

Capability transformation for cloud-based digital services

Many organisations struggle to hire and retain people with the skills required to successfully shift from traditional legacy technology and delivery processes to modern cloud-based services. To optimise technology investment, organisations require highly evolved capabilities within teams and people, optimised cloud delivery governance and processes, and modern technology and tooling.

Equal Experts has hands-on experience in helping digital organisations at scale across a wide range of industries. Typically in our client engagements, a key objective, alongside the move to cloud-based services, is to help transfer and embed knowledge of technology and process innovation to improve our clients' internal competency and build long-term sustainable capability.

Features

- Embeds new ways of working for sustainable long-term change
- Delivers digital Transformation, adhering to digital by default service standards
- Increases value when moving to cloud through modern mature practices
- Addresses the cultural changes needed for delivering successful, sustainable outcomes
- Strong focus on engineering and architecture to enable new methods
- Facilitates learning by doing, with hands-on coaching and mentoring
- Effective knowledge transfer and upskilling of team members
- Holistic approach to transformation that combines culture, methods and organisation
- Readiness tool assesses capability maturity in people, processes, technology, tooling
- Tailored practices to address specific organisational constraints without losing benefits

Benefits

- Builds long-term sustainable internal delivery capability, skills and competency
- Addresses resistance to change, builds success stories, embeds rigour
- Experienced Equal Expert staff underwrite the capability transformation
- Aligns digital services with business lines; service managers own P&L
- Empowers digital transformation teams to solve problems

- Introduces effective governance structures to optimise ROI
- Focuses on breaking dependencies at every level of the organisation
- Platforms encourage re-use, reinforce positive behaviour and scale delivery
- Appropriate culture and practices tailored to the organisation
- Implements digital change at organisation, leadership and practitioner levels

Our approach to capability transformation

Equal Experts work on-site with our clients and take responsibility for end-to-end multi-channel software applications and platforms typically deployed or migrated to the Cloud. We use proven, rigorous, disciplined engineering practices and processes that help to improve productivity, optimise throughput and allow for continuous learning and improvement.

Typically, a key objective is to help transfer and embed knowledge of technology and process innovation, to improve our clients' internal capability and build long-term sustainable internal delivery competence as they transition to modern Cloud-based technology and services.

To embed new practices effectively, our consultants take responsibility for helping individual client team members adopt mature practices and new ways of working in their respective disciplines.

In our experience, working together through the lifecycle to overcome problems and 'learn by doing' helps win over sceptics, reduce resistance to change, build success stories, and embed rigour and discipline in software practices.

Our consultants all have many years' experience, and we tailor particular practices to address specific organisational constraints – we recognise that every organisation is different and there is no "one size fits all" approach.

The depth of experience of our consultants means they are mature, pragmatic, and have an approach grounded in hard-won experience. This is key to our ability to help transfer and embed knowledge of new ways of working to client team members. All our consultants are selected based on their demonstrated understanding of how intelligent and innovative uses of technology can create competitive advantage across industries. Passing this expertise and understanding to our clients is a key and unique advantage and value provided throughout our engagements.

To implement successful, lasting change at an organisational, leadership and practitioner level, we recommend a dual approach:

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- Coaching of senior business and technology executives to understand their motivations and address any gaps in understanding between the organisational structure and delivery teams.
- Embedding experienced practitioners with both delivery and mentoring capabilities in exemplar teams – helping to introduce and reinforce capabilities at the practice level to build a sustainable internal capability.

Doing these in tandem will help build the following characteristics, which we believe are necessary for an effective digital organisation at scale:

- Engineering-centric culture – empowered technical people with deep expertise who remain hands-on in delivery, with an emphasis on code quality, automation and working “smart”.
- Long-lived cross-functional teams owning a product or a service – throughout the lifecycle, including Cloud operations and support. Align the product and services with business lines, where business “service managers” responsible for the P&L are collaborating closely with IT.
- Organisational structure providing autonomy and purpose - ensure teams have control over their destiny and are given autonomy to solve their problems. Focus on breaking dependencies at every level of the organisation and every step of the digital lifecycle. In our experience, focusing on helping teams to think and decide for themselves is more important than imposing a consistent process and tooling across the entire organisation. A common culture and architecture/platform strategies are better suited to provide coherent direction to the whole.
- Enterprise-wide architecture transformation - this will be specific to the client’s context, but we typically consider the following:
 - Build common Cloud-based platform(s) to encourage re-use, reinforce positive behaviour, remove dependencies and scale multiple teams without creating the rigidity that reduces efficiency and innovation.
 - Simplify the legacy estate to lower capex (including cost of change).

Outline engagement structure

After establishing a steering group to lead the transition, we will embark on a time-bound inception to gather context and identify the path of the transition. Following this, we will embark on the following phases:

- Phase 1 will run an ‘Exemplar’ with a co-sourced team of EE consultants leading customer staff. This exemplar will identify which improvements are possible at

what level of investment and for what benefits, within the specific customer context.

- Phase 2 will focus on scaling – transitioning more domains to the new way of working. We help with selecting new members for the customer delivery organisation while implementing more exemplars together to further up-skill customer staff, providing hands-on coaching during the course of real-world delivery.

In parallel, we will carry on coaching executives across the organisation to evangelise the shift to new ways of working, and adherence to agreed digital Service Standards - providing a standard for all teams.

In Phase 3, the customer will have developed the capability to continue the transition more widely, with or without our help.

Meeting the cultural challenges of transformation

At Equal Experts, we are experienced in helping organisations across the private and public sectors transform their capabilities in digital delivery. However, the cultural change required for successful transformation at scale requires significant effort – work needs to be approached in a very different way.

Below, we describe the principles that underpin our success in digital capability building and transformation, so that customers expecting to undergo significant change when transitioning towards a digital cloud-first future can evaluate our cultural fit as a “transformation partner”.

Ways of working on their own are not enough

Adopting new ways of working is a key factor for increasing value and moving to the cloud, but those methods won't be effective without a strong focus on engineering and architecture. New practices will not turn mediocre developers into good developers, nor will they remove legacy architecture constraints. Also, modern engineering practices are well-suited to bespoke software using modern technologies that lend themselves to automation – in other words, the benefits they provide are limited by commercial off-the-shelf packages and legacy systems. This is why we recommend a holistic approach that combines culture, methods and organisation with an ambitious architecture transformation.

Before you scale, you have to tackle the really hard problems

Our approach is to first test the scalability of the new ways of working within the context of the organisation, before committing high levels of resource to the problem. To do this, we typically run one or more deliveries that address existing constraints, focusing on what is typically hard to solve – things like breaking down silos, removing dependencies, evolving the architecture (to cloud-based environments) and improving automation (automating the path to production via DevOps practices).

Our experience shows that if those problems cannot be solved with a small team in one part of the organisation, it becomes impossible to progress at scale. This is why we initially focus on ‘digital at depth’ – only once the new model is proven will we gradually expand it to get to ‘digital at scale’.

The best coaching comes from hands-on delivery

In seeking to transform capabilities, clients are typically looking for a partner to help develop those capabilities within the organisation itself – not an organisation that delivers the work on their behalf. Our approach is to set up co-sourced teams where we combine hands-on delivery people from both the client and our teams. We believe that working together on a specific problem is the most efficient way to acquire the necessary skills and deep understanding required to embed new ways of working successfully.

Each of our consultants will mentor and participate in hands-on implementation. That way, we can address the hard problems together, which means the appropriate culture and practices are much more likely to survive in the long term. This is what will enable client staff to become self-sufficient – and not revert to old habits when things get challenging.

This approach contrasts with an alternative, in which a supplier provides several agile coaches who each work across many teams. In our experience with large organisations, we have not seen that approach yield meaningful, long-lasting results on its own.

Examples of capability transformation in action

At HMRC, we have been a key programme delivery partner for HMRC’s award-winning Multi-channel Digital Tax Platform from its outset at the start of 2013. The objective was to move approximately 600M+ transactions a year, across 50M+ customers, from traditional/voice channels to digital channels.

In 2020, this platform underpinned the UK Government's Covid-19 Job Retention Scheme for furloughed employees, successfully delivering more than £1.8bn to 220,000 eligible claims in the first 24 hours of live operation. The whole solution was built and delivered within 1 month.

This tax platform was one of the UK Government's totemic 'exemplar' projects, and therefore had to be Digital by Default – a continuously improving service that sets the standard for how digital solutions can enhance the Government's ability to offer straightforward, accessible services.

Integrated transactional services provide seamless end-to-end experiences for business and individual customers, with self-service applications 'bundled' together to provide services based around life events (eg. a customer setting up a business), and address tax risks.

Digitisation is changing how HMRC works internally, automating many currently manual processes. Ultimately, it will result in the design of tax policy that can be implemented digitally. More transactions will be automatically risk-assessed in real time, and HMRC can be responsive to customers who improve compliance. This frees up HMRC resources to focus more on tackling evasion, deliberate non-payment and criminal activity.

We have helped HMRC transform the way it approaches large-scale technology. We have not just deployed a new technology platform to the cloud – we have helped HMRC build its entire digital delivery organisation (1,200+ people in 60+ teams, working on a shared platform across multiple digital delivery centres) from scratch, to ensure the ongoing evolution, maintenance and operation of the platform and the digital services it supports.

Together, we have dramatically shortened the time taken to deliver working software: new services can move from the idea stage through to reaching customers much faster than before. Changes can be made in hours, not weeks. HMRC Digital now releases new functionality to users multiple times a day, instead of a couple of times a year, and is able to scale development in ways that help them meet users' needs sooner and more effectively.

Most significantly, by helping transform HMRC Digital's technology capability, we have helped transform HMRC as an organisation. HMRC leaders are no longer reliant on reviewing a set of requirements documents and hoping for the best; they are central to building digital services and solving their users' problems. HMRC can now create digital

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services in a user-centred, agile way, meeting the country's needs in the digital age at a much lower cost than before.