



Scott Logic



Scott Logic
Perspective Report

Become the face of public sector technology

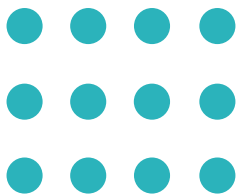
Lessons from the people and projects
shaping government





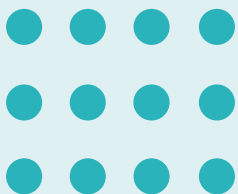
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Foreword from Steve Foreshew-Cain, CEO, Scott Logic



Wherever you look, some emerging technology is creating an opportunity for progress. Why shouldn't the public sector be able to claim some of those wins? And why couldn't you be the face of one?

Welcome to the Scott Logic Perspective Report. Inside, you'll hear from five people who know what it means to be the face of public sector technology. They know because they've done it themselves – delivering practical, technology-enabled services to citizens and communities across the country.

Each short section in this report tackles a familiar challenge with a fresh perspective, to show you what it takes and inspire your own approach. In Never a waste, Managing Director Chris Ferguson discusses the value of mistakes. Planned redundancy from Principal Consultant Jess McEvoy explores the need to close – not just fill – the government technology skills gap. And in Social currency, Head of Public Sector Sales Glen Ocskó suggests some of the best ways to measure progress beyond the bottom line.

But this report is only the beginning. Our experts are keen to help you put their perspectives into practice, discuss your projects and, ultimately, raise your profile by helping you become the face of public sector technology. So, don't hesitate to get in touch.

Thanks for reading,

Steve Foreshew-Cain



Never a waste

How missteps can lead us to meaningful change

Chris Ferguson is Managing Director of Scott Logic. Over a 20-year career, Chris has worked in the Home Office and the Cabinet Office's Government Digital Service, where he helped to establish several cross-government platforms, including the Identity Assurance programme. Here, he discusses why the face of public sector technology should be able to implement timely, meaningful change – and how waste can guide you in the right direction.



From buying stamps to banking, sending mail to exchanging data, public services require thousands of forms. So, what if we made them all available for citizens to download online? Is that meaningful digital change? Or just a bit of a misstep?

It's hard to be visionary when the day-to-day is so demanding. Working in government, where pre-existing projects cross your path and legacy technology is a tripping hazard, it's easier to focus on what's possible than what's right. Getting something, anything, done can become the be-all-end-all – and the driver of all your decisions. But if you want to become the face of public sector technology, you know you need to pursue meaningful change.

So, where should you look?

Start your search where user journeys end

The trends concerning other organisations don't always apply to the public sector. As Steve explores later, it's more important the public sector keeps up than gets ahead. But with nobody to follow, we usually have to find our own way. And sometimes, naturally, it's not perfect first time.

Here's an example.

One government agency found that citizens were abandoning a complicated online journey and opting instead to call the number shown on each page. The result? Failure waste in the purpose-built service. And failure demand putting pressure on another.

Failure waste is when users hit an obstacle and abandon your service – reducing your return on investment. Failure demand is when users hit an obstacle and turn from your purpose-built service to a more expensive or less suitable alternative. This government agency had built a service that wasn't serving its purpose – and was stuck paying for the backup option, too.

But failure needn't be a waste.

This story ends with the government agency spotting its misstep, identifying where citizens were struggling with the technology and realising the meaningful change necessary to meet their needs as users. And it could be where yours starts.

How it's used must inform how it works

Making meaningful change isn't so much about understanding technology as it is about understanding people's experiences of using it.

So, what are your biggest sources of failure waste? Look for the points where users are abandoning your purpose-built services and figure out why. Where are you suffering the most failure demand? You'll find it at the place where citizens are reappearing in your system and raising your costs.

And if you need support, look no further than Scott Logic. We believe that meaningful change can only be based on the service you're providing, the user challenge you're trying to solve and the resources you're trying to save – not the technology you're working with. It's why our team, with its combined decades of experience in the public sector, focuses on understanding where you are, what your citizens need and the most meaningful changes you can make to deliver it to them.

When you see it that way, perhaps simply making all those public sector forms available to download online is just creating more work for the government and its citizens.

But what if we made those forms fillable and submittable online? And what if the data was then applied across the user's entire digital presence? Now, the focus isn't on how the service will work but how it will be used. We can identify the areas that really need our attention and to what degree. And we can be sure that our efforts will pay off – instead of going to waste.





The wheel keeps turning

Working fast and slow in the public sector

Peter Chamberlin is Technology Lead at Scott Logic. Peter started his career in start-ups and then media as a developer, before moving to the public sector to work for the Government Digital Service as a technical architect. Since then, he's worked in start-ups and as a consultant for clients including the Department for Education and Government Digital Service.

Here, he discusses the pace of delivery in government – and why the face of public sector technology must understand how the big wins are founded on work done in the long-term.

Few organisations can claim a customer base of 67 million people. Scale is one thing that sets the public sector apart from the private – no organisation has a responsibility to customers like a government does to its citizens.

On one hand, the public sector can't choose its customers. But citizens equally can't choose their public services. Citizens on the Orkney Islands require the same services as those in Central London, but they might have very different needs – different connectivity, skills or local infrastructure. If someone is entitled to a service – from permits to pensions – there's a government department responsible for delivering it to them. That's 67 million UK residents, plus millions of visitors.

The scale of the challenges, along with the number of competing priorities and pressures, can mean that change takes a long time. The wheel of government turns slowly.

That can be frustrating when you want to get something done – especially when you believe in the mission, as so many public servants do. The public sector doesn't always lend itself to quick wins. It demands bullet-proof outcomes, because you're often delivering crucial services to meet the whole spectrum of needs.

But I've found that at the right moment, with the right things in place, you can help make big things happen fast. That's not in spite of the careful pace of change, but because of it.

Delivering at sudden pace

The pandemic was a national upheaval. I don't think we thought very much about the lessons we were learning at the time. But looking back, I can see how privileged I was to be asked to support a mission for the Department for Education.

I worked on the Get Help with Technology programme, for and with schools shut during lockdown, to get laptops and wireless connectivity to vulnerable children, care leavers and their families.

This was not only to support their education during lockdown but to provide them with a vital connection to the outside world. And it wasn't just about shipping devices. More than a million children and care leavers needed laptops. We needed to configure them to be safe to use and hard to steal or misappropriate – without tracking or identifying the users in any way. We needed to configure the devices, then build and ship up to 10,000 per day.

I led the work to technically specify the laptop build, testing and verifying the builds across dozens of different hardware variants. We worked at an extraordinary pace, collaborating with vendors and suppliers on a daily basis and in a tiny team that reminded me of my start-up days. We had bold, technology-literate leadership from Senior Civil Servants in the Department for Education. The red tape disappeared, and we had real time assurance and support from organisations like the NCSC to support secure and safe delivery.

We shipped over 1.3 million devices within the year. It's something I'm immensely proud to have been a part of – and I'll take forward the lessons I learned in teamwork and dedication from the people I worked alongside. Of course, none of that rapid collaboration would have been possible without careful preparation. Jess has previously written about this for the Scott Logic blog. Here's another experience that proves it's true.



The long-term work that supports rapid delivery

As the pandemic unfolded, I was asked to take on another project alongside my work at DfE. A Director at the Government Digital Service, responding to the need for new transactional services, wanted me to bring together my ideas on login and digital identity.

It was a piece of work for that moment in time – but it had been years in the making. Around four years earlier, I'd been the lead architect for digital identity at GDS, working on the GOV.UK Verify programme. It wasn't easy work, but I became a subject matter expert in digital identity and continued to work in the space, even supporting GDS as an independent consultant in later years.

Login and identity is the kind of long-term challenge that can be so frustrating in government. But in that moment, I had the

opportunity to put forward a set of ideas and approaches that became the One Login programme. It is now the UK's Strategic Digital Identity programme and I saw it into production as Chief Architect, shipping it to live in less than a year.

GDS as a whole is oriented in such a way that we could pivot 100 or so people onto the mission rapidly, and the platform infrastructure, design principles, user research, standards and assurance were all in place. The department had spent a decade building the capability.

And in retrospect the same was true at DfE. In those moments, the thousands of hours of preparation came to bear on the delivery of services at a critical time.

That's why we put the long-term leg work in here at Scott Logic. What goes around comes around.





Social currency

What we measure when we don't measure money

Glen Ocskó is Head of Public Sector Sales at Scott Logic. One of the newest members of the team, Glen brings more than 10 years' experience in community engagement, shaping short- and long-term decisions in councils across London.

Here, he discusses the unique position of a sector unmotivated by profit – and why the face of public sector technology should use social, economic and environmental benefits as the benchmark.

As Peter pointed out, there are no quick wins in the public sector. Even if you hadn't read it here, you'll certainly have lived it out there. Our decisions today must also consider tomorrow. The public sector needs to see return on investment in both the short- and long-term.

But what does that return look like when money isn't the motivator? What can you measure to judge the most meaningful change? Being the face of public sector technology makes you answerable to 67 million citizens – how do you show them you're delivering as promised?

We need only look at what's at stake.

Before the first 10%

Picture a typical consulting services contract. Perhaps 10% of it is guaranteed – a proving ground before the project progresses. In this way, the private and public sectors aren't so different. Overpromise or underwhelm during that initial period? It all ends there.

The difference? While the private sector loses revenue, we lose something even more valuable.

The public sector places social good above all else. It's the currency we count and the yardstick by which ministers measure success. Don't get me wrong – there's a balance to strike between purpose and profit. But while opportunities to turn a profit will come and go, the public sector may only get one shot at making this difference in society.

So, we can't afford to wait until we're 10% done. We can't waste even a day. Social good is the return we need to see from the start. At least, that's how we think at Scott Logic.

Look beyond the bottom line

This is now codified in the Social Value Act – encouraging us to ask ourselves how our public service project might be able to deliver wider social, economic and environmental benefits.

How many graduates will we hire? How many local jobs will we create? How will the local community benefit? Not to mention how effectively will we deliver against the project objectives? And are we the right team for the task? Is there a local partner that would be better placed or are generalists unfairly ringfencing key areas?

These questions – and plenty more like them – are how the public sector proves a project's value. As the face of public sector technology, you'll need to lead by example, making social good the basis for every decision you make. It's something we at Scott Logic try to do ourselves.

It's why we set up the Altitude Foundation, which helps young people get their start in the technology world, and Marra, which supports women building careers in the industry. Our commitment to social, economic and environmental benefits even predates the Social Value Act. When Scott Logic was founded in Newcastle, it was to provide quality tech jobs outside London.

Don't get me wrong – we know the public sector needs to save money. We share your focus on delivering efficient services that reduce costs. But it's never the only consideration we make. We strive to deliver work which improves people's lives and which also happens to be cheaper to deliver, rather than only focusing on the pound signs.





Planned redundancy

How to achieve your objectives without us

Jess McEvoy is a Principal Consultant at Scott Logic. After roles in the governments of the UK and New Zealand, Jess was drawn to her role at Scott Logic by the level of experimentation it allows – designing, building and running technology platforms and services for departments across government.

Here, she discusses the challenges facing public servants as they drive delivery in complex environments – and why the face of public sector technology will learn every step of the way.

Perhaps you read Chris's perspective on learning from mistakes and identified your own opportunity for a change in approach. Or maybe ministers, anticipating a shift, are pushing you in new directions at odds with what you'd planned for. But governments are required to respond to the issues of the day. And whether they're immediate – like those we saw during the pandemic – or long-term, they'll make unique demands of you and your team.

Whatever the context, the bigger the change, the deeper the skillset and learned experience required to achieve the desired outcomes.

Organisations across all sectors often struggle to fill the digital, data and technology roles they need. But there's a perfect storm of conditions making it even harder for the government. It's not just that new requirements reveal missing skills. Political pressures and a restrained appetite for change can drive frustrated talent away, creating more gaps. The sheer scale and complexity of delivery – which must consider citizens, businesses and countless organisation types besides – demands a range of skills and experience at different phases of delivery.

From inception, through design, to build and run, the profile of people needed will shift over time. So, how can the public sector build and attract the skillsets it needs to approach new opportunities with confidence?

Why am I still paying for this?

The obvious solution is to bring in some outside help for the duration of the project. However, while senior leaders may want tangible, finished things to draw a line under, we know that robust, reliable and secure technology doesn't usually work that way.

When the initial job is finished and the objectives achieved, the focus must shift from building to maintaining, iterating and improving. This, combined with the difficulty of hiring the skills

needed, can mean that outside help can easily become a full-time cost. And ministers grow frustrated: "I've paid for this – so, why am I still paying for this?"

Don't let filling the skills gap distract you from closing it. Any partner worth working with will help to build education into the project plan. I know because that's what Scott Logic does. We bring in a blended team of adaptive skills that can flex as the project progresses through agile delivery phases. It's a model that builds up the knowledge of the in-house team, leaving them ready to manage the estate without additional support.

How to succeed without Scott Logic

Put simply, we build the system, build the knowledge, then back out and wait to be invited back. That's how Scott Logic operates – not making ourselves permanent and indispensable but focussing on knowledge transfer, empowering you to make confident, autonomous decisions that give you more control over your digital estate (and your budget).

Scott Logic understands that, regardless of sector, technologists want a job that stimulates them. Many are excited by the prospect of solving the unique problems the public sector presents. We help our clients create mature, modern environments that engineers want to use, making it easier for programmes to attract and hire quality candidates.

And it doesn't hurt when we see these two big benefits bring customers back time and time again.

So, keep in mind that projects will require different skillsets throughout their lifecycles. But remember that this doesn't mean you can't keep costs under control – and close the skills gap along the way.



Boring magic

Why delivery today matters more than strategy tomorrow

Steve Foreshow-Cain is CEO of Scott Logic. Steve's storied career includes leading the Government Digital Service in its mission to make digital government simpler, clearer and faster for everyone. He was drawn to Scott Logic for its similarly mission-driven purpose.

Here, he discusses fighting the urge to chase the latest trends – and why the face of public sector technology will instead focus on the ordinary projects that transform lives.

Why just keep up when you could get ahead? When the here and now feels like an obligation, it can be awfully tempting to chase the promise of new opportunities. But whether it's implementing AI or overhauling your infrastructure, that attractive new toy won't always solve the everyday problems.

To solve those problems and become the face of public sector technology, delivery is the only viable strategy.

As Peter said, the wheel of the public sector keeps turning. Look around you. How many of your department's dormant tools were once considered cutting-edge? This is a tough reality of working with technology, of course. But when we look to theoretical solutions for theoretical problems, we don't make it any easier for ourselves.

It means the public sector has a balance to strike. What are the real problems facing citizens? How can technology help solve the problem? And can we make it accessible to 67 million people? It'll come as no surprise that that's not as simple as it sounds...

The right solution to a real problem

Earlier in my career, a developing country was hit by a natural disaster, causing widespread damage. In response, some of my colleagues – smart, passionate people – devised a digital system to help match displaced children to their parents. But what they'd overlooked was the reality of the people affected. Few had reliable access to power – even fewer owned devices that could run the proposed software.

The solution was theoretical. It wasn't until it pivoted to SMS – capitalising on the widespread use of mobile phones and the relatively unaffected cell reception – that it became practical.

When I was at the Government Digital Service, we had a name for this kind of thing. We called it boring magic. Boring because it often involves simply getting the basics right. Magic because, while the solutions aren't necessarily career-making, they're nearly always life-changing.

Unlocking technology's potential

Of course, before we can keep up, the government needs to catch up.

As Jess pointed out, the skills necessary to do so are hard to come by. The ideal is an environment of safe experimentation, where we can try new things and build confidence based on the outcomes. But it means getting the basics right first. So, while an interesting and experimental use of AI will always be interesting to me, I believe that the transformational potential of technology requires a few things from us, first.

What does the technology need to live up to that potential? Does it fit the problem we have today? Can we support it? What are the boring bits we need to take care of to make the magic happen?

A technology like AI is limited by the data it's trained on. If your systems aren't engineered with that data in mind – if you can't access or make sense of it – today's AI innovation is just going to become tomorrow's albatross around your neck.

Where the magic happens

At Scott Logic, we balance advanced with appropriate, purpose with profit and prioritise what works over what's new. And, in fact, it's anything but boring.

It's why the company was founded in Newcastle when so many of our peers are in London. It's why we hired fresh graduates when we were only a start-up ourselves. And it's why we champion small, high-capability on-shore teams over project headcounts. Because that's how we're able to build the accountable, empowered, informed teams we need to keep up with the people we're trying to serve. That's where the magic really happens.





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