Digital maturity in the charity sector

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Driving social change with digital technology

There has been much written about charity digital maturity. There are also many self-assessment diagnostic tools and models to describe the digital transformation process. We know that this is a symbol of a maturing sector.

There is a lot of energy going in to providing support for charities to make sense of digital, whilst more 'mature' charities are now openly sharing their progress and learning. Through this research we want to understand how best practice is described in how charities develop their digital capacity.

Research focus

1. **Map what frameworks exist:** How many diagnostic tools, literature, reports, think pieces and surveys exist in the sector?
2. **Describe digital maturity focus areas:** Is it possible to identify a consistent set of standards that define, describe and assess the journey towards digital maturity?
3. **Identify key progression stages:** Are there common benchmarks for success and development journeys?
4. **Frameworks for charities:** What are the characteristics of charity diagnostic tools? Which are the most appropriate frameworks to recommend? What needs to change?

Approach

A project mapping digital maturity discourse and practice in the charity sector. To do this we set out to:

- Collate and analyses what diagnostic tools, literature, reports, think pieces and surveys exist
- Publically share our efforts to map and synthesise digital maturity tools
- Examine subsets of diagnostic tools and key literature in more detail to identify consistent stages, and focus areas
- Talk to tool developers about their tool development, evidence base, feedback gained and interest in our project

1. Mapping what frameworks exist

We built on an existing Airtable curated by CAST and shared this Medium post. We spoke to: NCVO, the DOT project, SCVO, Elemental and presented at NetSquared Meetup

Airtable
https://airtable.com/shrPu7tPawOcuX8gg/tbl0tWdDpeHRFjjdW

Medium
https://medium.com/@thinksocialtech/how-can-you-assess-digital-maturity-in-charities-bc6a15bdcaa6

The organisation that owns or hosts a framework is key to interpreting it's relevance. Few are explicit about their key target audience or evidence base. For most, understanding the nature of the organisation (their priorities, services and focus) are key to interpreting the tool itself.

Collating these has been valuable. There are a lot of frameworks and the response to the project has been positive, where it has been shared or publicised.

50 Frameworks, tools, guides, reports and blogs outlining what digital maturity looks like

33/50 Targeted specifically at charities, the remaining 17 are for SMEs, social tech start ups and government

29/50 Created in 2018/19 (21 were older). 12 of the charity diagnostic tools were created in 2018/19

15/50 Include stages of progression towards digital maturity (typically 3-5 stages)

27/50 Are classified as 'literature', including blogs, reports, guides and think pieces about digital maturity

23/50 Are diagnostic tools to help organisations self-assess their digital maturity.

14/23 Diagnostic tools are targeted specifically at charities looking at digital maturity across their organisation

19 Components of digital maturity have been identified as common focus areas across the 50 tools

Reflections

Tools can be divided into 4 main areas:

- Sector Analysis (charity digital survey)
- General guides (e.g. 10 things you need)
- Organisation diagnostics (benchmark, plan)
- Specific functions (service design, content)

Evidence base

We categorised the evidence for each of the 50 frameworks – many do not make their evidence base explicit. Where this was unclear, we made the assumption that their tool was based on internal priorities and experience of providing services. Some used multiple types of evidence so are double counted (the numbers won't add up):

Of the 50 frameworks overall (including reports and surveys):

- 14 are based on direct research with target audience
- 6 are based on other tools, desk research and analysis
- 7 are based on sector expertise (consultations or steering groups)
- 24 are based on internal priorities, experience and learning

Of the 14 diagnostic tools for charities:

- 3 are based on direct research (NCVO, TechTrust ICT4NGO, Charity Comms).
- 4 are based on other tools, desk research and analysis
- 3 are based on sector expertise (consultations or steering groups)
- 6 are based on internal priorities, experience and learning

Defining digital

The tools largely offer general interpretations of the importance of digital, however almost no tools outlined in the research expressly define what the term digital means. For the purposes of research we have chosen to use the definition used in the Charity Digital Code taken from the Co-op's definition of digital:

'Applying the culture, practices, processes & technologies of the Internet era to respond to people's raised expectations'

The only other explicit definitions that complement this description and can be found in the CapGemini Digital Culture Challenge which focuses on digital culture)

Defining digital maturity

None of the tools definine digital maturity. Instead, they address why it is important for organisations to think about and give a rationale to undertake a digital maturity assessment. Tools which do outline the rationale include Charity Digital Code, Cogapp, NPC, TechTrust, Deloitte, CapGemini, and FutureGov.

The rationale they give includes:

- To assess how ready you are for change
- To deliver for your communities
- To integrate a digital strategy in to your organisational strategy
- To reflect on what you want to do as an organisation strategically to inform your digital strategy
- To consider the capabilities, skills and assets within an organisation
- To support a series of conversations with service users, front-line staff and leadership relating to skills, capability and governance.
- To visualise how digitally mature each part of your organisation is
- To continue to review digital transformation progress against a maturity assessment
- To reduce costs of running your organisation and to improve efficiency

2. Describing Digital Maturity

We categorised the focus areas across all 50 frameworks under key headings or 'buckets' according to the descriptions, definitions and questions observed across the tools (grounded theory approach, thematic analysis). We discovered 19 areas in total, in the following order of those most cited:

1. Team, people and skills
How organisations manage their staff, their interactions, the structure and systems of their organisations to support and foster digital skills and capabilities.

2. Internal systems
How organisations manage their technical systems, IT infrastructure, data storage and their processes to plan and manage the systems they use.

3. Culture
The capabilities that and organisation has to ensure it has the right values, structures, ways of working and behaviours to support and enable the right environment for digital success.

4. Leadership
How the Board, CEO and senior leadership think about organisational governance and the strategic management and planning of digital in their organisations.

5. Risks
The processes, systems and infrastructure organisations have in place to responsibly manage privacy, GDPR and security in their organisation, as well as their awareness of risks and how to mitigate and manage these effectively.

6. User-centred
The process by which organisations respond to user needs and behaviours, including undertaking user research and engaging users when designing products and services to ensure their requirements are met appropriately and sensitively.

7. Communications
How organisations use digital to strategically communicate online and offline to manage their interactions with their stakeholders.

8. Data
The ability to manage, store and strategically make use of data to inform decision making.

9. Financial sustainability
How organisations invest in digital strategically and responsibly to make the best use of its potential. This includes resourcing and funding for the growth, impact and sustainability of digital products and services.

10. Strategy
The ability to set a clear direction of travel and purpose of the charity that articulates what the organisation wants to achieve and how digital can help achieve those goals.

11. Services
Building services that put users at the core and deliver and use technology to strategically increase reach, improve tracking, reporting and delivery in ways that are simple intuitive and comprehensible.

12. Collaboration
How organisations build and enhance their own strengths and capabilities through the targeted engagement with others (internally and externally).

13. Innovation
The process organisations use to create, develop and pilot new ideas that address an unmet need in a cost efficient and low risk way.

14. Accessibility
The extent to which an organisations' services are designed to be accessible and inclusive of audiences, meeting the needs of those who are digitally excluded and those with complex needs.

15. Responsible tech
The approach organisations take towards ethical development, including consequence scanning, factoring in unconscious bias and the implications of digital services.

16. Open
The fostering of a mindset that focusses on the practice of sharing, collaboration and continuous learning - making information more accessible to drive improvement.

17. Future proof
How organisations anticipate and plan for the future taking into account the impact and implications changes in technology may have on what the charity does and how it does it

18. Social impact
How organisations look to improve people's lives and communities through their work, creating social value.

19. Diversity
How organisations ensure that they digital services they create are inclusive of marginalised and under represented communities, are designed and built by diverse teams and are inclusive by design.

Patterns in focus areas

Digital Maturity is most commonly described in terms of: Team, people and skills; Internal systems; Culture; Leadership; Risks; User-centred; Communications; Data; Finance and sustainability. These are the most cited areas across the 50 frameworks. Some are more specific to charity diagnostic tools

Niche areas also used to describe digital maturity: Collaboration; openness; strategy; accessibility; innovation; social impact are rare and cited by a smaller proportion of the 50 frameworks.

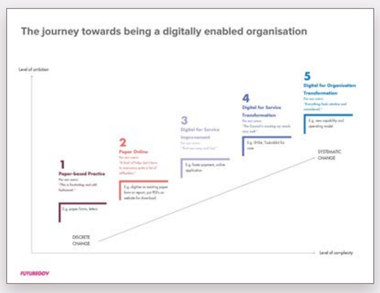
Emerging areas: services; responsible/ethical development; future; diversity

- **Service design** is being positioned by leading sector organisations and thought leaders as a key facet of digital maturity (CAST, NCVO, GDS). It is less apparent in older frameworks, diagnostics from outside of the charity sector and organisational frameworks
- **Responsible and ethical development** is being discussed in think pieces and by thought leaders such as Dot Everyone, but is not currently covered by diagnostic tools.
- **Diversity, inclusion and accessibility** of both digital products and teams has patchy coverage across the 50 frameworks. Given debates across the charity sector and tech sector this is surprising and will likely change over the coming few years.

Change over time

- **Risks, Strategy and Communications** (content, marketing, social media) hardly feature in older literature and tools. However, they are in the top focus areas for 2018-2019 tools.
- **Culture, Leadership and Team** (people and skills) have been consistently important to the literature and tools focusing on digital maturity

3. Identifying key progression stages



Overall 15 guides or tools indicated stages of progression for digital maturity (out of the 50 overall set of frameworks identified). All the diagnostic tools included scales of 1-3 or 1-5 consistently that indicate progression.

All assume linear progression rather than drop of points or different pathways

The evidence base for progression through or outcomes for each stage is very thin and poorly described. The Digital leaders Maturity Framework and Arrk Group, Digital Readiness Level Tool and DataKind Data Maturity Assessment are most clearly articulated

Progression scoring

- Most follow an 'outcome star' model – before and after measures based on positive progression and rating scale (1 – 5).
- A smaller proportion use scales that you see in surveys with a positive rating (rather than a likert scale with agree to disagree ratings)
- Survey thinking tends to underpin their design, presentation and analysis. They are 'neutral' assessments assuming all aspects important
- Don't start with assets or priorities (not personalised or interactive in that way)

Progression stages

Only 9 diagnostic tools describe progression routes of digital maturity for charities. Three outline progression stages but do not describe what the definitions mean (Cap Gemini, Lloyds Business Index, After digital), and two focus on design (Social Tech Trust & Shift).

The interpretation, milestones and outputs are patchy across both pathways. Only Digital Leadership and Shift clearly define indicators against stages (Lloyds provides some details but they are not linked).

More work is needed to develop defined milestones and indicators against stages of maturity overall.

4. Frameworks for charities

Charity diagnostic tools

- **Charity Digital Code of Practice**
- **Digital Leadership** Maturity Framework
- **NCVO** Digital Maturity Matrix
- **Tech Trust** ICT4NGO
- **Innovation Unboxed** Digital Maturity Framework
- **Charity Comms** Digital Benchmark
- **Elemental** Digital maturity for social prescribing
- **Rockefeller Foundation** Innovation Capacity Assessment for Non Profits
- **Charity IT leaders digital benchmarking**
- **Hubbub** (the charity digital code)
- **After Digital** Digital Maturity Questionnaire
- **The Digital Workplace Skills Framework**
- **SCVO** Digital Check-up
- **The Dot Project** Digital Maturity Healthcheck

Guide to the best guides

From our analysis of the 50 frameworks as they appear (as well as speaking to some developers), the following organisations have developed tools that are most well designed and / or researched (based on an analysis of existing tools, internal learning, sector expertise or user testing):

- **Charity Digital Code** (based on solid sector expertise)
- **CAST Better Digital Services** (substantive user research and testing, with signposting to resources)
- **SCVO** (well suited to smaller charities, connects into their free service)
- **NCVO** (solid user testing and development based on existing tools)
- **New Reality** (thought leadership report based on substantive research, targeted at larger charities)
- **Digital leadership Framework** (most comprehensive tool, suited to larger charities)
- **DataKind** (most rigorously researched and developed, specific to data maturity)
- **Cogapp** (helpful for chief executives)

There are other tools that look to be of interest but are not freely and openly available (because they are built in to consultancy services), including the DOT project and Aark Digital Maturity Assessment.

Different starting points

Our review also identified some frameworks are more appropriate for different starting points

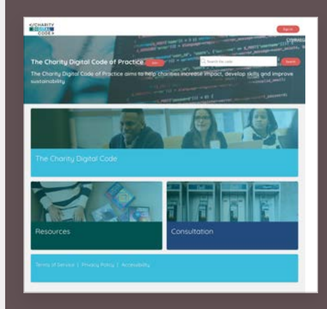
Small charities and/or charities at an early stage of developing maturity
Charity Digital Code, SCVO, NCVO, Charity Digital Code and CAST Better Digital Services are the most accessible, with connections to further resources and training.

Large charities and/or charities making progress in digital maturity
New Reality, Digital leadership, DataKind, Cogapp (specific to chief executives) are more extensive and provide an in-depth discussion of digital maturity.

Services
Those looking to follow best practice in digital service design should look to the GDS and Shift Progressively frameworks. They complement the CAST Better Digital Services guide.

Assessing technical skills and knowledge gaps
The Tech Trust: ICT4NGOs offers a unique approach in their competency based test of technical knowledge, tailored to different expectations of the level of digital skills an individual should have.

Focus of key guides



Charity Digital Code

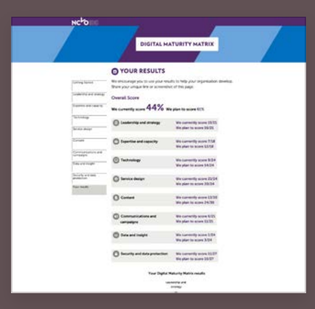
The code has been produced for charities of all sizes, with separate guidance for small and large. It focuses on the principles and best practice in digital. It gives an overview of a number of key areas, with links to key resources to learn more. It's free, now incubated by CAST. Note that Hubbub translates this into a diagnostic tool.

Topics: Leadership; user-centered; culture; strategy; team, people and skills, risks; responsible tech and ethics; future; innovation; accessibility; diversity and inclusion;

It doesn't cover: Internal systems; communications; data; social impact; sustainability; services; collaboration or openness. It does not provide a diagnostic assessment.

Evidence base: Developed in 2018 based on learning from 40 charities, a sector steering group and 171 responses to the sector wide consultation.

https://doit.life/charity-digital-code



NCVO: Digital Maturity matrix

About: This tool is designed for all charities, but is most well targeted towards smaller and medium size charities. It is a diagnostic tool to self assess perceptions of digital maturity for a large number of key areas on a scale of 1 to 4 as to where they are now and where they want to be in future.

Topics: Leadership, User-centred, Strategy, Risks, Data, Communications, Team, People and Skills, Internal systems, Services, Accessibility.

It doesn't cover: culture; sustainability; responsible tech; Diversity; collaboration; innovation; future or social impact

Evidence base: This is based on an early prototype of the tool and substantive redesign based on internal learning, reviewing 5 other tools and in-depth user testing.

https://tools.ncvo.org.uk/digitalmaturitymatrix

SCVO Digital Check-up

SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations)

SCVO Digital Check-up is a simple diagnostic survey to assess digital maturity, specifically designed for small charities and to be a starting point for a more detailed conversation with SCVO about digital needs.

Topics: Leadership; culture; team; people and skills; risks; internal systems; communications; data.

It doesn't cover: user-centred; data; finance and sustainability; strategy; services; collaboration; innovation; accessibility; responsible tech; openness; future; social impact; diversity.

Evidence base: Internal learning and user feedback, the questions are updated regularly. To date 200 organisations have used the tool with 50 following up.

https://digitalcheckup.org

Digital Leadership Tool

Digital leadership

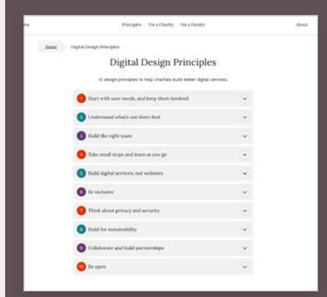
Digital Maturity Framework is a microsite and survey diagnostic test. Fifteen competencies are evaluated on the level between 1 and 5 to produce a digital maturity score. The test works best when it's completed by Digital Leads and their colleagues to capture different perspectives in the organisation.

Evidence Base: Numerous charities across the sector using the survey (as well as informed insight from years of specialist insight / training in the sector)

Topics: Team, people and skills; internal systems; culture; leadership; communications; data; finance and sustainability; services; innovation;

It doesn't cover: risks; user-centred; strategy; collaboration; accessibility; responsible tech; openness; future; social impact; diversity

https://www.digitalleadership.ltd/digital-maturity-framework



Better Digital Services

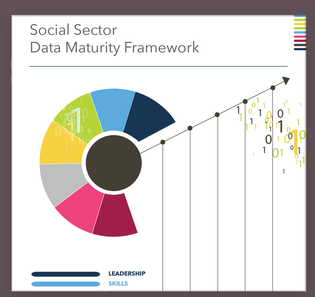
Better Digital Services lists 9 key design principles that help charities build better digital services. It is a microsite produced by CAST, with links to case studies and key resources to learn more. The 9 principles are: User needs, Understand what is out there first, build the right team, take small steps and learn as you go, build digital services not websites, be inclusive, think about privacy and security, build for sustainability, collaborate and build partnerships, be open

Topics: Team, people and skills; user-centred; services; innovation; openness; collaboration; finance and sustainability.

It doesn't cover: risks; strategy; leadership; internal systems; culture; accessibility; responsible tech; future; social impact; diversity; communications; data

Evidence base: Workshops and 11 research interviews with over 50 charities and funders of all sizes

https://betterdigital.services



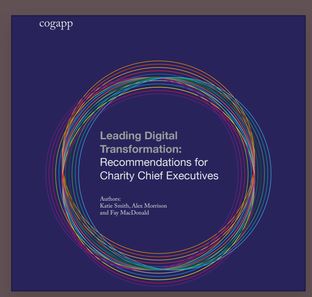
Data Maturity framework

The Data Maturity Framework by DataKind and Data Orchard is a self assessment tool to help charities better understand and alleviate the challenges of incorporating data into their efforts. It focuses on leadership, skills, culture, data, tools, uses and analysis across 5 core stages of progression; unaware; nascent; learning; developing and mastering

Topics: Data; culture; team, people and skills; leadership

Evidence base: It is based on the Data Evolution research project which involved over 200 charities and social enterprises in interviews, workshops and user testing. Their reports are available to download and use under a Creative Commons licence.

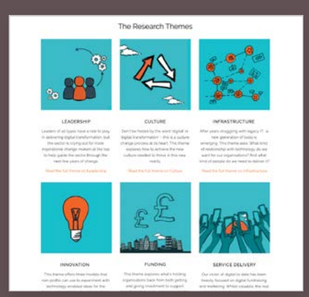
https://dataevolution.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2017/01/Summary-Designed-Data-Maturity-Framework-Social-Sector-FINAL-v1.pdf



Cogapp: Leading Digital Transformations

This report provides strategic advice and guidance for charity Chief Executives. Focus areas include: digital ambition, chain of command with head of digital, positioning digital in the organisation, investing in digital as infrastructure not marketing, digital literacy of senior teams

https://www.cogapp.com/leading-digital-transformation



The New Reality

The New Reality is based on in-depth research with 50 charities in 2015, focusing on how charities can create a step change in digital. It is organised around 5 themes: leadership, culture, infrastructure, innovation, funding and service delivery. Despite being dated, the findings and guidance is largely in line with the group of digital maturity frameworks collated.

https://thenewreality.info

Key takeaways

The scope of the digital maturity frameworks

- There are a lot more than we expected
- Most have limited evidence behind them and many are based on internal learning
- They frameworks look to be of limited use as standalone tools
- They tend to be designed for one completion as a snapshot of the organisation (not always clear)
- The value of each is indicated by who owns it and their typical target audience
- Most focus on scoring or best practice.
- Few offer signposting to follow-up support, resources and training to help understand what next

Broader sector needs

- A clearer understanding of what a digitally mature charity looks like and how this differs for small and large charities.
- A greater evidence base about milestones and indicators for progress against key focus areas, particularly for: diversity; future; innovation; social impact and responsible tech

The content of digital maturity frameworks

For digital maturity framework producers

- Be explicit about the target audience, thinking about the size of organisation your tool is most helpful for (or who took part in research or user testing for it) and their current digital capacity
- Be clear about who should complete an assessment (individual or across organisation) and how they should look to use the results
- Develop better signposting to follow-up support, resources and training
- Be more explicit about the evidence base behind them and look to build on this
- Give clear definitions of the key topics you focus on and the terminology used
- Undertake user-testing in context, to ensure tools are helpful to organisations completing them in terms of improving their confidence, motivation and focus on next steps for digital maturity.

Broader sector needs

- They broadly cover the same topics and there is a lot of consistency in descriptions - the key differences are the depth to which they delve in to digital maturity focus areas
- Only a limited number of define digital maturity stages (particularly those aimed at charities) and fewer describe the milestones or indicators for progress against key focus areas.
- Very few differentiate between development pathways for different sizes of organisation.

Next steps

1 Guide to digital maturity frameworks

2 Blog Post outlining findings

3 Continue research with charities to understand their progression, using the focus areas identified as a framework to develop milestones and indicators

4 Sharing this with tool developers as evidence based pathways towards digital maturity will help to improve the quality of tools