

NHS JOBS: HOW SERVICISED PLATFORMS CAN MODERNISE OUR PUBLIC SERVICES

Overview

Professor Thompson's work for DIGIT Lab (Work Package 5) explores new and emerging business models relating to the digital transformation of large-scale public service organisations.

Based on collaboration with senior health leaders, the NHS Jobs use case proposes a new operating model for public services that could transform vertically integrated information silos into common information systems via a platform architecture designed for agile deployment across the UK public sector.

Collaborators include a housing association's Chief Technical Officer (CTO), a freelance housing association's Chief Operating Officer (COO), a local authority's CTO, the COO of a local government technology firm, a data science entrepreneur, and several individuals connected to the development and delivery of NHS Jobs.

NHS Jobs presents a radical blueprint for real transformation as opposed to initiatives that merely improve the front end but leave underlying structures intact, generating significant opportunities for public sector reform.

Digital technologies play a significant part in the healthcare we receive at clinics, hospitals and increasingly within the home via telemedicine. The hospital 'back office' is not often thought of as a space for innovation and yet, digitalising healthcare administration is one of society's most pressing concerns, given the sheer scale, scope and complexity of the paperwork involved in delivering healthcare services. Part of the funding we have received for DIGIT (Work Package 5) has been used to explore an exciting and innovative approach to reducing the duplication of corporate activity between healthcare providers, while also helping to ensure that agencies work together for the betterment of stakeholders in the National Health Service (NHS).

Our work in this area (led by Professor Mark Thompson) focuses on minimising the repetition that often creeps into service delivery, where one or more agencies are involved. This duplication wastes billions of pounds each year, preventing services from working effectively. Several models have been tried for sharing common functions and services, including national technology projects, none of which have proved particularly successful in amending the siloed structure of public services. The case of NHS Jobs demonstrates that digital technologies can be used to promote collaboration across boundaries, which in this instance involved 700 separate organisations connected to the Department of Health via an external supplier-managed browser-based coordination function, achieving 100% adoption.

The 'servitised' model behind NHS Jobs offered an 'out-of-the-box', easily consumable alternative to installing and managing a bespoke IT recruitment system or application. This model is unique in public services and offers powerful inspiration, as well as a valuable blueprint, for modernising other public services along similar lines. Professor Thompson's contribution to Work Package 5 considers why NHS Jobs was so successful, identifying transferable lessons of benefit to other public service providers, for whom servitisation and common platform models might help save billions from public service budgets.

Further dissemination work

Public service providers are consistently challenged to deliver 'more with less'. This includes grants to local authorities, which were cut by 40% in real terms between 2009/10 and 2019/20. Current predictions suggest that half of councils could issue Section 114 notices in the next five years. While they enact responsibilities for education, transport and the environment, much of what our local councils do is health and well-being-driven, necessitating close cooperation between health and social care agencies and practitioners, particularly where the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults is concerned. Reducing duplication across agency boundaries would help lift many of the time, cost and efficiency burdens associated with inter-agency working in the locality.

Concept origination

Taking inspiration from supermarkets, imagine if every store were to run its own corporate function, each with its supporting network of suppliers, drivers and so forth – busily commissioning their own bespoke functions and services, all with their own time-consuming office politics. Any supermarket operating on this principle of 'wheel reinvention' would quickly go to the wall. Happily, like all modern digitally enabled organisations, retailers recognise that local focus is best delivered via a common back-end office infrastructure.

An agile and responsive NHS

NHS Jobs is a test case for the adoption of this ethos within health delivery contexts. To our knowledge, it is the only example of 100% voluntary take-up of a common service platform achieved in UK public services: it is thus a pathfinder model for how the adoption of shared digital infrastructure can lead to local services that are more responsive, efficient, and aligned with users' needs – whilst increasing inclusion (any person or organisation with access to a browser can use it) – at a time when this is crucial for everyone.

Analysing success factors

Our detailed analysis of the adoption process explains how this unusually successful outcome was achieved, distilling the generic characteristics of the operating model while also providing an initial indication of how this thinking may transform other public services using local government and social housing as example sectors.

Awareness raising

DIGIT is supporting vital work in translating the servitised platform model from industry to public services, beginning with NHS Jobs. Accordingly, NHS Jobs may be viewed as a blueprint for tackling siloed duplication in public services more generally, with the goal of generating significant improvements in public services alongside reductions in cost.

Our report, therefore, constitutes a call to arms for policymakers across UK public services to consider where the servitised platform model exemplified by NHS Jobs can be replicated to achieve similar improvements in service quality and savings.

Impact and events

- The platform model we propose was discussed in two Cabinet-Office-run CDDO 'fireside chat' events (March and May 2024) with the Government CTO, Government CDO, and top technology officers across government.

Planned events include:

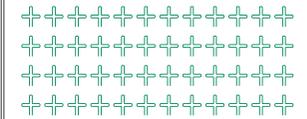
- A video explaining the concept.
- A 1-day workshop with senior executives and policymakers in local government (Institute for Government).
- Presentations to tech suppliers at TechUK & the Digital Leaders Forum.
- Further dissemination activities are likely to include targeting MPs, the Tony Blair Institute, LocalGovDigital, policymakers, and journalists interested in public services funding.

Publication outputs include:

- "NHS Jobs: How servitised platforms can modernise our public services"
- An article in [Computer Weekly](#)
- Blogposts about [common infrastructure in local government](#)
- A [talk at the Times Higher Education Digital Universities UK 2024](#) and [associated podcast](#).



Professor Mark Thompson
University of Exeter



“ Although just as essential to the delivery of the care we need, we are less likely to think of the hospital 'back office' as a space for innovation ”



For further information please contact:
Professor Mark Thompson
m.thompson6@exeter.ac.uk

Tight - Loose collective operating model for local government

