# Talking About a More Digital Government: Episode 8 -Measuring and Improving Digital Maturity Transcript

**Esther Semo (00:06):**
We'd like to start by acknowledging that this podcast was written and recorded across two different locations.

In the spirit of reconciliation in Australia, we acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, as well as the Wadawurrung people. We pay our respects to their elders past, present, and emerging, and extend these respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples listening today. This always was, and always will be, aboriginal land.

Hi, and welcome to Talking About a More Digital Government, a podcast by Code for Australia. My name is Esther and I'm Code for Australia's Head of Community and Communications. I'm thrilled to be back for a second season of this podcast. We'll continue exploring the ins and outs of digital in the public sector, chatting with some amazing folks working in the field, and learning more about civic tech initiatives from around Australia.

Digital maturity is a topic we hear about a lot in the public sector. How do we measure it? What should the end goal be? And importantly, how do we improve it? These are questions that often lead to a lot of discussion and often some confusion. So in this episode we'll be talking to Lara Stephenson, the Lead Researcher on Code for Australia's Digital Maturity Indicator - a tool to help organisations measure, benchmark and improve their digital maturity across six key areas.program. Lara will be speaking to us about what digital maturity actually looks like in the public sector and the frameworks and methodologies we can utilize to benchmark and improve it within government teams. She'll also be filling us in on a great way to get involved - a whole of government survey, which  will help establish a baseline for digital maturity across the sector and result in a report featuring actionable recommendations to improve support for teams and individuals involved in digital delivery. Let's welcome Lara.

**Lara Stephenson (01:32):**
My name is Laura Stephenson and I'm a researcher with the Digital Maturity Indicator at Code for Australia. And as well as that, I am a social entrepreneur and designer with my own business, Social Good Outpost.

**Esther Semo (01:47):**

We're gonna be talking about the upcoming whole of government Digital Maturity Indicator survey, but let's take a step back for a second. What does digital maturity mean to you?

Lara Stephenson (01:58):
I feel that digital maturity means working together in a connected collaborative way in our, in our current world, which has changed a lot in the last few years, particularly digital maturity is also about using our ability to work together in different places and together in the room, synchronously and asynchronously. And really, to me, it's about sharing knowledge, information, and processes so that everyone can work closer, better together. And, um, the big picture is that this leads leads to a more efficient, effective service for both citizens and staff working in government. So the big picture seems really simple when you take out all of the technical details, it's about working together, sharing information, um, and enabling each other to do that.

Esther Semo (02:54):
Tell me a little bit about the Digital Maturity Indicator methodology. How did it all come about?

Lara Stephenson (03:02):
Sure. So, the Digital Maturity Indicator formed out of work done by the Harvard Kennedy school of Government in America in 2018. They brought teams, digital teams from around the world together to co-create a model for digital maturity. So we at code for Australia, took their findings out of that. They found they made a big matrix involving six key areas, um, that helped measure digital maturity in, uh, 2019.

We at Code for Australia took that research that the Harvard Kennedy school did and shaped it to the Australian environment, both through a pilot of real work and through our prior experience so that we were asking the right questions over the six key indicators. We created a set of research activities and questions to measure digital maturity and, uh, successfully ran this with three agencies that year in 2019 through that process. We've got a model out of it that we feel really measures the Australian environment.

Esther Semo (04:09):
So what are the six key areas?

Lara Stephenson (04:12):
The six indicators that measure digital maturity are skills and hiring institutional capacity delivery capability, human-centered design, cross government platforms and political environment. We tend to find that skills in hiring, which is about people, really comes at the center of these six areas and that the political environment is the outer shell or the ecosystem that everything else happens in. The other areas are

about measuring, um, how easily the, um, people are enabled to do work and what resources are able to support them and how easy it is to share information.

Esther Semo (04:53):
Who would you say it's for? What types of teams?

Lara Stephenson (04:57):
So we initially ran the Digital Maturity Indicator with three state government departments, including the Public Service Commission in New South Wales. But the structure of the DMI is such that  as we mentioned, it's really about people working together in the most effective and efficient way. And it's, it's all designed towards civic and, and public institutions. So it really is applicable across all levels of government from local government and councils up to state and federal government.

Esther Semo (05:32):
So how does it happen? How do these engagements work?

Lara Stephenson (05:36):
Yeah. So when, when a department or agency comes and says that they want to run the Digital Maturity Indicator, we meet together to first know what are their desired outcomes. Some departments come to us because they want to, um, have us prove or disprove a theory they have about how, how, um, work is going in their department in order to, uh, later on make some changes such as, um, an increase in their digital capability or they come to us because they want a baseline measurement of how are things now just before they embark on a whole heap of changes. We've also had people come to us after doing a whole heap of changes, just to kind of get a measurement to see where they are then. But basically we really, we really talk with that agency to find out what are their specific goals, because we can make sure that we focus recommendations around that.

Lara Stephenson (06:33):
One of the outcomes that we had had done in the past for instance, was a ideal project template, which had a lot of little, little reminders for different stages of the project, including before, during, after, and, and, and maintenance or growth of the project. So there were all of these things that, that, that, that department could reference. So after talking together to find out the goals, we start the engagement by doing interviews. Usually these interviews are one on one and across all levels of the department. So from leadership to day to day staff, technical staff and, and other and other specialists. So we make sure that we, we cover all levels of, of the organization as much as possible and including any important project staff that might, might be running right now, as well as that we create a survey. This survey is, or can be slightly customized to help target that agency's specific goals.

Lara Stephenson (07:36):
And we run that survey with as many people as possible in the organization. After that, we create a very readable, very accessible report that really focuses across those six key Digital Maturity Indicators tells, tells basically the top level like what's going really well. What are some barriers that you're facing in those areas? And the most important bit we feel is that we always present recommendations and these recommendations are designed to be practical, actionable, and build on each other. And speaking of building on each other, we also run prioritization workshops, which are optional, but I think extremely valuable so that you can start, you can start with the, the key items that are easy, but make the most difference and really accelerate your changes from there. Some of the outcomes of completing the DMI is an assessment of your current strengths. This is really important because no situation is all negative.

Lara Stephenson (08:41):
Nowhere we've worked in has had a terrible situation all around. Actually they mostly have one excellent situation that's leading the way. So one of these areas, these six indicators will be really leading. And sometimes that's where you can get the most leverage. Sometimes that's where you can say, this has worked really, really well, or you can share these stories of success. So the current strengths is definitely one of the outcomes as well. We do touch on areas that could be improved so that you can see what are the barriers when you're working in a situation day to day, you don't always have a very clear view of what might be standing in your way, and it might not be a big barrier. It might just be something that everybody needs to have a look at, agree on and move forwards from. So it's great to get that external point of view, and we are coming in and trying to help you make change. We're not coming in and writing a huge report we're coming in and trying to create actionable steps forward to increase, increase digital maturity, but also increase, um, ease of working day to day.

Esther Semo (09:49):
It seems like there's a lot of emphasis on the people side of things. And I think often people focus a lot on the technology side of digital maturity. Can you give us some examples of the types of recommendations that you give in these areas?

Lara Stephenson (10:03):
Oh yes, absolutely. It would be about people first and then the technology is what supports us to connect with each other, but we are not connecting with Microsoft Word we're connecting with, um, or Teams we're connecting with the person on the other side of that technology. One of the areas that we really like to start with our recommendations, because it's really common across a lot of departments is skills and hiring also because this is where a lot of the change that you make can really

ripple out throughout the organization, because this is the area that focuses on on people and their skills and, and what they're enabled to do. So some examples of recommendations that we have given is to invest in the digital capability of individual staff. I mean, there's a huge appetite for learning, and everybody wants to be able to do their job better or more efficiently, or be less hindered by the, um, technical or digital environment.

Lara Stephenson (11:02):
So while we're not saying everyone has to start coding, what we're saying is can they use the tools that they need to do their job as, as well as possible? And if there's something that staff really want to learn, how to do like a new way of managing projects, invest in, invest in that kind of upskilling. This is also an area that's a lot about supporting people. So recognizing people's growth and achievements, um, supporting people to learn, learn new ways of working in ways that they're comfortable with, whether that's just a lunchtime learning session or a, a bigger course or series of series of workshops. We basically also recommend people can learn by watching, um, or testing out new ways of working and just having enough spare time to kind of learn and try things out without feeling pressured. Like the success of the project depends on them.

Esther Semo (11:59):
What are some of the things you hear a lot from people who undertake this work?

Lara Stephenson (12:04):
Yeah, we do. We do hear that people want to feel confident and competent in their job. It's also clear that people have heard about different ways of working such as human centered design or such as agile. And they're kind of, they're quite curious about it as well as feeling like they don't wanna be left behind in how they're working. Um, we've seen when one person brings, say a new hire brings a skill such as human centered design into their team. They can change the whole culture of that team in such a short time. Under six months, we heard a story about somebody who went from working in, in a previous more traditional way to a full human centered design, um, project style way in their small team. And that team was thrilled. It usually all of these things that we're talking about help people work together better.

Lara Stephenson (12:57):
It's not about putting fancy terms down. It's not about making things more, uh, technical it's about creating better solutions to problems. And, um, everybody wants to be able to do that. Nobody wants to feel left behind. And I think a lot of people there, there is a perception that as a government worker, you are not so technical. Maybe you, you do have to manage a computer, but you're not like excellent with computers. Well, this isn't, yeah. The computer is the tool. Um, people want to be good at working with the tool, but the end goal is so that they can help and share

with other people. So,

Esther Semo (13:38):
So where does the Digital Maturity Indicator survey fit into this? What are its goals?

Lara Stephenson (13:43):
The Digital Maturity Indicator survey that we've just created - the goal is that it reports on the whole of government throughout Australia and it creates a great baseline plus yearly intervals of revisiting that measurement baseline. Um, so that we can see the national trend throughout Australia in digital maturity. So the survey basically asks questions across the six key indicators. Uh, there's about four or five questions per indicator. And there's also space for people to tell us their own experiences and stories. If we haven't asked specifically, we are asking it of people working at all levels and definitely it's anonymous. We just really want to get a good picture of where government is. So the outcomes of the survey will include providing advice and suggestions on a whole of government level. That individual teams can use much like our reports. We want the advice to be really actionable. So even if you are one small team reading a whole of government survey outcome, or report that we create and send out, we want this to be really actionable to you at your level.

Esther Semo (14:59):
What would you say are some of the benefits for folks who are keen to undertake the survey?

Lara Stephenson (15:04):
Some of the, some of the great benefits I would say that, that you could get through filling out this survey is that once you have filled it out and of course shared it with, um, your coworkers to fill out as well, once you get the report outcomes, you can take that to your executive or your leadership and say, use it to back up a theory that you have, or an argument for change that you have in your workplace. Um, it's a great researched and unbiased tool that you can say, this is, this is proof for evidence of the change that I would like to make. These are the recommendations of the whole of government. So we're really bringing a wide lens, even doing the survey might help you think, think through things in different ways, because of the way that the survey breaks up, the six areas of digital maturity. You might start to see patterns in your own area of work that you can start putting into practice while waiting for the report to come out. And of course, as the survey grows and as time passes, we're going to have year on year comparisons and national trends. So we'll, we'll be able to work from that and explore that more as, as that comes out.

Esther Semo (16:21):
Great. Thanks Lara. Is there anything else you wanna add?

Lara Stephenson (16:25):
I think the only other thing that I would add is that the more people from the more different areas, more levels from leadership to day to day staff, to technical specialists and from regional remote city departments, the more people that can do the survey, the better and more valuable that our data will be. So, um, if you do get the chance to do the survey, please recommend it to as many people in government or public service as possible.

Esther Semo (16:57):
Thank you very much to Laura Stephenson for speaking to us on the topic of digital maturity in the public sector, the link to the whole of government Digital Maturity Indicator survey can be found in the show notes for this episode until next time.