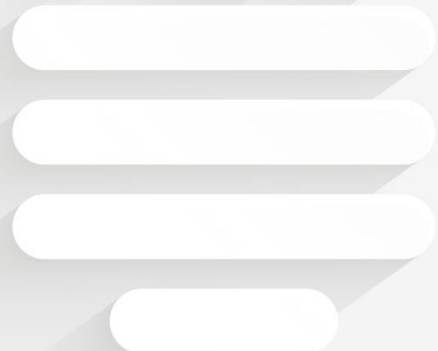


Creating the conditions for innovation in government

Takeaways from Innovation 2025



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Introduction

Governments around the world are trying to innovate to drive efficiency, deliver better services and meet citizen expectations. Doing things differently is challenging, though, in areas from skills to culture and technology to leadership. This report looks at how governments can create the conditions for civil servants to innovate and achieve better outcomes.

It is based on panels, presentations and discussions at Global Government Forum's Innovation 2025 conference held in London in March, as well as a survey of over 300 UK delegates – drawn from more than 3,500 event registrants – to capture civil servants' views on how to set the strongest foundations to enable innovation to thrive.

The findings highlight the critical importance of support from the top for innovation, as well as a culture of open communication and risk-taking, skills like adaptability, and access to the right tools and data. Comments from speakers and panellists at the event provide practical insights on how these challenges are being tackled in government.



Cat Little, UK civil service chief operating officer and Cabinet Office permanent secretary

An exciting time for innovation

Opening the Innovation conference, Cat Little, the chief operating officer for the UK civil service and permanent secretary to the Cabinet Office, set the scene around the government's drive to make the state more innovative and efficient, and the need for active government to meet the UK's five missions of kickstarting economic growth, building an NHS fit for the future, ensuring safe streets, breaking down barriers to opportunity, and making Britain a clean energy superpower.

Innovation is crucial to the civil service – and public servants are fundamentally “problem solvers”, she said.

“And I need everyone in the civil service to be thinking about ‘how can I fix the problems in front of us in the fastest, most effective way?’”

She highlighted the importance of having an experimental culture and the courage to try new approaches, being ‘risk-smart’ rather than ‘risk-averse’, embracing a test and learn culture and the need to break down silos and empower teams to innovate.

Sarah Munby, the outgoing permanent secretary at the UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, told the conference: “This is a really exciting time for innovation in government”, noting backing from the prime minister and the cabinet for “digital and data-led transformation of the state” and to capitalise “not just on the technologies of yesterday and today, where we still have work to do, but also on the technologies of tomorrow, and putting ourselves at the forefront of the implementation of AI”.

“They are saying that is a critical priority for the UK state, and that right there is an enormous opportunity,” she said.

The need for consistent innovation

In the first panel session of the event, experts discussed what innovation means for them.

The conversation picked up on comments from Little’s opening keynote, where she had set out the need to change the culture of the civil service. “If we’re really going to be agile, and if we are really going to move at the pace that I think we need to move at, we’ve got to stop getting in the way of ourselves,” she said.

Building on these comments, Jo Shanmugalingam, second permanent secretary at the UK Department for Transport, added: “I think we have pockets of brilliance, and also we have shown so many times over the last five years how good we are at innovating in a crisis,” citing examples such as COVID financial support initiatives and the vaccine taskforce.

“I think we have pockets of brilliance.”

Jo Shanmugalingam,
UK Department of Transport

“What we are not consistently good at is innovating in normal times and innovating when we don’t have that burning crisis,” she said.

Annette Southgate, head of the UK Accelerated Capability Environment (ACE) within the Home Office, stressed that innovation is not only about technology.

“I try to use the word creativity alongside innovation a lot,” she said. “I think innovation can make you feel like it’s a data-driven problem set we’re trying to get after, and sometimes we just want to work out a better way of doing something.”

Laying the foundations

This report builds on these themes to explore the lessons shared at the conference and outline the key conditions needed to embed innovation across the civil service. From leadership and culture to skills and data, the following sections examine how governments can turn ambition into action and create public services that are fit for the future.

Sarah Wray
Research editor
Global Government Forum

May 2025



Innovation 2025: At a glance

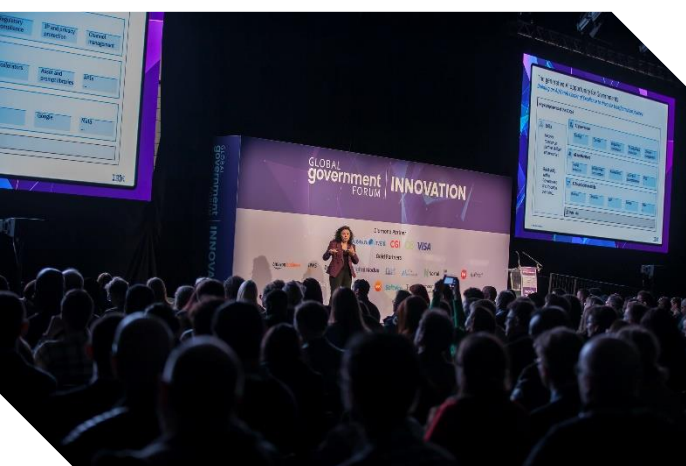
- 3,648 delegates
- 174+ speakers
- 64 sponsors and exhibitors

What delegates say

"An excellent experience with so many great speakers, an excellent networking and informative event."

"I really was inspired by listening to the representatives from other nations... we just need to be given the permission to try."

"The generative AI session was probably one of the best and most useful talks I have ever been to – loved it."



Date for your diary: Innovation 2026

24 & 25 March 2026

Excel, London

Co-hosted by the UK Government, UK Civil Service and the Cabinet Office, Innovation is a unique exhibition and conference that brings together government leaders from across the globe responsible for the transformation and acceleration of their public sector organisations and services.

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1. Innovation essentials in government

Our survey showed clear trends in what is considered most important for fostering innovation in government. **Leadership support** stands out as the most critical factor, with three-quarters viewing it as essential – much more so than any other factor.

Factors following closely behind are a **culture that embraces failure and learning**, and **access to modern technology and tools** – both of which are also widely seen as critical enablers of innovation.

Training and skills development, along with **access to funding**, are recognised as important, though slightly less essential.

Interestingly, while elements like **flexible policies**, **cross-department collaboration**, and **recognition for innovation** are still valued, they are more often seen as supporting conditions rather than core drivers.

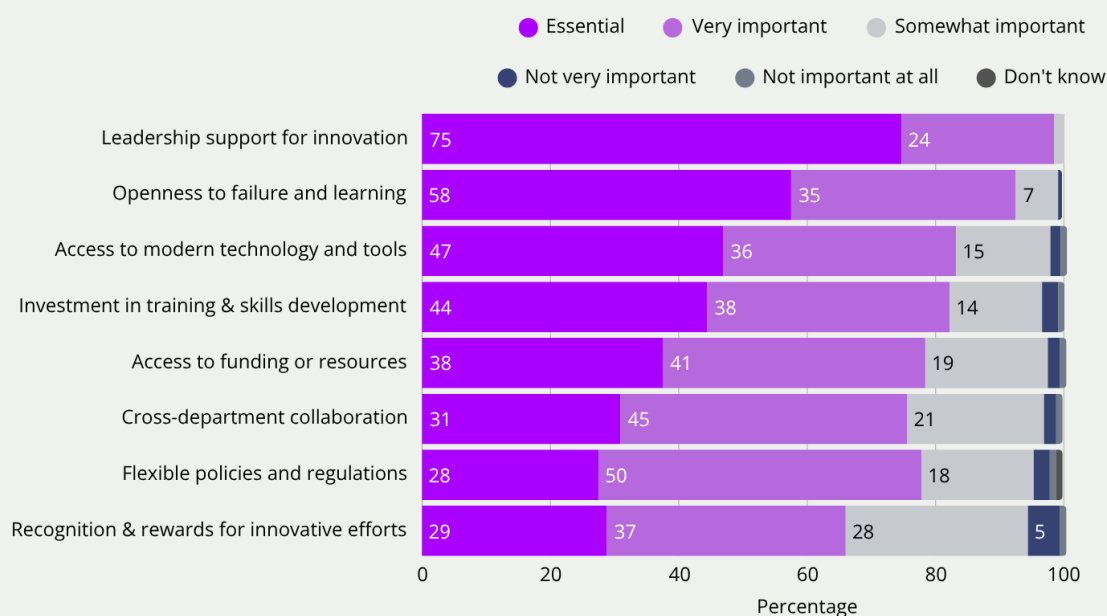
Top 3 factors for innovation in government

Leadership support 01

Openness to failure and learning 02

Access to modern technology and tools 03

How important do you consider each of the following factors for fostering innovation in government?



Creating an innovation culture

On fostering an innovative culture specifically, respondents ranked **open communication and idea sharing** as the top factor for success, with 94% saying it's essential or very important.

Respondents made practical suggestions such as having "a forum for sharing innovative ideas" and more "cross-government and team information-sharing and knowledge-building".

Close behind are **willingness to take risks** and **empowerment of employees to make decisions**, with almost half seeing these as essential.

One respondent said it was "the actual willingness to take risks that is letting us down". They said that while leaders encouraged innovation, they'd had many ideas refused due to lack of time. It can "feel like lip service", they commented.

Some believed that the opportunity to be innovative should be more inclusive, with one noting: "The lower down the grades you go, the less scope roles offer for innovation, risk-taking and failure" and another saying that a culture should be fostered "where innovation is standard across all teams, not just digital".

Support for continuous learning and emphasis on **user-centred design or citizen needs** are considered important as well, though slightly fewer view them as essential compared to the top three.



"I often find innovation blocked by the cost to change a system even slightly."

Survey respondent

On learning, one participant called for "compulsory training for senior management on how to foster and encourage innovation" and another for "far more training, not just surface training on possibilities but actual practical training".

Notably, **flat or less hierarchical organisational structures** receive the least emphasis, with relatively few respondents seeing them as essential – though many still consider them important to some degree.

The need to address bureaucracy as a barrier emerged as a strong theme in respondent comments, with one stating: "I often find innovation blocked by the cost to change a system even slightly."

Another respondent raised the concept of specifically recruiting innovators.

Today, they said, government "hires people with other skillsets and then asks them (sometimes) to innovate. Government needs to hire innovators specifically to perform the role of innovating. These may be people who might not necessarily make successful civil servants in the current culture. We need more 'changers' and fewer 'status quo-ers'. Government needs to completely change what a civil servant is, how they work, what they do."

Leading innovation

With leadership being such an important factor, we asked survey participants about the most important actions from leaders to effectively encourage and sustain innovation.

At the top of the list is **allocating time and resources for innovation projects**, which almost 60% view as essential.

Several participants stressed the need for dedicated time and space to focus on innovation and “allowing people the time to innovate and try new things”.

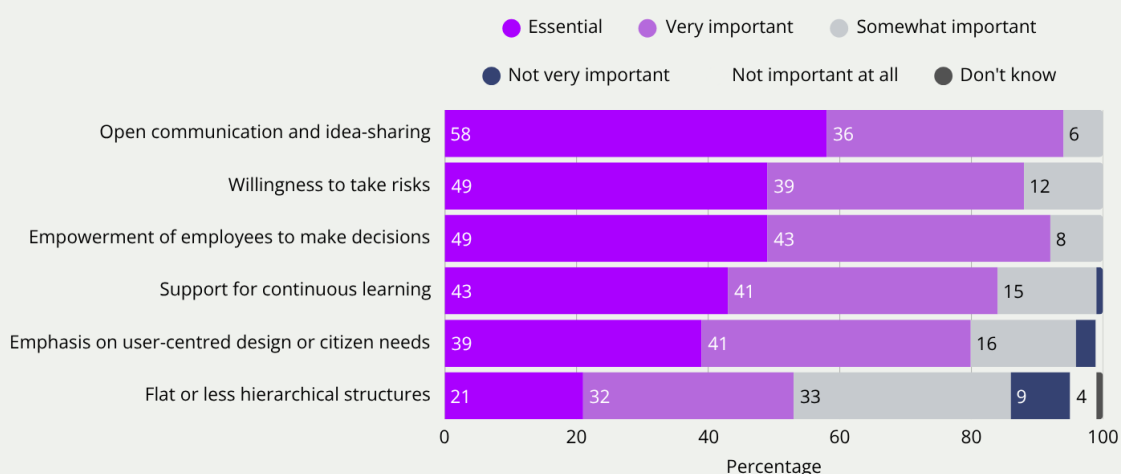
Close behind was **communicating a clear vision for innovation**, also seen as a critical action by most respondents, though some highlighted the need to retain openness. “I think having a vision tends to lock people into that vision strictly. Having a loose idea of the direction you want to move in can help guide but leave you open to changes within the change that end up being improvements,” one said.

Top 3 leadership actions for innovation

- 01 Allocate time and resources for innovation projects
- 02 Communicate a clear vision for innovation
- 03 Encourage experimentation and risk-taking

Encouraging experimentation and risk-taking and **encouraging cross-team collaboration** rank next, with over four in ten viewing them as very important but slightly fewer considering them essential compared to the first two actions.

How important do you consider each of the following factors for fostering an organisational culture that supports innovation in government?





One respondent urged leaders to "empower staff and make sure you don't judge too quickly when things go wrong".

Removing bureaucratic or policy barriers is another highly regarded action, with close to half viewing it as essential for innovation.

Lower down the list is **recognising and rewarding innovative ideas** but a third still see it as an essential action to drive innovation. One respondent called for leaders to "pay rewards and promotion for innovation that is taken up".

Another respondent said that to make innovation "the essence of what the civil service is" rather than an "occasional" activity, leaders should encourage teams and colleagues to "compete to be ever more innovative, creating change on top of change, extending the scope of what's possible".

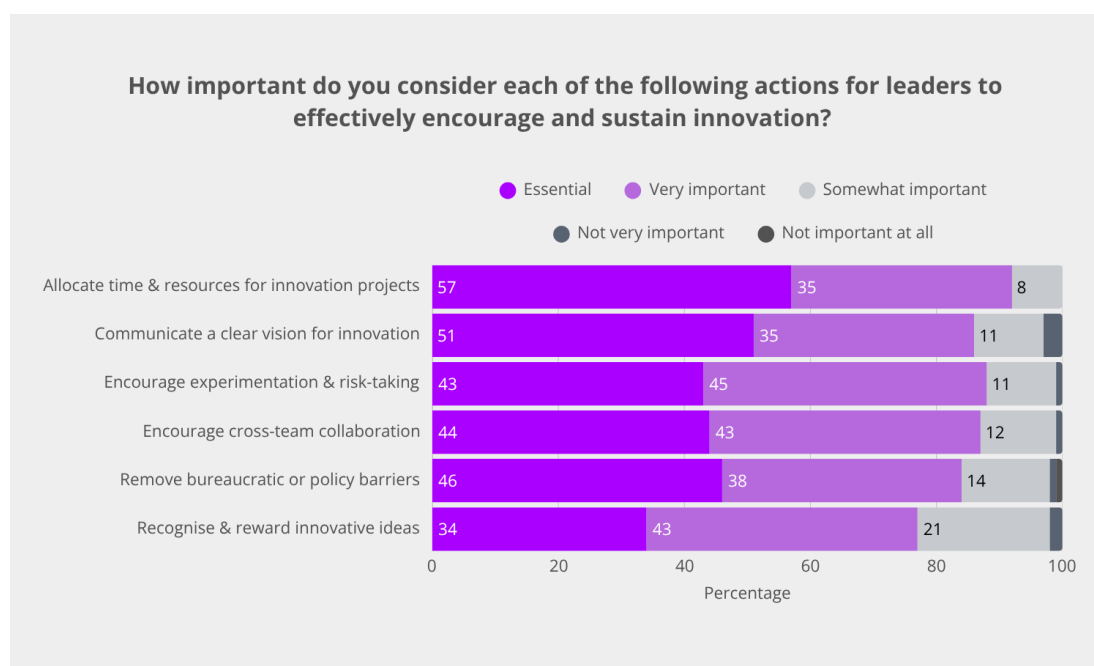
Another encouraged leaders to "prioritise how they engage with innovation".

"They should think about how they hear pitches and what they do with the pitches they've had," they said. "If you've not had any, why not? What can you do to make yourselves more accessible?"

"New ideas are out there," they stressed. "People have them all the time. It's a question of making sure they get heard and helping them be actioned."

"New ideas are out there. People have them all the time. It's a question of making sure they get heard and helping them be actioned."

Survey respondent



Cultivating the right culture

During a panel session on how leaders can create an innovative culture in government, Emily Hobbs, director for capability, learning and talent at the UK Department for Work and Pensions, reiterated a strong theme that “a culture of psychological safety absolutely underpins a culture of innovation and for me, you can't easily have one without the other”.

She said this extends beyond a culture where it's safe to speak up and challenge to one where people feel safe to make mistakes, share openly, take risks and propose new ideas without fear of negative consequences, even when things don't go as planned.

“Your teams need to know that you support them and that you have their backs.”

Emily Hobbs, UK Department for Work and Pensions

To make this a reality, Hobbs said that leaders play a critical role through four key actions. First, they must openly express their commitment to psychological safety and acknowledge that while it may not always be perfect, it's a clear ambition. They must be mindful of their own behaviour, ensuring they model positivity and avoid reacting with frustration. Further, they should create simple and accessible ways for team members to provide feedback, helping leaders stay informed about the culture they're shaping. Finally, courageous leadership is essential, she said: “Your teams need to know that you support them and that you have their backs.”

‘Benefits before challenges’

Gareth Bristo, associate director at the UK Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), explained how the DBS has tried to embed this approach. Recognising that frontline employees often have valuable insights but may hesitate to speak up, DBS created a dedicated “innovation lab” – a safe space for staff to explore and develop ideas without fear of criticism or rejection. The organisation trained a core group of over 200 staff members to participate, encouraging inclusive and constructive engagement. A key principle of this lab is ‘benefits before challenges’, which shifts the focus from immediate obstacles to the potential value of an idea. Phrases like “Yes, and how can we make this a reality?” replace dismissive responses.

He said this approach not only surfaces a list of ideas that's potentially feasible but also “you've got a group of people that feel safe to promote that now, because they understand how that's going to positively impact the organisation, and then we can start to look at delivery...”

One Big Thing: Innovation

Sapana Agrawal, director for civil service strategy in the UK Cabinet Office, said that a key aspect of fostering innovation in government is aligning ministers, civil servants and leadership on innovation and risk-taking.

She highlighted recent speeches by Cabinet Office minister Pat McFadden and the prime minister about innovation and the importance of a test and learn culture. She called it “a real call to arms and permission for civil servants to innovate, to be creative”, while stressing the need for a shared language around risk and opportunity when pursuing new ideas.



As an example of support from leadership for civil servants to pursue new ideas, Agrawal highlighted initiatives such as the Civil Service Data Challenge – which Global Government Forum runs with the UK Cabinet Office, Office for National Statistics and NTT Data – and the One Big Thing initiative, which this year focused on innovation.

One Big Thing is an annual initiative for all civil servants to take action around a cross-government change priority.

“We asked the entire civil service to do innovation training, have structured conversations in their team, get leaders really comfortable leading these types of conversations and then experimenting and evaluating their efforts. And we got around 150,000 people involved,” she said.

Say no to the status quo

Jonathan Rushton, deputy director in the UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, said that an innovation mindset is crucial for fostering a broader innovation culture, especially in government where problem-solving is central.

“For me, a major part of it [innovation] is saying no to the status quo if we can see a better way of doing something and an opportunity and the benefits there,” he said.

Like others, he also emphasised the “test and learn” approach to encourage starting small, evaluating if ideas work, and scaling them if successful or learning from them if they don’t.

He pointed to government examples such as the Government Communications Service applying a percentage of its budget to more innovative approaches to communications and testing the impact; and central government working with local governments and others on using the test and learn approach to tackle specific challenges.

He said: “For me it’s the idea that might fail, but it’s not the person that had the idea that’s failed. I think that’s really central to how we think about this and how we can drive that experimental culture.”

“It’s the idea that might fail – it’s not the person who had the idea.”

Jonathan Rushton, UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

2. Skills for innovation

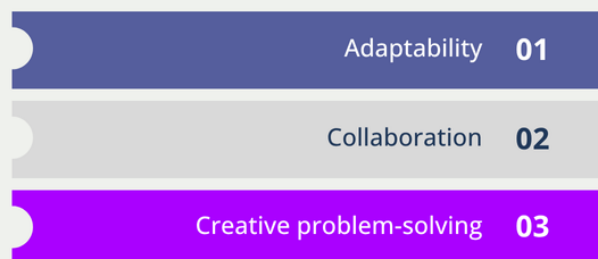
When asked about the top skills for civil servants to develop so they can better drive innovation, **adaptability to change** is viewed as the most essential, with nearly 60% of respondents emphasising its importance. **Collaboration and teamwork** follow closely, as almost half of the participants deem these skills crucial.

Creative problem-solving and **leadership/decision-making** are also regarded as vital, with significant proportions considering them essential.

One respondent noted that: “Creative problem-solving only takes one so far. Civil servants also need to develop the skill of identifying the problem in the first place... Real innovation demands the skills of setting aside all assumptions and prejudices about all things.”

Skills such as **communication**, **data analysis**, **design thinking** and **digital proficiency** are seen as important but less essential.

Top 3 skills civil servants need for innovation



“Real innovation demands the skills of setting aside all assumptions.”

Survey respondent

One respondent, however, urged leaders to “treat digital skills as a key skill alongside communication and numeracy, etc.”

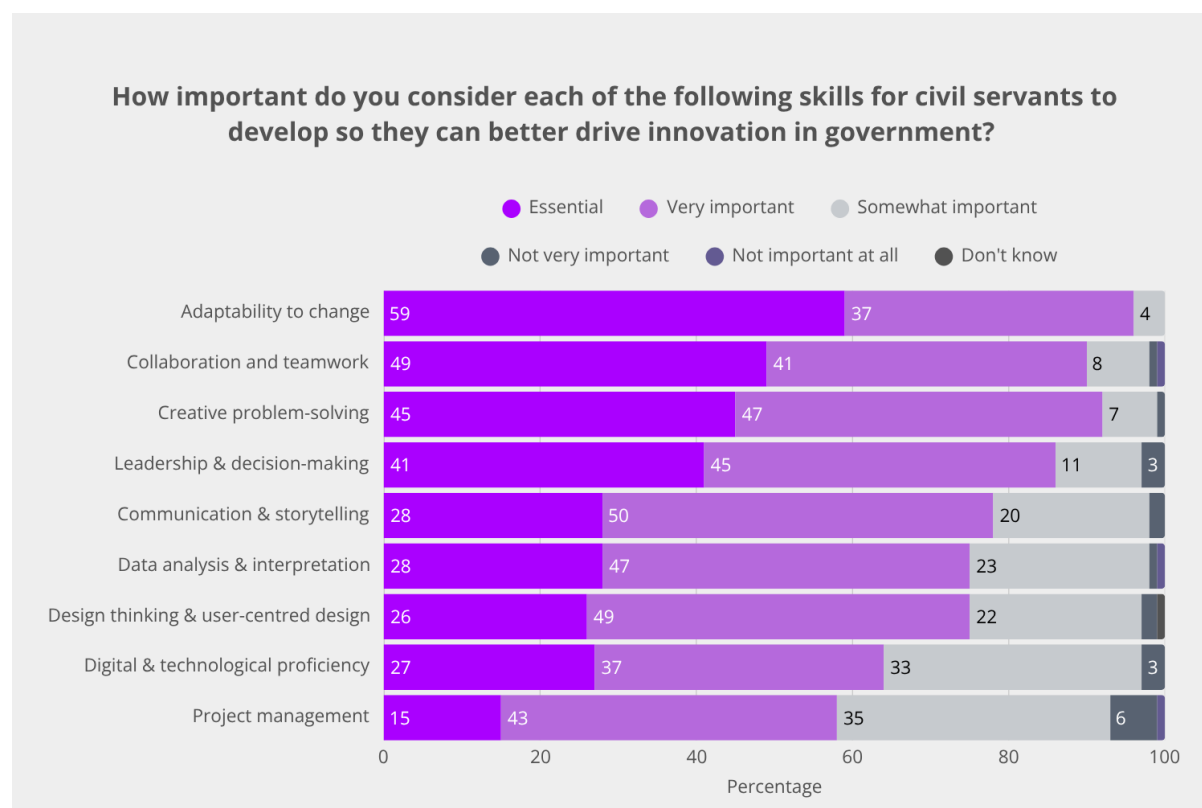
“It seems to be acceptable to ‘not be good with tech’,” they said.

The UK government has a goal to significantly increase digital skills within its workforce but the survey results suggest work may be required to demonstrate the importance of this to all civil servants, not just those in digital roles.

Project management is rated essential by only 15%, with the highest share of respondents saying it’s only somewhat important, though one clarified that: “Project management is essential for ‘scale up’; innovation is the seed project management can grow.”

One respondent highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in civil servants while another suggested that to boost their innovation skills, “civil servants need to spend time in the private and charitable sectors as part of their training and be better connected to the communities they serve in business and with the public”. Ownership, listening skills, risk

tolerance, and an outcome-oriented mindset were also flagged as important qualities for innovation.



Skills for a future-ready civil service

In a session on skills for innovation, Fiona Ryland, chief people officer for the UK government, used the metaphor of a "three-legged stool" to explain how civil service skills development is structured: core skills that all civil servants need, professional skills based on a person's profession, and domain-specific departmental knowledge. The initial emphasis is on defining the core skills.

There are some digital skills "that everybody will need to have to work alongside the technology we have now and the emerging technology that we'll have in the future".

Fiona Ryland, UK government

Ryland said there are some digital skills "that everybody will need to have to work alongside the technology we have now and the emerging technology that we'll have in the future".

"The other area that we think there might be a core common curriculum is leadership and line management," she said. While not everyone is a line manager, "we really feel that there is a common set of standards and a common training programme to make sure that everybody is a really confident and capable line manager and leader".

Eva Treven, director general, Directorate of Quality in Slovenia's Ministry of Public Administration, said that values must inform the people skills needed in public service. She pinpointed values like trust, pride, self-respect, respect for

others, sustainability and helping others as foundational, especially in the context of emerging technologies like AI, which many people fear or don't understand.

Attracting the next generation

In Slovenia, there's a challenge with an ageing public workforce, as the average public servant is over 50, and new talent is hard to attract.

To address this, Slovenia has implemented major changes such as reforming public sector pay and promotion systems. Annual performance reviews were abolished as they were ineffective. They were replaced by mandatory annual development conversations between leaders and staff. In addition, leaders receive annual training in people skills to carry out these conversations effectively.

The training system is now centralised and offers over 60 digital skills courses, from basic to specialist and over 60 soft skills courses "because they are very important".

Slovenia has partnered with universities to involve students in real public sector projects with mentors. It has also created exchange programmes between public servants and private sector employees for better understanding and collaboration.

"Public servants spend up to five days in different firms and people from different businesses spend up to five days in the ministries because we want to understand... what the real issue on the field is, and then we can solve it together," she said.

Treven added that public servants are also regular people who rely on public services, making them uniquely positioned to improve the system through real-world insight.

"We are mothers, fathers, we are daughters, we are sons," she said. "We need public transport, we need healthcare, and we can test in real life what works and what doesn't."

Digital expertise

Thomas Beautyman, deputy director, government digital capability in the UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, highlighted prime minister Keir Starmer's commitment that by 2030, one in 10 UK civil servants will be digitally skilled experts.

He said this "really speaks to where this government wants to go" and what the future workforce might look like.

The definition of "expert" is based on roles tied to the UK's Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) Capability Framework, which standardises roles and skills across government. High-investment areas include DevOps, cybersecurity and machine learning, supported by initiatives such as



apprenticeships and role-switching accelerators. However, the framework also includes roles that might not normally be associated with digital and data.

"Probably the biggest growing role over the past few years has been the user researcher," Beautyman said. "User researchers didn't exist before; now they are a really critical part of our digital teams."

Beautyman also made the point that the digital function shouldn't be viewed as isolated or niche.

"I'd say 70, 80% of their core skillset is the kind of skills that you would want in many public servant roles," he said, citing problem-solving, analytical thinking and teamwork.

"User researchers didn't exist before; now they are a really critical part of our digital teams."

Thomas Beautyman, DSIT

Estonia's approach

Karl Andreas Sprenk, director, digital skills coordination in Estonia's Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, described Estonia's three-tier approach to developing digital skills in the public sector.

First is the focus on basic digital skills needed for daily tasks, such as using collaboration tools, understanding data quality, and being aware of cybersecurity and AI. To support this, Estonia created an on-demand Digital Academy platform for civil servants.

Second is developing skills for innovation and transformation. Estonia doesn't have a single digital entity responsible for government transformation; each department and ministry focuses on the needs in their respective areas. Executive and mid-level managers are trained to align departmental projects with broader strategic goals and user needs, and to ensure solutions are compatible and meet core competences and standards in areas such as data, cybersecurity and sustainability.

Estonia also addresses the wider digital talent challenge in society through a partnership with the Ministry of Education and Research to promote reskilling programmes to build both public and private sector digital capacity.

The panel agreed that as well as supporting staff today, leaders must look ahead.

"I think that the landscape has never been as complex as it is now," said the UK government's Ryland, noting emerging technology, the amount of generations that are in the workforce, and new ways of working such as hybrid arrangements. Leaders need new skills themselves, she said, pointing to the need for organisational design capabilities as well as process management and adapting to new technologies.

"It's also looking at how do we future-proof our workforces, our ways of working and be agile? How do you pivot in terms of what your workforce and your customers expect?"

Innovation as a contact sport

Joe Torjussen, head of innovation in the Civil Service Strategy Unit within the Cabinet Office, led an Innovation Masterclass session, drawing on the civil service's e-learning course which supports the One Big Thing initiative and breaks down the innovation process into stages. He pinpointed three core skill areas which have particular applicability for all civil servants: identifying and defining problems, building a proof of concept, and evaluating outcomes.

He noted that effective user research can challenge assumptions and encouraged civil servants to test ideas quickly and cheaply using tools like AI and anonymised data. Evaluation is often overlooked but critical, he said.

"I see so many brilliant pockets of innovation across government, so many pilots, and we're not good enough at scaling or sharing our successes or our failures," he said. "I think it should be a call to arms to share your learnings with your networks, with your communities, so that we can get better at learning from failure, but we can also get better at adopting and diffusing the really good innovations."

Angela Hanson, the innovation lead at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Observatory of Public Sector for Innovation highlighted global approaches including Belgium's federal innovation awards, France's public transformation campus, Chile's bottom-up training platform, and Sweden's formalised innovation roles.

The OECD's six core innovation skills, published in 2017, are: iteration, data literacy, user-centricity, curiosity, storytelling, and insurgency. These are now being updated to also capture managerial competencies.

Hanson stressed that capacity-building must go beyond formal training to include real-world practice.

"Innovation is a contact sport," she said.

3. Making the most of modern technology

Our survey also asked civil servants about the most important factors in enabling innovation through digital tools and data.

Investment in modern digital tools and platforms and **training on how to use these tools effectively** were both considered essential or very important by 87% of respondents.

Some stressed the need for better tool suitability. One said it is “extremely important to ensure that the current digital tools we are using are fit for purpose and work,” while another argued that “government should be willing to build systems from scratch... if bespoke systems are required, they should be built”.

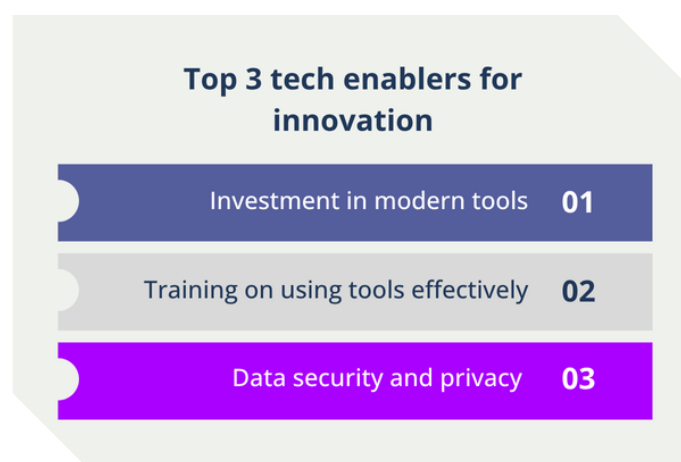
Ensuring data security and privacy compliance is also seen as critical, with 52% ranking it as essential.

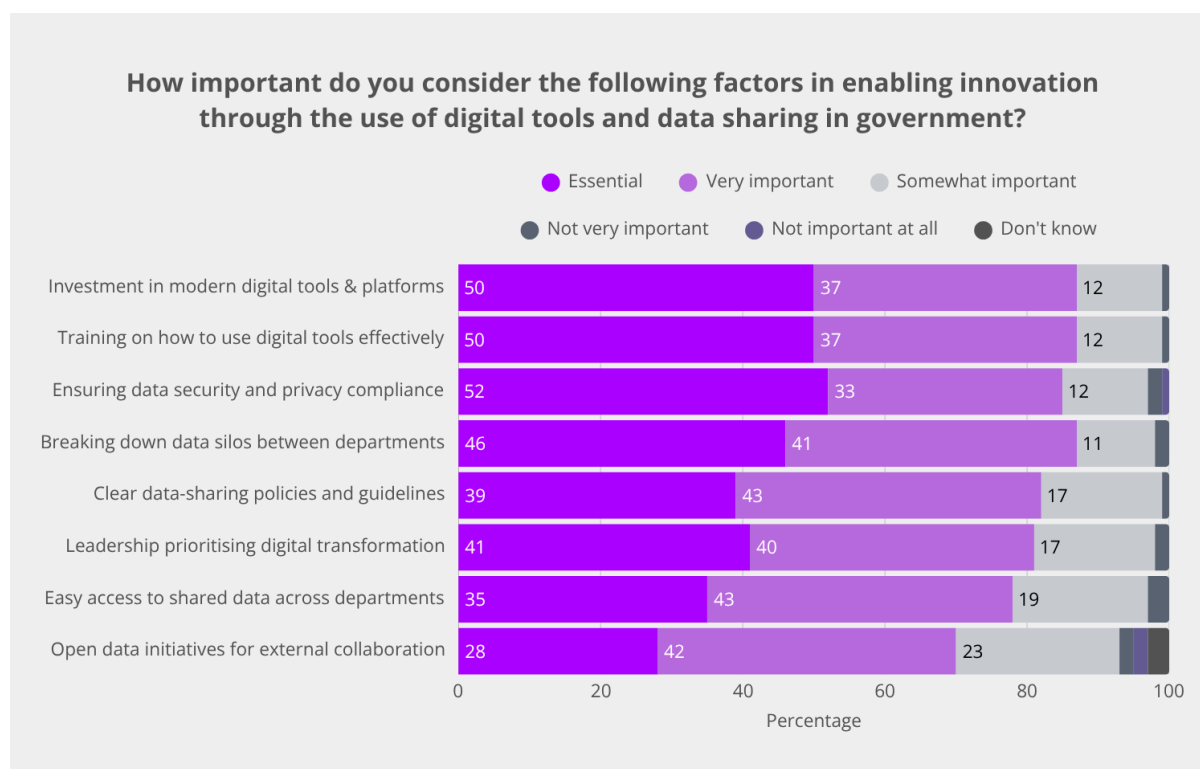
One respondent noted: “We still seem to be too nervous about data security to use it proactively in support of problem solving and whether we use the right data in the first place is another issue.” Another suggested a path forward: “By the time we are talking about data sharing between departments we are potentially already failing to recognise small adaptive changes at team and function level. Start small, share models across departments.”

Breaking down data silos between departments is another high priority, with almost half of participants deeming it essential. **Leadership prioritising digital transformation** is similarly regarded as vital, with four in ten viewing it as essential for fostering innovation.

While **clear data-sharing policies and guidelines** are important, they are seen as slightly less critical, with 39% marking them as essential. **Access to shared data across departments** and **open data initiatives for external collaboration** are considered important, though less critical.

There was some concern that digital is often seen as the default solution, while deeper issues – such as poor collaboration, limited training and underused existing tools – go overlooked. As one put it: “The potential risk is that every problem is seen to need a digital solution.” Another noted: “Typically we only use a small proportion of the functionality of any tool... Being trained to exploit what we have would be eye-opening.”





What's slowing down digital

Sarah Munby, permanent secretary at the UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, said there are strong foundations in the UK government but a state of digital review in January revealed “really concerning” findings such as under-digitisation and falling public satisfaction.

She identified three root causes: talent, system fragmentation, and processes.

The review found that many public organisations are building their own digital solutions for common needs, which wastes money, complicates services for citizens and stifles innovation. “We’ve begun working really, really closely with the commercial function... but we need to go much further,” Munby said, urging collaboration across silos to meet government missions.

She stressed that transformation requires leaders to be followers too: “Sometimes it is about finding the places where we can operate together and being prepared to do things one way, consistently designed around the citizen.”

Finally, Munby highlighted how traditional models that favour short-term upfront financing over long-term investment in systems that can evolve over time result in outdated legacy technology. The government is introducing more agile, staged funding for digital and AI projects.

She warned too that there can be too much focus on “novelty” and getting funding for the next new programme: “I want us to ask ourselves, collectively: where are we simplifying the castle as well as building new turrets upon it?”

“Sometimes it is about finding the places where we can operate together and being prepared to do things one way, consistently designed around the citizen.”

Sarah Munby, UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Insights from government digital leaders

In a panel session on making innovation happen, Richard Puttick, chief information officer for Defence Support in the UK Ministry of Defence, emphasised that successful innovation often comes from those closest to the problems, not top-down directives, and that leadership's role is to provide the right tools and support.

He gave one example where a senior Royal Navy engineer took the lead in rolling out a complex data mining tool, sponsoring hundreds of staff through a boot camp. While only a few fully adopted the tool, those who did produced highly valuable insights. He said this illustrates that enabling and upskilling internal staff is key and that "you can't predict where innovation is going to happen; you've just got to lay the groundwork so that people can realise it themselves".

The second example involved a small team that provide innovation services across a wide range of units in defence. They started with robotic process automation and evolved into AI and process engineering. This highlighted the benefit of collaborating across departments and sharing resources.



"Don't fragment and build the skills."

Richard Puttick, UK Ministry of Defence

Puttick said: "They had a central grouping of skills – a small team, but a knowledgeable team – dedicated towards innovation. And instead of me spinning off a separate group of people to do innovation in my part of the forest and similarly, other people doing innovation in their part, we've actually focused on using resources elsewhere in the department effectively."

"Don't fragment and build the skills" was his advice.

Transformation not technology

John Laverick, chief digital and information officer at the UK's HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS), reflected on an eight-year transformation journey at HMCTS away from being a paper-based organisation using technologies such as AI and robotic process automation, as well as low code development.

However, he warned against conflating technology and transformation.

"One of the real mistakes we made in our reform programme was treating it as a technology programme – it was a business transformation programme," he said.

Leanne Cummings, GDS; Richard Puttick, MoD;
John Laverick, HMCTS; Christine Hammod-Aziz,
Rainmaker Solutions

"One of the real mistakes we made in our reform programme was treating it as a technology programme – it was a business transformation programme."

John Laverick, UK HM Courts & Tribunals Service

He urged against approaching new technologies like AI with the mindset of chasing “shiny” new trends and instead stressed the importance of addressing business problems first.

Leanne Cummings, director, products and services, UK Government Digital Service, highlighted the GOV.UK Chat tool which allows citizens to ask complex questions and receive answers in their own language. This innovation was built upon prior work involving data science and large language models.

The tool’s success was made possible by cross-departmental cooperation, with agencies like HM Revenue and Customs, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Business and Trade all contributing.

“Innovation is not an event; it’s a thing that we do,” she said.

*“Innovation is not an event;
it’s a thing that we do.”*

Leanne Cummings, UK Government
Digital Service

Conclusion

Our research shows that while there is strong will to innovate in government, there are still significant challenges that hold back the full potential to harness creativity and improve public services.

The findings offer a clear message on moving past these. Support from the top is essential and civil servants need to feel safe to take risks and sometimes fail. They need to be equipped with skills such as adaptability and creative problem-solving as well as the opportunity – at all role levels – to apply them. And government leaders themselves need to act to ensure access to the right data and focus on smart investment in digital tools.

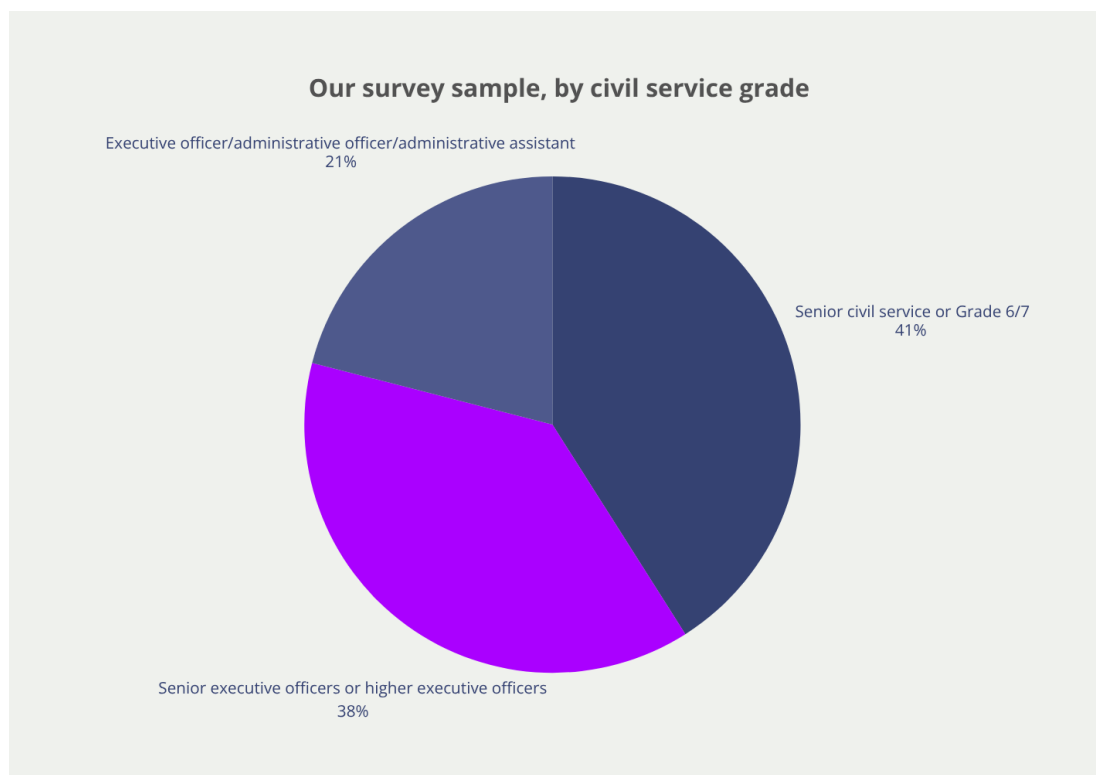
Examples showcased at the Innovation 2025 event demonstrated that this transformation is already underway in pockets.

The opportunity now is to scale it.

Methodology

Global Government Forum surveyed 320 of over 3,500 delegates registered for the Innovation 2025 conference. The majority (98%) were from the UK with a small number from countries such as Belgium, Brazil, Estonia, The Gambia and Germany.

The survey captured responses from a broad spectrum of civil service grades, providing a well-rounded view across seniority levels. Over 40% of respondents were senior service level or Grade 6/7 and 38% were senior executive officers or higher executive officers.



The top professions were operational delivery (26%), digital, data and technology (13%), and project delivery (13%).

The survey is statistically significant with a margin of error of ± 5.27 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. This means that if the survey were repeated multiple times with the same methodology and sample size, the results would fall within ± 5.27 percentage points of the reported figures in 95 out of 100 cases.

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