

5 Unconventional Ways to Think About Digital Transformation

The way people often discuss digital transformation is both evocative and vague. Intuitively, they get that transformation is a more holistic concept than modernization, which tends to focus on updating or replacing outdated technology. They get that it encompasses broader organizational concerns and goals — but exactly how, they can't exactly say.

At a recent GovLoop digital event, [Your Roadmap for Gov Transformation](#), thought leaders from government and industry shared their experiences driving transformation, with a focus on some key principles that can help make digital transformation a concrete, achievable goal. ***Here are highlights from that session.***

Think About... IT as the Means not the End

NASA's Marlowe generally defines digital transformation as "changing a process, product or capability so dramatically that it's unrecognizable from its traditional form."

But notice that the noun is "transformation"; "digital" is an adjective, she said. In that vein, begin by thinking about the goal of transformation, then determine how IT can help you get there.

In NASA's case, the goal is to take a more collaborative approach to space missions, working both with a coalition of 36 nations as well as private-sector organizations investing their own resources. Now the task is to determine how IT can support that new model, Marlowe said.



Participants

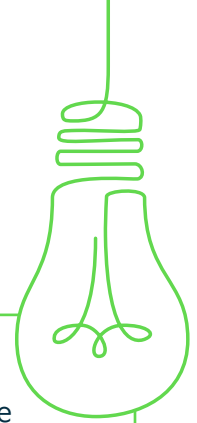
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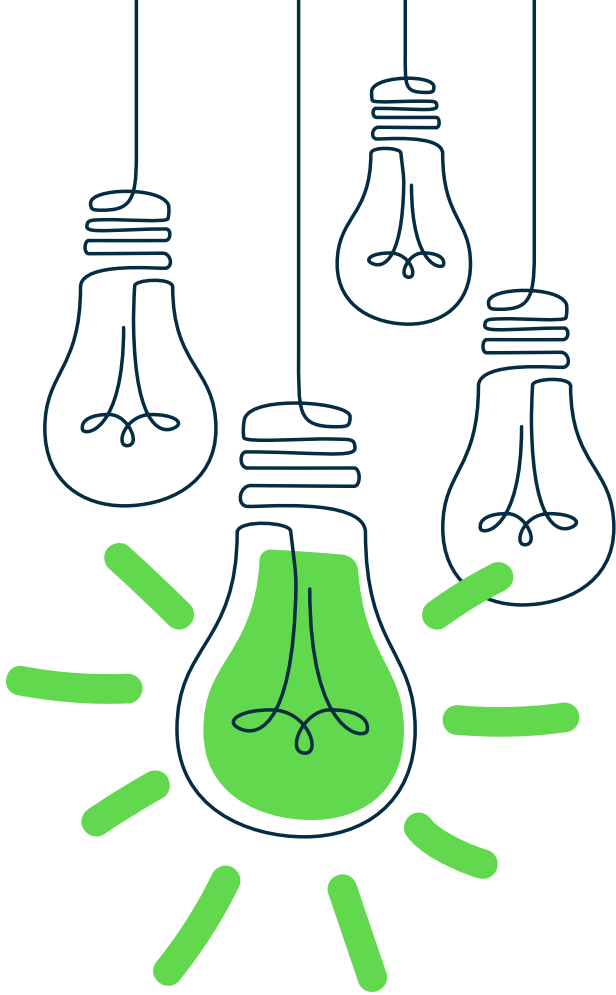


Think About... People, not Just Systems

VA officials know they need to modernize the agency's financial system, which is 35 years old. "But for us, transformation is actually about transforming the way people work, not just the system," said VA's Sadek. "It's about transforming the way we do everything in support of those who support our veterans."

For example, as the agency modernizes its systems, it will look for opportunities to automate tasks that regularly eat up staff hours, such as putting together reports for Congress and managing Freedom of Information Act requests.

Automation "will allow people to move to that next level of thinking strategically across business [lines], across organizations, [using] good quality data and information to make great decisions on behalf of our veterans," she said.



Think About... **The Customer Experience**

In the same vein, Pennsylvania's Erickson recognizes the importance of adopting better technology and processes, but in her case, that efficiency must be assessed by looking about its impact on the state's constituents and businesses.

"Transformation is really about making Pennsylvania as business friendly as possible," she said, "transforming the state's business ecosystem so that we bring as much economic development to the state as possible."

Erickson's team could waste a lot of time figuring out how to build better systems and more efficient processes. But to what extent will those innovations help the state attract and retain businesses and residents? Emphasizing the customer experience helps them target their efforts.

Think About... **Root Problems**

Conventional wisdom says government procurement often is hindered by "red tape," that is, by overly complex processes or policies. But solutions for cutting through that red tape often fall short because they don't get at the root problem, said DHS' Simpson.

"There's so many times when we jump in and say, 'There's this new generative [artificial intelligence] thing, and I'm going to do X, Y and Z,' and then you deploy it, and no one uses it," he said. "You ask why, and they say, 'You didn't talk to me first. I'm not having a problem with that. I'm having a problem over here.'"

To identify a root problem, said Simpson, you need to get people involved upfront and find out what they think the primary trouble is. It might be a matter of old technology or outdated processes, or it might be more of a cultural issue that needs to be addressed through training and awareness initiatives.

Think About... **Metrics**

People often talk about transformation as a journey, and the journey is important. But for the journey to have meaning, you need to keep the end goal in mind, said ServiceNow's Herman.

That means defining the end goal in measurable terms, that is, key performance indicators, that you can use to assess your progress and correct course as needed.

"If our journeys and our experiences aren't measurably and directly supporting the achievement of better services...with higher customer satisfaction scores for the people that are relying on it most, then it's all just paperwork there," Herman said.

[**Click here to watch the entire session on demand.**](#)