



Mission-driven government:
5 critical success factors



DELOITTE HAS A LONG-STANDING COMMITMENT TO DEVELOPING DELIVERY CAPABILITY ACROSS GOVERNMENT.

We have worked with delivery and implementation units in most departments to help establish and embed good delivery practice through our Enabling Delivery Programme.

The new government's mission-driven approach provides an opportunity to focus on how government works together, and with its external partners, to deliver for citizens.

The government has taken some early decisions about how missions are governed, including appointing Senior Responsible Owners (SROs), setting up ministerial mission boards, and establishing a central Mission Delivery Unit building on the previous No10 Delivery Unit. Further critical decisions are starting to be taken about how to define the missions and the specific objectives that sit beneath them. Significant thinking has been done already, including by those outside government such as the Future Governance Forum and UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, Nesta and the think tank Reform.

Our contribution to this discussion 'zooms-in' on five critical success factors which we believe every mission team needs to focus on, based on our experience of working with a range of government and public sector organisations to drive effective delivery in the UK and around the world. Our contribution is aimed at mission teams in government although we hope it will be useful to all those with an interest in contributing to one or more of the missions.

Deloitte will be convening our people, clients and stakeholders to explore these topics further. We would welcome feedback and hearing from anyone with an interest in mission-driven government and improving public sector delivery.

MISSION-DRIVEN GOVERNMENT: 5 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Focus on...

1 First, construct genuinely multidisciplinary mission teams with the right accountabilities and incentives – reflect the mission intent and not existing departmental remits

2 In parallel, activate stakeholders across the delivery pathway – ensure the mission team has the right levers to engage widely

because there is a real risk that...

- The lead department becomes overly dominant.
- Professions and functions with value to contribute (e.g. DDAT, Commercial) are not included.
- Structures are in place that bring the right top-level players around the table but incentives and mindsets stay the same.
- The mission exists primarily at the central government level. The opportunity to catalyse innovation and investment from across the wider public sector, private sector and civil society is missed.
- Stakeholders required to deliver are not brought in early enough.
- Only large organisations with the capacity and know-how to engage with government are catalysed.

This is crucial because

- At the outset, creating the ‘first draft’ delivery pathway needs the widest possible engagement to test and refine assumptions.
- Stakeholders with value to contribute may be put off from doing so if they perceive a mission to be defined narrowly.
- It is hard to “square the circle” – Secretaries of State and SROs have accountabilities to their department alongside the mission.
- Missions are grand national challenges that go far beyond the control of those working in central government and require the widest possible thinking.
- All organisations face competing priorities. Deciding to contribute to a mission requires stability, resource prioritisation and a compelling rationale to get involved.
- The delivery system for each mission is complex and evolving (e.g. impact of devolution). Developing the most effective delivery pathway means activating the relevant public, private and third sector partners.

Three headline actions and practical suggestions for mission teams and the centre to help get this right

- 1. “Hardwire” multidisciplinary working into mission team structures and ways of working** – suggestions: make this an objective that SROs are assessed on, adopt a “checklist” mentality to ensure coverage of all relevant functions/ professions in the team, use matrix models to enable individuals to join mission teams without moving department, use civil service hubs and hybrid working to access the best talent in different locations.

2. Incentivise team members to act in the interests of the mission – suggestions: recognise individuals will have concerns about being penalised for “doing the right thing” or credit not being shared, so create objectives and development pathways for team members to work in new ways (e.g. external collaboration is a key performance indicator in NASA’s annual evaluation process), ensure the mission team can provide unfettered advice to the lead Secretary of State and mission board, use limited bonuses and other tools (awards, written feedback to line managers, etc) to recognise and reward the right behaviours.

3. Invest in developing the culture and capability of the whole central government mission community – suggestions: host regular mission “summits” that bring together all ministers and officials to instil a spirit of community, create “action learning sets” for individuals across different mission teams to problem-solve common challenges, pair new team members with experienced “buddies”, create a formal development offer for new team members and leaders drawing on the earlier No10 Delivery Unit offer and Deloitte Enabling Delivery Programme.
- 1. Be honest as a mission team about how well you really understand the system – don’t rely on existing knowledge and relationships** – suggestions: conduct facilitated listening exercises to help the team gain a “warts and all” understanding of the system, adopt an account management approach to assign clear ownership for specific relationships, leverage existing networks (regional hubs, Cities and Local Growth Unit, DBT business networks, etc) and iterate the delivery pathway with input from all stakeholders accordingly.

2. Use the full range of tools at government’s disposal to incentivise private sector participation and investment – suggestions: explore blended finance, risk and reward sharing, outcomes-based procurement, conditions on public sector licences, R&D incentives, tax levers. Engage across government to access relevant tools (Government Commercial Function, Department for Business and Trade, UK Government Investments, etc).

3. Deploy a range of approaches to access the best innovation across the public, private and civil society sectors – suggestions: consider “challenge prizes”, sandboxes, digital twins – and engage across government to learn from approaches elsewhere ([Financial Conduct Authority’s regulatory sandbox](#), [Department for Business and Trade’s National Digital Twin Programme](#), etc).

MISSION-DRIVEN GOVERNMENT: 5 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Focus on...

3 Next, make sure the mission has a truly cross-cutting, long-term, flexible funding settlement – avoid traditional funding paradigms

4 Create and sustain a culture of psychological safety and collective ownership in the mission team and across the delivery system – the ability to “speak truth to power” is vital

because there is a real risk that...

- The timing of the spending review means budgets for the next few years are allocated before the mission has been defined fully.
- Funding stays with individual departments which makes joint working harder.
- Funding is short term and inflexible which makes it difficult to plan and deliver over the long-term.
- Key players “defend their territory” and fail to adopt a “one team” mindset.
- Those inside and outside government with something to add are put off from doing so for fear of “getting it wrong”.
- There is a disconnect between leadership ambition and ways of working on the ground.

This is crucial because

- Traditionally it has been very difficult to allocate funding to shared priorities across departments. Existing examples (e.g. the Shared Outcomes Fund, Single Settlements) are of a very different scale to missions.
- Successful delivery of missions will involve iteration, experimentation, explicit risk-taking and over-programming - all of which challenge the business-as-usual spending approval process.
- Accountability arrangements generally flow through Permanent Secretaries as Accounting Officers.
- Mission-driven ways of working challenge both the prevailing culture of government and lines of accountability.
- Research shows time and again (e.g. Google) that psychologically safe teams, demonstrating collective ownership, accelerate innovation and attain high performance.
- Tone and behaviours are set from the top. The lead Secretary of State, SRO and mission leadership need to “walk the talk” with their teams and “have their backs” when new ways of working come under challenge.

Three headline actions and practical suggestions for mission teams and the centre to help get this right

- 1.Ensure mission settlements give each SRO maximum flexibility to deliver – suggestions: include flexibilities to move funding between years, programmes and RDEL/CDEL, allow over-programming, consider single portfolio business cases, provide greater long-term certainty (e.g. drawing on the example of 5-year CDEL settlements). Learn from existing examples (Advanced Research and Innovation Agency, Single Settlements, etc).

2.Build in safeguards to ensure mission settlements are spent against cross-cutting mission priorities and not on individual departmental pressures – suggestions: use budget cover transfers, ringfences and delegations to make each SRO accountable for the whole mission settlement, create minimum expected terms for SROs and a strong focus on succession planning and handover to provide continuity, consider making SROs personally accountable to Parliament (as major programme SROs are).

3.Adapt ways of working at the centre accordingly – suggestions: create informal mission teams at the centre that bring together all relevant HM Treasury spending team leads, the Mission Delivery Unit lead, No10 Policy Unit etc – don’t put all the emphasis on the lead spending team to bring in the right players, use “star chamber” political negotiations (e.g. utilising the “quad”) rather than the standard HM Treasury / spending department bilateral process, ensure HM Treasury and the Mission Delivery Unit can provide a joined-up view to mission teams on funding and performance.
- 1.Develop a set of tools to help embed and maintain psychologically safe behaviours and ways of working in mission teams – suggestions: hold 1-2-1s between all new team members and SROs to discuss and emphasise the importance of psychological safety, start all team meetings by reinforcing that “all ideas are welcome”, actively encourage experimentation, explain at the outset that the initial delivery pathway will be iterated over time and create simple mechanism for periodically refreshing.

2.Radically rethink how government communicates with stakeholders in its role as system leader – suggestions: frame each mission as a “learning problem” rather than an “execution problem”, be equally clear to stakeholders as with team members that no one holds all the answers and invite new ideas/challenge, role model good behaviours in stakeholder engagement, use interactive/online engagement tools that allow all participants to openly share ideas and contribute feedback on the ideas of others.

3.Invest as mission teams in exploring the motivations and behavioural preferences of each team member and what this means for ways of working – suggestions: draw on tools such as Deloitte Business Chemistry as part of team mobilisation, codify a set of team principles, revisit principles regularly and update together as a team.

MISSION-DRIVEN GOVERNMENT: 5 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Focus on...

5 Finally, use data and insight to understand performance – agree the smallest basket of outcome metrics possible

because there is a real risk that...

- The large number of stakeholders argue for an unmanageable basket of targets – “losing the wood for the trees”.
- Data and insight are not used to test assumptions and reset delivery pathways when original assumptions are proven wrong.
- Data is used solely to provide assurance to the centre instead of improving understanding and alignment across the system and wider public.

This is crucial because

- Mission teams need to know if delivery is on track – the flip side of taking risks is being able to “learn fast” and if necessary “fail fast”.
- Being able to demonstrate interim progress and short-term “wins” is important to maintain momentum and political support.
- Open access to data and insight can help the wider system and society engage in each mission, align disparate stakeholders and support accountability.

Three headline actions and practical suggestions for mission teams and the centre to help get this right

- 1. Keep the number of metrics to a minimum – 3-5 headline outcomes per mission – but ensure these provide a rounded picture of performance** – suggestions: explore different types of performance metrics (citizen sentiment etc), balance static historical metrics with predictive indicators or forecasts associated with metrics, consider including some output/input metrics to help show interim progress alongside outcome metrics, draw on widely available data across the system building on examples such as the [Ministry of Justice’s BOLD programme](#).
- 2. Invest in how data and insight are used to support decision-making** – suggestions: understand how decision-makers interpret information and tailor products utilising the DDAT profession’s interaction design expertise, accompany data with pithy commentary from the SRO / owner of each outcome to drive accountability and focus minds, ensure data leads work hand-in-glove with mission boards and other governance forums to make sure data drives action/decisions.
- 3. Make data openly available to the whole system and wider public** – suggestions: draw on examples such as the [UK Health Security Agency data dashboard](#) and earlier COVID-19 dashboard, and [the New Zealand government’s quarterly reports against its nine targets](#).

GET IN TOUCH

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Designed and produced by 368 at Deloitte. J40421