accenture

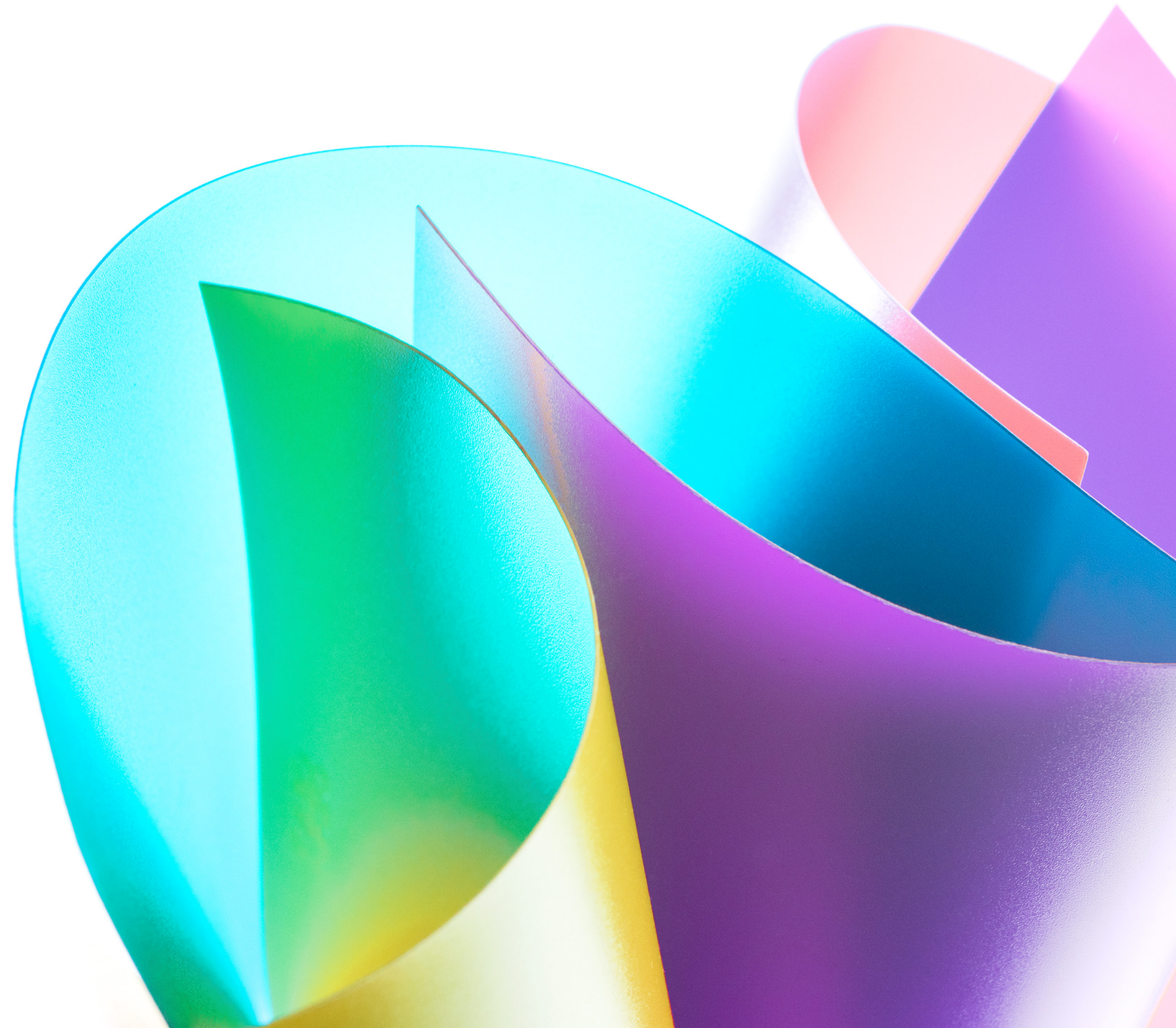# PUBLIC SERVICE AGILITY:

Unleashing Government Innovation in the US

Becoming an "agile" organization is a term heard frequently within management circles today. And while forward thinkers know it's the only way to navigate the accelerating pace of change in the public sector, the implications are not as easy to appreciate. Becoming agile enables new ways of working within the digital economy across the core functions of government: policy, regulatory and service delivery.

The future requires a dynamic, adaptive and responsive organization that is equipped to address the convergence of demographic, socioeconomic and political change, which is compounded by private sector innovation. Agile organizations are able to pivot to a citizen-centric culture that responds to citizen needs the moment they arise. They are also able to deliver dynamic regulatory and compliance frameworks.

Agile organizations balance speed and stability, transcending organizational layers and using technology to power innovation like never before.

Meeting the new imperative

Business and technology innovations have disrupted work, businesses, industries and our entire society. Public service organizations are not immune to the state of constant change in today's world. In fact, government is becoming a platform for orchestrating public-private connections and delivering next-generation public services.

Citizens expect government to meet their ever-changing needs. And while technology enables breakthroughs in public service operations, it also opens the door to new levels of cyber vulnerability.

Such change is the only certainty and agility is the first line of defense. However, only 14 percent of public service organizations surveyed have more than 60 percent of their funding model focused on agile practices.[1] An agile organization that continually evolves to support innovative service delivery is essential for success. Agility at all levels reduces complexity and increases responsiveness, allowing government to meet the needs of citizens and businesses that they serve.

The anatomy of agility

Public service organizations that infuse agility across the entire organization—structure, technology and people—will be positioned to respond to the constant change around us.
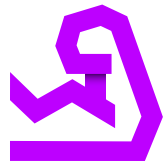
The backbone: Structure. Gone will be traditional brick and mortar operating models and organizational design in the future of government. Agile organizations take a holistic approach to managing the entire body of the government agency – the people, processes and technology. By shaping the organization with a fast and stable approach in mind, it will be poised for dynamic, adaptive services that meet citizen demands and stakeholder needs, speed up decision making processes and allow innovation to thrive.

Being agile also allows governments to evolve from being stand-alone entities to serving as a "curator" of ecosystems. Collaborating and sharing data with ecosystem partners will drive economic efficiency and innovation.

The muscle: Technology. The core systems within many public service organizations lack the business agility needed to respond quickly to changes, such as new government policies, and respond quickly to citizens' everchanging needs. New technologies and platforms will allow government agencies to make data-driven decisions, improve operations, drive innovation, and enable personalized and customized interactions. Among public service organizations using agile methods for IT, 82 percent saw greater flexibility, while 81 percent saw improved quality.[2]

Intelligent, agile platforms provide a powerful foundation on which to share data and adopt leading technologies. For instance, automation and use of AI can enable speed and greater accuracy among error-prone, slow and duplicative manual processes. Agile platforms also allow public service organizations to quickly roll out new capabilities, such as eServices. Citizens (73 percent) say better digital services would improve their satisfaction with government.[3]

The intellect: People. Rather than focusing on the traditional value proposition of job security and great benefits, agile public service organizations have adaptive workforce models that offer new opportunities. For instance, self-organizing teams center on customer outcomes—not on functions. Siloed, hierarchical structures dissolve. Team members with unique skillsets may come together in self-organizing pods for a "gig" or to solve a particular business challenge. Teams are flexible enough to quickly disassemble and reassemble to take on the next task. And rather than focusing on rewarding tenure and volume of output, agile organizations reward innovation and quality of outcomes. The organization's cultural DNA will also shift to be more agile in nature, ready to fail fast and quickly move on to the next challenge.

Public service organizations have long struggled with how to grow skills and drive innovation—especially as a large wave of new retirees siphons decades of knowledge and talent. Agile organizations invest in new talent with new skills, such as analytics, data science and cyber security—27 percent are hiring new talent with agile skills.[4] Agile leaders will also offer opportunities to reskill and upskill the existing workforce using the latest digital tools. Automation may take on some of the transactional work in government, allowing the workforce to focus on delivering value-added customer service.
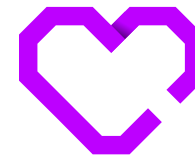
The heart: Citizens. There is only one boss in the agile public service organization—the citizen—and he or she can render an entire department irrelevant simply by choosing not to comply. Given the criticality of this role, the agile organization's culture must have a relentless focus on citizen outcomes. Providing flexible and adaptable experiences to citizens will deliver tangible benefits to government such as increased trust and transparency, greater compliance, less fraud, improved data quality/ accuracy and cost reduction.

Citizens benefit from proactive, innovative and continuously adapting services that meet the right need at the right time through the right channel. And when government is flexible and innovative, it fosters economic growth.

GETTING AGILE IN PHILLY

Government should be more agile to serve citizens, but what about business? Public and private sector leaders in Philadelphia realized that the regulatory environment wasn't ideal for cultivating business in the city. For instance, the process of opening a food business was long, complex and unpredictable.

Restauranteurs, hospitality leaders and food service representatives met to discuss issues they experienced with processes such as opening a food business and licensing pertaining to sidewalks, cafes and signage.

Accenture partnered with the City of Philadelphia to convene stakeholders from Licenses & Inspection, Health and other city departments, using design thinking techniques to identify potential process improvements and outline a customer-centric approach that would make it easier to open a restaurant. A special committee is working to improve the customer service experience for businesses by advocating for changes to outdated and archaic Philadelphia code, alleviating difficulties for business owners and increasing communication efficiency across city departments. Additional improvements involve technology, staffing and procedural changes.

This effort underscored the need for the city to instill a customer service-driven culture within agencies that are compliance-driven.

Accelerating agility

How can a government agency self-identify as agile or not? Agile organizations connect the four elements of the agile anatomy—structure, technology, people and citizens—in real time. Doing so provides enhanced "sense and respond" capabilities. Using analytics, the organization has heightened senses and can proactively respond to citizen needs.

Some remain hesitant to make the move to agile. When asked why their organization has not used agile methods, 43 percent of public service respondents said they were reluctant to change.[5] It is time to be fearless rather than hesitant because the potential benefits of agility for government are exponential.

There is no single path to follow to become an agile public service organization. But there are many ways to get started. Take the leap and unleash your agency's innovation transformation.

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References

[1] Accenture Public Service Agile Research, 2018

[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid

[4] Ibid

[5] Ibid