the need to anticipate trends. Governments are not too good at this. Fx with GenAI. At SciencesPo, they blocked ChatGPT on launch. They didn't expect that, and didn't anticipate the strengths. Likewise you need to teach the public sector to anticipate trends.

This points to agility, and the entrepreneurial government as well. It's great that they are coming out with EU AI frameworks, but there is room to be more proactive and make strategic investments.

## 10. United Kingdom, David Eaves

Interviewee: David Eaves, Professor at UCL

Date: Jan 11, 2024

**When we talk about digital competency, some people talk about it as coding, and you could frame that as “hard” skills, while on the other hand you have “soft” skills such as understanding users and agility. Do you agree with this way of framing things?**

It's a relevant distinction, but hard and soft might not be the right words to describe it. We should fix a misunderstanding. Are you trying to create a new set of competencies, that you will layer or put side by side with existing competencies. Or are you trying to think about whether the current set of competencies needs to be replaced or updated. That is a more basic question that people often do not ask. So people tend to think there is an additional set of skills that people need to have: before there wasn't coding skills, now there is coding skills.. And that's different from the “soft” skills you insinuate, where it is more like a reframing of an existing skill.

Another point is that I dislike the term digital government, because it sounds like the future. But we should be talking about the present. What I think you should be trying to describe is, what are the Public Administration competencies that you need in the 21st century. It's not about adding, it's about subtracting or replacing!

So if you look at the competencies on the <https://www.teachingpublicservice.digital/> website, none of them have to do with technology. Most of them also applied 50 years ago, like privacy and user understanding. But the way we are doing those things, and we need to do those things, has changed. So the website is an advocacy for the updating of competencies, not the accrual of new competencies.

It's not about defining skills of roles, but rather to say, what is the minimum amount of knowledge you need to have. Another question could be, what are the new jobs you need to create, and how do you reform the existing jobs.

So we're talking about how to reform the existing jobs.

**So could we say that “adding more skills” is a mechanical, simplistic way of thinking about it?**

It's just a matter of people fumbling around. In government, a central question to ask is: “who defines what the job specifications are”? Is it an individual unit or does it happen on HR level? At some point having basic understanding of economics suddenly became necessary in any role of government. And now, for good and for ill we are burdened with that. But who decides that?

**What are you hearing that makes people successful? What are the sort of barriers they have to transcend to come to terms with digital competencies?**

There is a bigger challenge. In the UK and around the world, there is this assumption that it is a competency problem. Somehow it is about the people in the job who don't have the right competencies. And that ignores the structural reasons for why we don't get the outcomes that we want. So for example around agility, having someone who understands the mindset of agile, is only helpful if they can advocate for a project that is agile based and not waterfall based, in order to get a budget for springs with unknown outcomes. All the competencies in the world aren't going to matter if the system is not working with them. The inverse is that if you change the way systems worked, so people had that flexibility, maybe people would start to develop those competencies because the system demands it of them. But at the moment, the system isn't demanding, it's downright hostile to it. So going in to try and solve a competency problem, ends up throwing people into a system that can not make use of or reward those competencies, and it'll be frustrating.

**That's the organizational context. We've come to understand that it is too much to put the onus on the individual.**

Yes, you have to at least understand the organizational context which they are being dropped into. And what does it reward and what does it punish?

**But how do you go about that? It seems like a chicken and egg problem, to get managers to have that self-reflection.**

We tend to focus on the managers, because we're less interested in providing new skills, and more on things about the way work is done. Other ways of measuring and doing the work. But even that's limited. A manager who doesn't get it can't manage. That's the reason why it's so hard to get started.

**Digital competencies feel straight forward when you hear the term the first time. As if it's only about email or word. But there's more to it than that, right.**

Nobody said at any point, hey, we have to do email. It's more that email crept into the institution and people had to respond to it. We didn't populate our workplaces with people who had email in their job description. Rather, email happened, and everything around it changed with that fact.

These are not digital competencies. I think they are public administration competencies. The current public administration competencies do not reflect the reality of today. And the more you keep saying digital competencies, the more people will say 'there are 5 of them' or 'they're a niche' or that they compete with other competencies.

**And then your point is that it is pervasive, and not something to prioritize or not, it's a fact on the ground, right?**

The framing itself leads to part of the problem. We don't speak of literacy competencies, if we can read or write. That's a fact. You can have variations between roles in terms of what level of competency for writing is needed. So you can think of this topic in the same way, as literacy, because it won't be the same for everybody.



Everybody has to know how to read or write in order to work for the government. But we don't all have to be virtuosos. A comms analyst should be able to craft strong messages, whereas a sanitation worker should be able to read and fill out forms. So there's a range to it.

**So digital literacy would open up to the thinking that there is a spectrum.**

Yes, maybe, just trying to lay out an argument.