

Bringing together digital and quality improvement – how boards can connect the dots and create allies in service transformation

As the sector emerges from the pandemic, new ways of working are required to support staff and service recovery.

1

Break the agendas out of their silos

Although early adopters are a good place to start, **avoid change getting stuck with your 'evangelists'**. Coalesce around a shared purpose: service improvement.

Develop a shared language between digital and QI and avoid overtechnical terms. Transformation is about bringing people together with a shared understanding and this starts with language.

Avoid passing solutions between IT and clinical teams and instead create spaces where multidisciplinary teams can design together, with **improvement expertise acting as the glue**.

Rethink how teams are organised. **Is it necessary to separate digital, QI, transformation, for example?**

Trusts are looking at digital ways of working and quality improvement (QI) approaches to transform services. While sometimes considered separate, these approaches share many similarities. These include putting the user at the heart of service design and improvement, empowering teams, and having a test, learn and iterate model for change. Across our **Trust-wide Improvement** and **Digital Boards** programmes, trust leaders are reflecting on their collective role in leading these changes and how they can make best use of existing improvement capabilities.

This briefing sets out some key considerations for boards that we have heard from trust leaders.

2

Bias towards continuous, iterative improvement

Don't focus only on start and end dates, but rather on empowering continual improvement and how to get the best out of new systems and skills.

Demonstrate the impact of what you're looking to achieve through **small cycles of change**, whether that be through Agile or PDSA methodologies.

3

Build trust through delivery

Be up front about the scope, prioritisation and how long change takes. **This can mean going slower to go further.**

Work in the open by sharing successes and learnings to generate momentum and keep the 'always improving' focus of Agile and QI.

Learn from your mistakes. Across the Foundation Group provider collaborative, they have coined the phrase 'fabulous failure' relating to improvement initiatives.

Questions for boards

- How are you creating an organisational culture of staff empowerment and continuous improvement?
- What improvement and transformation capacity is available across your organisation? How can you optimise and consolidate skillsets, resources and energy for change?
- Does your organisation have a coherent overarching programme of work to support its transformation priorities or are digital and QI workstreams separate and disjointed?
- Are your transformation, improvement and digital agendas focused on understanding problems and achieving outcomes?
- Who designs your services and how? What can be gained from bringing project teams together?
- Are you starting small and iterating process changes?
- Do you fully understand your users' needs?
- Is a focus on project milestones and cost savings outweighing the attention given to how change is improving services for patients and giving time back to staff?

Being outcome focused, investing in teams who are empowered to own and solve problems, and committing to sustained improvement make QI and digital transformation natural partners. Trusts should look for opportunities to bring these skills together, remaining laser focused on what users need.

PUBLIC DIGITAL

Finding out more

The Digital Boards programme, delivered in partnership with Public Digital and supported by Health Education England and NHS England and NHS Improvement, has engaged board members from across the provider sector.

This briefing is the third in a series to capture some of the insights and actions boards have committed to take to improve their collective leadership of the digital agenda.

- **Read** our [Digital Boards leadership guide series](#) that cover topics such as digital delivery, making technology decisions, digital strategy, building digital teams and digital leadership.
- **Read** our guide, [Deliver and improve: A board members' guide to trust-wide improvement](#).
- **Register your interest** for our upcoming [Trust-wide Improvement](#) and [Digital Boards](#) events.
- **Visit** our [knowledge hub](#) for blogs, case studies and other board resources.
- **Join** our [Digital Boards leadership network](#).
- **Contact** digital.boards@nhsproviders.org to book a free, tailored board development session on leading digital transformation.