
From 'IT Department' to 'Digital Team': Practical Steps



For many health providers, digital transformation is a challenging multidimensional task, but it always starts with an enabled digital team. Several leading U.K. organisations have developed a guide to help leaders facilitate creation and support of such teams.

You might also like: [How To Manage a Remote Healthcare Team](#)

The guide, [Building and enabling digital teams](#), has been prepared by NHS Providers and Public Digital and supported by Health Education England (HEE) and NHSX. It builds on the NHS Providers' [first guide](#) and offers some practical solutions to assist in developing effective, open and responsive digital teams that will lead the digital transformation.

At the core of such teams' work lie three key concepts: user-centred design, agile ways of working and a knowledge of how to build and operate modern internet technologies. However, leaders should keep in mind that a digital team is not a 'rebrand' of an IT department, but an equal partner to clinical and operational teams. Hence, to support a digital team many operating norms should be reviewed in parallel, in areas such as funding, HR management, performance assessment, etc.

Common Challenges

The challenges to effective digital transformation are many, and the most obvious include:

- Inappropriate funding structure, which encourages short-term rather than long-term solutions. As a result, many organisations still lack the necessary digital infrastructure.
- Multiple legacy systems, whose maintenance is resource-consuming and inhibits introduction of new solutions.
- 'Invisible' nature of IT work, which makes it difficult to have a reference point to properly appraise the performance of IT departments.
- Siloed work culture that may undermine the ultimate efficiency of any digital transformation, as the change will be IT-led rather than service-user led.
- Risk management requires finding the balance between rapid and radical change common in the IT field and a more staged approach usual in healthcare.
- Attracting and retaining digitally skilled staff, especially in rural areas, and the lack of clear career prospects.
- In-house development vs. outsourced/ready-made solutions. Decision-making on this particular aspect requires much consideration and is complicated by possible lack of skills and resources as well as inflated market expectations.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for change for many healthcare organisations, increasing the pace of transformation, sharpening the purpose of such change and helping shift the priorities towards digitalisation. Furthermore, it caused a crucial change in mindsets.

Building Digital Teams

The first step to digital transformation is to create a diverse interdisciplinary team of professionals with versatile skills, deep knowledge and high motivation. On this way, collaboration between IT-oriented members of the team and clinical and operational staff is of utmost importance as is incorporating both new approaches and existing expertise and networks.

When implementing digital transformation strategies, leadership support is important. An organisation should be 'digitally-minded' rather than 'IT-led', which means prioritising digital technology, testing new outcomes-driven approaches, investing in people, readjusting the existing operating models and being user-centred. Building minimum viable teams and then scaling them up when new needs arise may be an efficient strategy

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compared to expanding one digital team.

Responding to a new digitally-driven agenda is it vital to ensure clinical ownership. Leaders who combine understanding of digital strategies with clinical background help bridge the gap between digital and frontline clinicians. Eliminating silos and facilitating collaboration between IT, clinical and operational teams is a similarly essential element of the transformation.

Good governance must frame all the efforts towards the digital transformation. Bringing together leaders and teams and facilitating dialogue between them as well as delegating decision-making to responsible teams, is crucial for successful digital delivery.

When aiming to enhance an organisation's digital capabilities, it is recommended that the leadership ask themselves a number of questions about, for example, how information and authority relate, who steers key technology decisions, how the services are designed and talent is attracted, or how the digital strategies are communicated to other stakeholders.

Source: [NHS Providers](#)

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