Building capacity to lead digital transformation: A new mindset in the French civil service

This case study was prepared in the context of the 2017-2019 OECD multicountry project on civil service leadership focusing on a variety of challenges and practices relating to the changing nature of leadership in the public sector. It was peer reviewed at a workshop with the ten countries participating in the project. The case study focusses on initiatives in the French Civil Service to strengthen the capabilities of the senior civil service to lead the digital transformation and create public value in the context of France’s strategy for the future of public service, Administration Publique 2022.
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Building public leaders’ capacity for digitalisation: an urgent imperative

Digitalisation, or the use of data, digital technologies and interconnections that change or result in new activities, is omnipresent (OECD 2019a). The capacity to use digital technologies open a world of new possibilities for governments, citizens and businesses worldwide to work differently. Possibly even more important than allowing people and organisations to work differently, digital technologies create new forms of interactions between governments, citizens and businesses.

This case study discusses how France is preparing its senior civil servants to support and steer digital technologies to create public value, namely in the context of France’s strategy for the future of public service, Administration Publique 2022. As the fast pace of digital transformation is placing new expectations on SCS, various French public organisations are piloting initiatives to strengthen SCS capacity to lead the digital transformation. This case study will analyse some of these initiatives and explore areas for consideration.

Some implications of digitalisation for public leaders

Digitalisation has implications over the public policy process and the way that governments work. A major challenge for public leaders is that they need to be able to identify what are organisations’ adaptive challenges, and distinguish them from technical problems (Linsky and Darabya, 2019). The disruptive effects of digitalisation in economy and society transform not only the way to deliver public value, but the meaning of public value itself. In this new context, the use of technology becomes increasingly strategic to improve the public policy process, service delivery and ways of working in the public sector (see box below).

Box 1. Using digital technology to create public value

The diffusion and adoption of new technologies are creating a new digital governance context where the multiplication of technological options create opportunities but also raise challenges and risks for which governments must prepare.

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1 Digitalisation is the use of data and digital technologies as well as interconnection that results in new, or changes to existing, activities, while digital transformation refers to the economic and societal effects of digitisation and digitalisation (OECD 2019a).

2 Digital technologies refer to ICTs, including the Internet, mobile technologies and devices, as well as data analytics used to improve the generation, collection, exchange, aggregation, combination, analysis, access, searchability and presentation of digital content, including for the development of services and apps (OECD 2014a).

3 In this context, senior civil servants are those public servants who take decisions and exert influence at the highest hierarchical levels of the public service, as defined by the OECD Recommendation on Public Sector Leadership and Capability (OECD 2019b). Public leaders, senior managers and senior civil servants (SCS) are used interchangeably throughout this document.
The OECD 2014 Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies defines Digital Government as “the use of digital technologies, as an integrated part of governments’ modernisation strategies, to create public value. It relies on a digital government ecosystem comprised of government actors, non-governmental organisations, businesses, citizens’ associations and individuals which supports the production of and access to data, services and content through interactions with the government.”

Building on this definition, the principles set out in the Recommendation support a shift in culture within the public sector. This shift is about leveraging technology to spur open, participatory and innovative governments, to create new forms of public engagement and relationships that transcend public, private and social spheres, and to help governments use technology to deliver better results and policy outcomes.

As the approach to technology becomes a strategic function, governments need to prepare to strengthen individual and collective capacities in order to strengthen digital government impact.


As decision-makers, public leaders need, at a minimum, to understand the impact of digitalisation on decision-making processes and on new ways to create public value. These increasingly imply working in new and different ways, and with partners inside and outside the public service. Capacity to set up innovative institutional partnerships, to create the space to work differently and to digitalise services depends greatly on the capacity of leaders to set the goals and align the resources within their organisations (OECD 2017b).

In a digital era, good leadership is more than ever a foundation for a professional, capable and responsive public service (see box below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 2. OECD 2019 Recommendation on Public Sector Leadership and Capability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The OECD 2019 Recommendation on Public Sector Leadership and Capability recognizes leadership in the public service as a foundational element for improving outcomes for society. It recommends that adherents to the recommendation build leadership capability in the public sector, particularly by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Clarifying the expectations incumbent upon senior-level public servants to be politically impartial leaders of public organisations, trusted to deliver on the priorities of the government, and uphold and embody the highest standards of integrity without fear of politically-motivated retribution;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Considering merit-based criteria and transparent procedures in the appointment of senior-level public servants, and holding them accountable for performance;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Ensuring senior-level public servants have the mandate, competencies, and conditions necessary to provide impartial evidence-informed advice and speak truth to power; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Developing the leadership capabilities of current and potential senior-level public servants.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The examples below illustrate some of these challenges:

**Digitalisation enables new forms of service delivery**

In 2016, 35.6% of individuals in OECD countries had used the Internet for sending filled forms via public authorities’ websites in the previous 12 months (OECD 2017c). This represents an increase of 23.5 percentage points since 2006\(^4\). As citizens become more digital savvy, the provision of online services, including from the public sector, gradually becomes the norm rather than the exception.

“Démarches simplifiées”\(^5\) or “simplified procedures” is a website and app launched by France’s directorate for digitalisation (DINSIC)\(^6\) in 2019 to digitalise every administrative procedure in only a few minutes. What makes “Démarches simplifiées” special is that it was developed after the administration realized that previous attempts to simplify administrative procedures had overburdened clerks and public servants and were more expensive than expected. In other words, they were not serving their purpose. “Démarches simplifiées” helps administrations digitalise their services and manage that new form of service. As of April 2019, it claims almost 1500 partner administrations and a 50% reduction in service delivery.

Understanding why digital service delivery is useful and how it brings value to citizens can be the first mind-set that leaders need to adopt in order to move towards digitalisation. Exploring the potential of digitalisation involves thinking and acting differently, managing financial and human resources. In this context, steering digital transformation can be more about reaching the right balance between adopting digital and innovative mind-sets and “traditional” business acumen and people’s skills.

**Social media transforms the meaning of public communication**

Digital technology created new ways to communicate and a particularly staggering proportion of citizens and organisations uses social media. The presence and activity in social media is a necessity for governments if they want, at a minimum, to keep up with individuals and interest groups’ concerns, and ideally, to use those platforms to communicate more efficiently with citizens (Mickoleit 2014). Social media accounts have become a commonplace for government institutions. They are cheaper than traditional communication tools, they have a large outreach, they increase the speed of interaction with citizens, they can help building trust in government by facilitating the contact between citizens and the administration, and they can inform citizens during emergencies.

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\(^4\) For more information about the data please go to : [http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933533416](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933533416)

\(^5\) [www.demarches-simplifiees.fr](http://www.demarches-simplifiees.fr)

\(^6\) interministerial directorate in charge of digital, information and the communication system of the State
Public leaders need to learn how to best leverage new social media. Its advantages are multiple and leaders need to learn how to steer their administrations to use these new forms of communications. However, especially in an era of “fake news”, public leaders need to understand the limits of such platforms, which can be as informative as mis-informative (Mickoleit 2014).

Open Government Data pushes for greater scrutiny of Governmental activities

Public communication is more than social media. By encouraging the use, reuse and free distribution of government datasets, governments become more accountable and transparent, and “design more evidence-based and inclusive policies, stimulate innovation inside and outside the public sector, and empower citizens to take better-informed decisions” (OECD 2017c). France was one of the early adopters of Open Government Data (OGD) and has been able to introduce and implement a large range of policies to promote data availability, accessibility and re-use (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Open-Useful-Reusable Government Data Index (OURdata), 2017

Notes: Data for Hungary, Iceland and Luxembourg are not available. Denmark does not have a Central/federal data portal and therefore are not displayed in the Index. Detailed methodology and underlying data available online in the annex online. Information on data for Israël : http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602.

Source: OECD Survey on Open Government Data
France’s digital agenda was initially influenced by its open data platform Etalab, launched in 2011. Other initiatives to simplify the relation between the State, citizens, businesses and associations (such as France Connect, API Entreprises and Associations) strengthened the basis to go beyond a technical approach to digitalisation to a cultural change, where the administration is a platform, is a key stakeholder of the public sphere – but not the only one.

The challenges of preparing leaders for digital transformation

By changing the way governments operate, digitalisation changes the expectations towards public leaders. They need to acquire new skills, to use their skills in innovative ways, and adopt more digital and innovative mind-sets. Building capacity for leaders in areas that go beyond digitalisation as a tool, is still challenging today, in France and worldwide.

Leaders are traditionally a group hard to target. They usually tends to have limited time to dedicate to learning new skills, partly due to their level of responsibility towards both government and administration. In the context of digitalisation, the challenge is greater for at least two reasons. First, digital transformation is complex and ongoing. With the incredible fast pace of technology, the implications of digitalisation also change. Second, public leaders constitute a heterogeneous group, and many have worked most of their lives in a pre-digital era.

Digital transformation is ongoing

As digitalisation pursues its pace, governments need to be agile enough to prepare for present and future implications of digital transformation. They need to adopt a dynamic vision and strategy and simultaneously prepare their leaders to steer that transformation across the public sector.

The future of work is digital…

The transformation of the public sector is inseparable from digitalisation. France’s flagship programme Action Publique 2022 (AP2022), or “Public Administration 2022” aims to build France’s future public service, has brought digitalisation to its core. Action Publique 2022 gives administrations a high-level mandate to initiate or pursue investments on digital transformation. Action Publique 2022 four Presidential commitments for digitalisation and digital transformation are, by 2022, to provide 100% online administrative procedures; to develop a “platform State” offering new and better digital services; to rethink the relationship between citizens and administration, and to transform public policies and administrative methods in a digital era (see Figure 2).

7 https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/etalab-plateforme-quel-ambition-nadi-bou-hanna/?trackingId=yNoGyOlctb2u9QNQs&q=DGA%3D%3D
8 Created by the Secrétariat Général à la Modernisation de l’Action Publique
These four facets of France’s digital transformation programme respond to the irreversibility of the digital disruption underway and stimulate the debate about the future of working in the public sector. They create incentives to adopt new approaches in designing public policies and services, in a way that prepares public servants to use technology to automate certain tasks and engage in better interactions with service users (DITP 2018a).

…but digitalisation needs to be put in perspective

Making a strategic use of digitalisation requires a broader vision of its impact on existing processes, services, use of resources, and people management. Action Publique 2022’s holistic vision to transform the public service recognizes that transforming the public service goes beyond digital transformation. The implementation of AP2022 also innovates by involving different levels of stakeholder committees (experts, youth), Ministries and interministerial commissions. The Interministerial Directorate of Public Transformation (DITP9) coordinates AP2022 (see box below).

Box 3. Preparedness for digital transformation in France: an overview

The French administration has been gradually preparing the digital transformation of the public sector as part of its policy to improve effectiveness and the quality of the services provided to citizens.

The digital transformation is also acquiring a new visibility within the various interventions designed to promote public sector innovation. The former General Secretariat for the Modernisation of Public Administration (SGMAP), created in 2012, provided technical and financial support to many innovations across the public sector, which often involved using technology or interaction with users to create new ways of working. Various public innovation competitions have contributed to developing an innovation culture across the administration. Additionally, the annual innovation week became a forum to disseminate good practices and to involve a broader audience across the civil service, and has allowed identifying and discussing enablers and barriers to innovation. Other initiatives such as the

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9 DITP: Direction interministérielle pour la transformation publique.
creation of a governmental fund for “transformation of the public action” created the space for supporting digitally-based innovative projects.

In 2017, the French State Secretariat in Charge of Digital Policy is working to scale up digital technology to improve public administration and offer 100% of digital services by 2022. This ambition for the public sector requires adapted infrastructure and greater preparedness of the civil service to adapt to a new mind-set and ways of working implied by digital transformation. The same year, the SGMAP was restructured into two interministerial directorates (the DITP in charge of public transformation and DINSIC in charge of digital, information and the communication system of the State). Among other responsibilities, the DINSIC trains and facilitates a community of practice of Information System Directors (DPSI) in the State, in order to help them better manage and communicate about their projects. Other initiatives includes the community involving “general interest entrepreneurs”, who work with public mentors to improve the civil service, for instance by creating online services. (DINSIC 2018).

The National Digital Council (CCNum) was relaunched in May 2018 to advise the government on the impact of the digital on society and economy.

The current focus on digital transformation also builds on a long history of using digital transformation as a core element of public sector innovation. For example the Future Investment Programme (from 2010) aims to prototype innovative projects which included, among others, digitisation of public services, development of open data exchanges or streamlining the interface between agencies and their clientele were some of the areas supported (OECD 2017a).

Introducing new ways of working in the public sector involves changes in rules and procedures, but ultimately, developing a new mind-set is about the way people work and interact with each other. Designing tomorrow’s public administration is also about creating user-centred public services, making better use of public resources, giving civil servants more agility and more attractive career paths. As such, in addition to digital transformation, Action Publique 2022’s other four pillars are 1) human resources management, 2) simplification and improvement of public services, 3) territorial organisation of the public services and 4) modernisation of public budgeting. The HRM pillar is particularly relevant as the ambition to develop the workforce of the future, including a digital-ready mind set in the public administration, requires a new look into the existing institutional frameworks.

Part of AP2022 HRM pillar is a “human resources renewal” strategy, the SIRH 2022. This crosscutting HRM strategy, deployed by a working group with experts from the areas of public transformation, digital and HRM¹⁰, include all areas related to human resources in the public sector. In addition to using digital technology to improve the HR function, the SIRH looks at the potential of digitalisation to improve management, transform public

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¹⁰ The working group involves the following key public stakeholders: DITP (in charge of transformation), the DINSIC (digital, information and the communication system of the State) and the DGAFP (General Directorate for the Administration and Civil Service).
professions for a digital environment and improve the employee experience (Roadmap SIRH 2022). The good practices across the administration are included in an on-line library of good practices\(^{11}\).

**Earlier discussions on skills for a digital era tended to focus on attracting more technical, traditionally IT- and data-specific skills.** At the time, France and many OECD countries had designed strategies to attract, develop or retain ICT-skilled public servants (OECD 2014b). Currently, the debate about skills is quickly expanding to include those skillsets that are necessary to steer a digital environment and its effects in economy and society (see for example OECD 2018). Nowadays, virtually all professions use technology. Digitalisation is spreading across different professions and raising the minimum level of ICT skills required to perform any job (OECD 2016).

Against this background, SIRH 2022 also aims improve competency management across the French administration, for example by establishing a platform (PIX) of evaluation, training and certification of digital skills. The SIRH Roadmap also plans to introduce a digital training passport, to promote a common understanding of digital skills and their portability across different ministries (DINSIC 2018)\(^{12}\).

**A successful digital transformation depends on the skills of civil servants, and especially on the skills to lead digital transformation within Governments.** Many of the countries that have joined the “Digital 9”\(^{13}\) are directing investments towards the improvement of skills for a digital era. This network (of which France is currently not a member), brings together some of the world’s most advanced digital nations with a shared goal of harnessing digital technology and new ways of working to improve citizens’ lives. Similarly to France, Portugal’s Digital agenda aims, by 2020, to promote an open and simplified administration, capable of working effectively with and for citizens\(^{14}\). This type of strategy requires skills that go beyond technology. For example, working with citizens is often about using innovative approaches, such as behavioural insights, to understand their actual needs and design public policies accordingly\(^{15}\).

**A pre-digital senior civil service**

Most administrations are long-standing institutions operating based on rules designed in a pre-digital era. However, the velocity of digital transformation is pushing Governments to adapt quickly, in order to be able to address the policy implications of digitalisation.

**Future generations should be better prepared to live in a full digital era, but current SCS are in a long-term transition process.** Two of most important sub-groups within the

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\(^{11}\) https://www.bibliotheque-initiatives.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/toutes-les-initiatives

\(^{12}\) La nouvelle feuille de route SIRH a été diffusée fin mars 2018.

\(^{13}\) Members in April 2019 are: Estonia, Israel, New Zealand, South Korea, United Kingdom, Canada, Uruguay, Mexico and Portugal

\(^{14}\) http://www.portugaldigital.pt/medidas/?id=6

\(^{15}\) For more information on behavioural insights, please see: [http://www.oecd.org/gov/regulatory-policy/behavioural-insights.htm](http://www.oecd.org/gov/regulatory-policy/behavioural-insights.htm)
SCS are the pre- and the post- digital senior civil servants. By nature, they have had different exposure to and experience with technology and its implications in the workplace.

The majority of French SCS has worked for most of their career in a professional environment with little technology - in 2015, about 50% of French SCS were over 50 years old. Younger generations of SCS are digital native and are more familiar with using technology than previous generations. At the same time, discussions with senior officials suggest that while technology is part of the daily personal life of younger generations, they still struggle to bring technology into their professional lives and working processes.

France’s approach: embedding digitalisation throughout SCS’s careers

Building capabilities of SCS for the digital transformation requires looking at how SCS are selected, hired and re-trained. France is amongst the OECD countries that have institutionalised the management of their senior civil service. Senior managers are identified early on in their careers through a public competition that leads to entrance into the senior civil service corps. They have a centrally defined skills profile and a specific performance management regime, and are encouraged to have more career mobility than the rest of civil servants (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Extent of the use of separate human resources management practices for senior civil servants in central government, 2016


In France’s administration, SCS or “hauts fonctionnaires” are traditionally selected by a competitive examination which leads to entrance in a public service school, such as the ENA or the Polytechnique. At the end of the training, students join the SCS corps and can apply to specific SCS positions. However, there is no specific legal definition of “hauts fonctionnaires”, which makes it difficult to clearly set boundaries to who belongs to the group. One of the most common categories is “encadrement supérieur” which corresponds to senior managers. It includes both the staff who hold senior management positions and those who belong to the SCS after graduating from a public service school (see box below).

**Box 4. The French Senior Civil Service (Encadrement supérieur et direction, ESD)**

The French civil service is organized into 3 status (central, territorial and hospital administration) and 3 hierarchical levels in each status (A, B and C). The SCS is often considered as the sub-category A+. This category is commonly used to distinguish the higher leadership positions from the corps within category A, but it is not recognised by law. Category A+ covers a large variety of missions including management (such as Heads, Deputy directors,…).) but also thematic expertise and inspection. In 2015 there were about 23 000 A+ civil servants in France, which represent senior and top managers. The French SCS also includes people directly appointed by the Government, who may or may not be civil servants (although the large majority are civil servants).

SCS in this case study include A+ civil servants in Central Administration (such as ENA’s alumni, state architects or police superintendents), and individuals in positions of responsibility (“emplois fonctionnels”) which in Central Administration usually correspond to people working directly with people appointed by the government.


The heterogeneity of the SCS group, namely in terms of age, is an additional challenge to prepare leaders for a digital era, but France is gradually integrating digital and future-oriented approaches into the recruitment and training of SCS. Innovative initiatives also emerge within public organisations to improve or update leaders’ digital skills, such as digital reverse mentoring in the French Ministries of Economy and Finance (see box below).

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17 If we consider all the A+ civil servants (defined by the level of classification of their corps), there were about 122 140 A+ civil servants in 2015
Recruiting for digital transformation

Selecting candidates into the civil service

Hiring digitally prepared SCS is challenging in many OECD countries and France is not an exception. In contrast with an increasingly fast and disruptive digitalisation, France’s recruitment processes for SCS are particularly lengthy. They can take over a year and are amongst the longest in OECD countries, who in the vast majority recruit senior managers in less than 6 months (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Length of recruitment processes for senior managers in OECD countries

31 OECD countries, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-6 months</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12 months</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over a year</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data not available for Germany, Japan, The Netherlands, New Zealand and Norway
Source: SHRM survey

Box 5. Digital Reverse mentoring in the Ministry of Economy and Finance

Digital Mentors is a form of digital reverse mentoring developed by the mission “Innovation” for the French Ministries of Economy and Finance. This form of mentoring allows the public managers who are in charge of digital transformation in these Ministries to identify digital solutions in a simple and faster way. The first step to developing a digital solution is to work with digitally native internal coaches, who present managers different digital concepts (cloud, big data,…) that can provide a solution for specific challenges.

Preparedness to lead the digital transformation has proven to be challenging to integrate in merit-based yet lengthy competitions. In ENA for example, selection procedures are defined by decree or legislation, and the content of assessments designed by expert working groups. Current ENA’s entrance examination assesses candidates’ knowledge of public law, economics and contemporary issues, social policy and public finance. A short-list of successful candidates undergoes additional tests, which include two oral examinations about the European Union and international issues, a panel interview, an interactive group assessment and an assessment in a foreign language. In 2017, there were 1370 applications for 80 places.

Although the impact of disruptive technologies is not fully assessed in the traditional selection processes of SCS, ENA is piloting an innovative modality that opens up SCS positions to people with scientific background. Under this modality, six positions will be open for PhD holders in 2019 and 2020. The 2019 competition will focus on science and engineering, for example use of data and evidence for decision making, and communication and information technology (digital communication, cybersecurity, etc). Admission to the Polytechnique School traditionally selects students with a scientific background, including informatics, mathematics, and statistics.

In parallel, preparedness for digital transformation is slowly making its way into the initial training for the most recent cohorts of future SCS. ENA’s initial training curriculum has started to focus on gradually building a new mind-set to prepare for the future of administration through the Public Innovation Chair (Chaire Innovation Publique, CIP). This Chair, of which ENA is one of the founding members, is one of the first crosscutting attempts to think collectively about the future of working in the public sector. Launched in 2017, the Chair emerged from discussions between people who had been working on new approaches to public policy design, namely through the SGMAP. Co-hosted by ENA and the industrial design school ENSCI, the CIP brings the world of design and administration together to rethink and redesign the future of public administration (see box below).

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**Box 6. Public Innovation Chair (CIP): a new approach to public policies**

The CIP aims to be a new space to co-create the 21st century administration through a multidisciplinary and iterative approach to policy making and public service delivery. CIP looks at how public sector innovation (often based on concepts from design, behavioural economics or digital transformation) challenges the traditional ways of working and affect the way people and resources are managed, and how decisions are made. This means looking at the impact of digital transformation (including digital governance or use of data); user-centered design (starting from the experience of users, civil servants and citizens); and new ways of working (including labs, open innovation, agile innovation, start-up mode).

The Public Innovation Chair works to mainstream innovation, including amongst public sector leaders. By helping senior civil servants understand new ways of working in government, they contribute to government innovation and are better placed to incentivise

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18 French Superior School for Industrial Design, Ecole nationale supérieure de création industrielle
innovation in the organisations they lead. In this context, the Public Innovation Chair aims to:

- Experiment by supporting innovative field projects
- Advance research and analysis, to understand how public administration is changing at national and territorial level
- Monitor progress and share knowledge on innovation
- Learn innovation through initial or continuous training

CIP’s learn-by-doing methodology includes field experimentation, behavioural approaches, design and research. Results of field experimentation are often transformed into case studies and inform the Chair’s research activities.

Source: ENA/ENSCI (2017), Presentation of the Public Innovation Chair

Digital technology is one of CIP’s approach to prepare the future of work in the public sector. While the inclusion of digital transformation in ENA’s SCS initial training programme is an important milestone, it is not a graded discipline. In practice, this means that students have some awareness of digital transformation but tend to concentrate on the graded disciplines instead (in ENA, the students with better final grades can choose first amongst the available SCS positions).

The CIP is not a traditional academic Chair and neither ENA nor ENSCI have a permanent body of professors. While this characteristic means that CIP’s leadership may not be clear in the public sector landscape, it also creates space for more flexibility and scaling up. Other public or private institutions, traditionally involved in the training of civil servants and SCS, have demonstrated interest in joining efforts towards a shared vision to re-think the future of public service through innovation.

**Hiring for specific leadership positions**

The gradual introduction of digital transformation into the initial recruitment and training of SCS is strategic in the long term. In the short term, most positions available were designed for pre-digital mind-sets. SCS recruited 30, 15 or 5 years ago don’t necessarily have the same experience with technology, or even the same approach to learning, as the SCS being recruited today. The diversity of SCS profiles means that they have uneven levels of perception about the impact of digital transformation in the future of work in the civil service and in their own work.

In this context, integrating digital transformation into the work of SCS has been a gradual process starting with jobs profiles. The 2017 edition of the French RIME19, a list of professions in the public administration, included for the first time new categories

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19 RIME: Répertoire Interministériel des Métiers de l’Etat. This document maps the diversity of professions in the French administration, and illustrates how the State is constantly adapting to better respond to the evolutions of society and citizens’ expectations (Ministère de la fonction publique 2017).
for digital professions while acknowledging the “digital transformation of the State” as a medium-term trend shaping the work of public leaders.  

**Continuous training**

Public institutions are investing in training programmes to improve future leaders’ digital awareness and capabilities. These trainings are usually open to SCS and civil servants, at central or territorial level. In some cases, they are open to managers from the private sector, or commissioned directly by client organisations. Besides the initiatives below, some Ministries develop their own training programmes.

- ENA’s Performance Agreement 2017-2019 (COP) highlights that to transform the public service, senior civil servants need to be better prepared for the challenges of digitalisation. Around 20% of ENA’s 2019 training courses specifically aim to prepare managers for the digital transformation and public sector innovation (including behavioural approaches, design thinking).
- The French IGPDE, the public management institute under the Ministry of Economy, delivers training on digital transformation to help civil servants understand the impact of digitalisation and artificial intelligence on the public administration and on the economy as a whole.
- The 2016-2021 strategy of the French Center for the Public Administration in the Regions (CNFPT) aims to strengthen the digital dimension of its overall training offer. The first focus is on how digitalisation can contribute to a more efficient service delivery, and the second is about preparing for digitally-driven change across the public sector at local level. Digitalisation of training methods is also helping to reduce regional inequalities in access to training.

Discussions with senior officials suggest that group training appears to have limited effect in improving ownership of digitalisation, especially amongst the highest levels of senior leaders. When training programmes are voluntary, in practice few SCS self-select to attend; as such the main target group usually comprises middle managers. High-level events usually have more SCS attendance, but by definition, they are usually short and with reduced impact in the digitalisation of organisations. Possibly more than the lack of time of public leaders, the heterogeneity of the SCS group contributes to explain why it is difficult to target them. The SCS group includes pre and post-digital generations; SCS have

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20 Positions of « Cadre dirigeant de ministère »
22 Seventy two training courses, list available here: https://www.ena.fr/Formation-continue/Offre-formation-continue-2019, assessed 14 March 2019
23 IGPDE : Institut de la gestion publique et du développement économique
24 CNFPT : Centre National de la Fonction Publique Territoriale
different constraints, profiles, skills and mind-sets that affect their openness and capability to lead the digital transformation.

While different modalities of training remain relevant to prepare SCS for digital transformation, France’s Digital Directorate (DINSIC) is exploring targeted approaches to the highest levels of SCS. Based on an internal benchmarking study, the DINSIC is preparing to test a coaching programme where the SCS would be supported by a team including a professional coach and a digital expert.

Other OECD countries are also investing in building the skills needed to support the digital transformation within governments. The United Kingdom’s GDS Academy is open to civil servants, local government employees, devolved administrations and other public servants. Initially set up to grow in-house digital capability and upskill civil servants at the Department for Work and Pensions, in 5 years it expanded to multiple permanent locations and pop-up academies. Canada’s Digital Academy was launched in 2018 with the purpose of “placing the public service at the forefront of the digital age and to making its services more secure, faster and easier for all users.” The academy is hosted at the Canada School of Public Service, and its curriculum will support all levels of public servants, including Senior Civil Servants (see box below).

Box 7. Building leaders’ skills for digital transformation

UK’s Hands on agile for leaders

The GDS Academy course “Hands on agile for leaders” was amongst the first to be developed in 2015. This three-day course is about leading across multiple self-organising, cross-functional teams within a service or programme for senior leaders. It is targeted at senior public service leaders who need to understand how a digital service is designed, delivered and operated, so that they can realise the benefits of digital for citizens, their department and wider government.

Training modules include not only issues like digital capability and governing digital service, but also prepare leaders to new ways of working, building teams or engagement with stakeholders. Participants (senior civil servants Grade 7 or above) have to be sponsored by their organisation, which also needs to have a training agreement with the GDS Academy.

Canada’s Digital Executive Leadership Program

The Digital Executive Leadership Program, launched by the Canadian Institute on Governance (IOG), is part of the Government of Canada's Digital Academy initiative. The 5-day course aims to provide public sector executives at all levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal) with the digital literacy and leadership skills they need to be effective decision-makers in the rapidly changing policy and service delivery landscape.

25 https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2019/02/20/gds-academy-turns-5-and-celebrates-training-10000-students/

The focus for the program is centered on three core areas and how they are changing the landscape for governance, service delivery, and policy development in the public sector: Design Thinking, Digital Technologies, and Data. The course provides participants with a basic grounding in key concepts from each of these three disciplines, and a practical understanding of how they can be applied to the business of government. In addition, the program also provides participants with an understanding of the big strategic drivers of the digital era, and considerations for building and managing modern, digitally savvy teams in the public sector.


Looking at the examples in France, Canada or the UK, leadership for digital transformation skillsets tend to go beyond digitalisation and include behavioural approaches, design thinking, agility, recruitment, and capacity to re-think traditional processes and service delivery models. Digitalisation often appears as a key enabler of innovative processes, such as those aiming to better use data and better interact with citizens. The data revolution implies an increase in the demand for more data scientists in government, but also that civil servants and SCS are increasingly data literate. For citizens to benefit from the use of data by administration, civil servants and SCS need to be able to appreciate the value and importance of data and be able to work with data experts, in order to use data and analysis since the first stages of policymaking (OECD 2017b).

Challenges and areas for consideration

There is a growing recognition that SCS capability is essential to support the digital transformation agenda. Yet, identifying and developing what are the skills to lead the digital transformation in government, economy and society is still relatively complex and challenging.

- SCS preparedness for digital transformation is heterogeneous and generational gaps are particularly significant in this field. Looking forward, as countries invest in raising citizens’ digital skills, this should also improve preparedness of future generations of SCS.
- Technology changes fast, and so does its implications for the public sector and beyond. With digitalisation the meaning of public value and the strategy for public transformation evolve, and so do the skills needed to steer the digital transformation.

The digitalisation of processes and services still requires a high degree of technical expertise. At the same time, France and governments worldwide are gradually focusing on the on building a new mindset, where leaders stimulate new and better ways of working with and for citizens, in order to create public value.

Overall, there are several on-going initiatives in France to strengthen SCS capabilities to lead the digital transformation in France. These include innovative approaches to the recruitment and initial training of the pool of SCS in the ENA, and some specific digital
transformation training by ENA, IGPDE or CNFPT. Other institutions such as the DITP, DINSIC or DGAFP have been developing special initiatives to ensure the sustainability of preparedness for digital transformation, which are aligned with the strategy Action Publique 2022, namely the pillars on digital transformation and human resources management transformation.

Looking forward, it seems necessary to increase the visibility and attractiveness of capacity building for digital transformation to SCS in post. This could include:

- increasing the visibility of the existing training programmes, for example by mapping all the initiatives and making the information easily accessible; or certifying certain skills sets.
- build a shared narrative on how these trainings aim to develop key competencies for the future of work in the public sector and for delivering public value to citizens;
- pursue research on the impact of digital transformation for SCS positons, in a similar way to what has been done for nurses, security officers, welcome officers, teachers and administrative staff (DITP 2018b);
- pursue and share innovative approaches such as the coaching of SCS experiment to be implemented by DINSIC, or the reverse mentoring in the Ministries of Economy and Finance;
- pursue efforts to implement new skills and working methods in the workplace. Generally, SCS do not have support after attending training. Working on specific challenges or setting up follow-up mechanisms could help sustain digital transformation in practice and in the long term;
- continue developing institutional partnerships and different modalities of collaboration between public, private and civil society organisations.
References


