

4 Reinforcing public sector coherence through an open and connected government

Chapter 4 discusses public sector coherence and capability for an open and connected government in Thailand. It looks at the use of the funding allocation and information and communication technology (ICT)/digital commissioning models as policy levers for digital government coherence and provides an overview and assessment of Thailand's efforts to build a digital and "open by default" public sector.

Introduction

Building open and connected governments that are capable of delivering value to their citizens is not an easy task. Whereas high-level political commitment to the digital and open government agendas and clear policy goals are fundamental for good governance (see Chapter 2), successful policy implementation requires strong policy levers to secure coherent practices and the alignment of digital and open government initiatives to central policy guidelines and standards.

Among those policy levers, regulation (presented in Chapter 3) sets the institutional responsibilities and accountability mechanisms to help governments track policy developments and monitor outcomes *vis-à-vis* the expected goals described in digital and open government agendas. However, steering policy in practice also calls for using other policy levers at hand such as the budget allocation process so that compliance with digital and open standards and guidelines is secured whenever needed.

In addition, the deployment of public policies and services that deliver value for citizens and businesses require equipping the public sector with the right skills, talent and culture so that public bodies can tap on these capabilities to meet citizens' needs and expectations. This implies taking a coherent approach towards a coherent public sector workforce: from developing common job descriptions, promoting talent mobility and scanning the current available skills and capacities to informing public employment strategies and tapping on external talent as means to build a collaborative, open and connected government. As such, skills and institutional capacity are core elements of the OECD *Recommendation of the Council on Digital Government Strategies* (2014^[1]) and *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government* (2017^[2]) (Box 4.1).

In terms of digital government, building the right digital talent within the public sector is cross-cutting to all six dimensions of the OECD Digital Government Policy Framework (Figure 4.1). As such, building digital capacity “requires a strong commitment to improving the skillset of public officers, attracting and maintaining IT professionals in the public sector, and upskilling and spreading a digital mindset throughout the public sector workforce” (OECD, 2020^[3]).

Box 4.1. Relevant provisions in OECD recommendations

Provision 10 of the OECD *Recommendation of the Council on Digital Government Strategies*

“Reinforce institutional capacities to manage and monitor projects' implementation, by:

- i) adopting structured approaches systematically, also for the management of risks, that include an increase in the amount of evidence and data captured in the course of project implementation and provision of incentives to augment data use to monitor projects performance;*
- ii) ensuring the availability at any time of a comprehensive picture of ongoing digital initiatives to avoid duplication of systems and datasets;*
- iii) establishing evaluation and measurement frameworks for projects' performance at all levels of government, and adopting and uniformly applying standards, guidelines, codes for procurement and compliance with interoperability frameworks, for regular reporting and conditional release of funding;*
- iv) reinforcing their public sector's digital and project management skills, mobilising collaborations and/or partnerships with private and non-governmental sector actors as necessary.”*

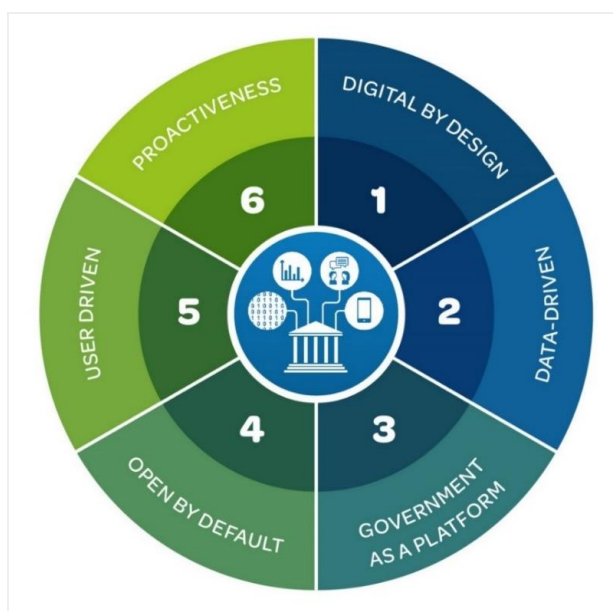
Provision 3 of the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government

“(i) Providing public officials with the mandate to design and implement successful open government strategies and initiatives, as well as the adequate human, financial and technical resources, while promoting a supportive organisational culture;

(ii) Promoting open government literacy in the administration, at all levels of government, and among stakeholders.”

Source: OECD (2014^[1]), *Recommendation of the Council on Digital Government Strategies*, <http://www.oecd.org/gov/digital-government/Recommendation-digital-government-strategies.pdf>; OECD (2017^[2]), *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government*, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/Recommendation-Open-Government-Approved-Council-141217.pdf> (accessed on 30 August 2019).

Figure 4.1. The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework



Source: OECD (2020^[3]), “The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework: Six dimensions of a Digital Government”, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f64fed2a-en>.

Funding to leverage inclusion, equality and better services

Together with legal and regulatory instruments (discussed in Chapter 3), funding is a strong policy lever that can help to steer improved policy implementation. In Thailand, the Bureau of the Budget (BB) plans and allocates government expenditure to secure that line ministries, such as the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES), count with the needed financial resources to implement the 20-Year Digital Economy and Society Development Plan (2017-2036) or Digital Thailand. The BB also has a strong political lever given its location at the Office of the Prime Minister (PMO) and the fact that the deputy prime minister chairs it.

It is noteworthy that pursuant to Section 77 of the 2017 Constitution, the BB organises a public consultation on the Draft Annual Budget Expenditure Bill that allows stakeholders to provide comments online as well as in person during public meetings. The results of the public consultation are then reported to the cabinet and the legislative power together with the draft bill. Such a public consultation of the budget can not only

help to ensure that the allocated funds reflect citizens' spending priorities but can also positively impact accountability. Moreover, through participation, stakeholders can gain a better understanding of and can become more actively involved in public policy making. The OECD *Recommendation of the Council on Budgetary Governance* explicitly calls on governments to “ensure that budget documents and data are open, transparent and accessible” and to “provide for an inclusive, participative and realistic debate on budgetary choices” (OECD, 2015^[4]).

Proposed projects are also assessed drawing upon their contribution to an integrated budget plan prepared by the BB, which covers: i) connectivity and Internet access; ii) digital government; iii) data sharing within the public sector; and iv) public officials' digital skills. Yet, the integrated budget plan does not contemplate any specific policy elements relevant for open government, inclusion and diversity (e.g. such as open, gender-based and participatory budgeting practices). This approach could help in advancing open and inclusive governance practices in Thailand while promoting greater policy coherence across different policy areas that might not be taken into consideration in the traditional sense when developing government budget plans, including those on digitalisation (Box 4.2).

Box 4.2. Canada and the city of Paris: Gender-based and participatory budgeting

Canada

In Canada, initiatives such as the Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) have helped in applying a gender equality approach in the development of government policies and programmes. The GBA+ framework has been applied to budget plan and allocation practices in Canada since 2018.

In 2019, Canada's government budget plans included the “collection and development of better gender and diversity data with an aim to improve the improve capacity to better measure, monitor and address gender disparity [...]” and “ensuring that skills development programs are forward looking [...] to meet challenges head on through the Future Skills Initiative [...]” (Government of Canada, 2019^[5]).

Such an approach would help to reverse or prevent the increase of the digital gender gap in Thailand (including within the public sector) and to ensure that women and less represented groups are well equipped to play a key role and benefit from the digitalisation of the economy and society.

City of Paris

The city of Paris conducts participatory budgeting by ring-fencing a specific part of its budget for citizen-initiated projects through a participatory process. Called “Le Budget participatif”, it offers Parisians a fair and equal opportunity to decide on the use of 5% of the investment budget between 2014 and 2020 that makes up EUR 0.5 billion. The proposed projects will be evaluated on the feasibility of their proposal and then they will be voted on by Parisians. As of 1 July 2020, 2 375 projects have been successfully realised. They cover over 12 themes: living environment; culture and heritage; economy, employment and attractiveness; education and youth; environment; prevention and safety; cleanliness; health; solidarity and social cohesion; sport; transport and mobility; and a smart and digital city. Every project is listed on an open platform detailing the amount of funding, the number of votes, the progress of the project and its outcomes.

Such an approach could help the departments, provinces and cities engage with citizens and civil society organisations, tap onto their creativity and resourcefulness and enable greater openness and connectivity in designing better products and services to deliver greater value to them.

Source: City of Paris (2020^[6]), *Paris Budget Participatif*, <https://budgetparticipatif.paris.fr/bp/>; Government of Canada (2019^[5]), *Budget 2019: Gender Equality Statement*, <https://www.budget.gc.ca/2019/docs/plan/chap-05-en.html> (accessed on 10 April 2020).

Also, adequate funding is crucial for efficient and sustainable implementation of open government reforms and for supporting open government priorities. Beyond the total amounts spent to support open government initiatives, countries must ensure that funding sources are as clear and consistent as possible, appropriate recipients are identified to support the government's open government reform goals and that funds are spent on both implementation and co-ordination (OECD, 2016^[7]). In that regard, earmarking funds for open government in the integrated budget plan could help to advance the open government agenda in Thailand.

Funds designated for open government initiatives are allocated in different ways across OECD countries. While the allocation of funds from a combination of sources is most common, in some countries such as Jordan, Korea and the Slovak Republic, all or most open government initiatives are funded by a single central institution. However, a large majority of countries (89% of all countries surveyed for OECD (2016^[7])) have set up a system where the different institutions responsible for implementing initiatives are in charge of allocating funds. In some cases, external stakeholders, such as the private sector or international organisations, may also play a role. Allocating funds from a combination of sources is most common, though in 48% of countries, funds are allocated by a single source (OECD, 2016^[7]). A large majority of countries (89% of OECD countries) allocate funds at least in part by the institutions responsible for implementing open government initiatives (OECD, 2016^[7]).

In Thailand, open government initiatives are funded through a mixed system. The Office of the Public Sector Development Commission (OPDC) that is in charge of the open government agenda centrally co-ordinates funding of initiatives across public sector institutions, while ministries and agencies also fund their own policies and initiatives themselves. The allocation of funds through a central institution such as the OPDC may facilitate coherence and consistency of reforms and can help to ensure that all initiatives follow a national open government strategy. Endowing the institutions responsible for implementation with their own funds can, however, also reduce overdependence on a single actor and may help to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the allocation of funds.

Commissioning of digital government projects: A focus on user value

ICT/digital project planning and approval

In Thailand, evidence collected during the OECD peer review mission to Bangkok and the survey (OECD, 2019^[8]) administered for the purpose of this review point to two different processes for ICT/digital project planning and approval, running in parallel rather than in a structured way underpinning their synergies.

On the one hand, the MDES manages the Digital Economy and Society Development Fund, which is resourced with financial resources from the Thai central government and the Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission with a threshold of THB 5 000 million per year. Public sector organisations can apply for funding with a budget threshold of THB 100 million (USD 3 million) without the need for ministerial approval. However, projects above that threshold require approval from the Government Computer Procurement Committee within the MDES, of which the Digital Government Development Agency (DGA) is a member. For those projects over THB 1 000 million (USD 30 million), approval takes place at the cabinet level. This process is in line with the provisions of the Government Procurement and Supplies Management Act, B.E. 2560 (2017). MDES funding for public sector organisations is highly devoted to ICT/digital infrastructure projects.

Other funding mechanisms include that of the Ministry of Telecommunications' National Innovation Agency (NIA), which manages the National Innovation Fund (NIF). The NIF aims at promoting social and business innovation in Thailand; thus, its focus is to a lesser extent on ICT/digital projects within the public sector. Through the NIF, the NIA provides funding for business and social innovation from THB 500 000 to THB 1 million (roughly USD 15 000 to USD 30 000).

On the other hand, the second process is directly related to the BB budget allocation process for digital government projects discussed in the previous section. This process has not been fully capitalised on by the Thai government due to the lack of a more solid governance structure for ICT/digital project management and approval. For instance, similarly to the MDES project funding process, the DGA, which, as the BB also comes under the PMO, is not actively involved in the BB financial process. This limits the DGA's capacity to advise the BB in terms of which digitalisation projects would require (or not) priority budget allocation. But separately, in the fiscal year of 2019, the DGA set up the Annual Digital Government Integration Programme, with the official appointment of the programme committee signed off by the prime minister. The programme's concept focuses on the digital government transformation within three project spheres: i) to enhance the digital government capacity building and formulate digital data; ii) to focus on digital government platforms in potentially competitive sectors; and iii) to support the development of digital services in line with the Digital Government Development Plan. The Thai government allocated a budget of THB 1.903 billion for the 2021 fiscal year and THB 2.409 billion for 2022.

In this respect, the DGA plays a key role as primary secretariat in digital government budget allocation and monitoring processes of the project outputs and outcomes, along with the MDES as vice-chairperson, the Office of the National Digital Economy and Society Commission (ONDE) as co-secretariat and committee member, and the BB as a committee member of the programme. Together, the committee members: i) set the objectives and key performance indicators for participating public sector organisations; ii) co-ordinate on the programming planning, execution and budgeting; iii) oversee the initial allocation process; iv) ensure that plans and budget proposals are in line with the programme objectives and goals; and v) compile all plans and budget proposals for compliance with budgetary procedures.

In all these planning and approval processes of digital government projects, while the MDES, DGA and BB are involved in the budgetary process, the budget is only approved by the Parliamentary Budget Committee and the cabinet. As the primary secretariat of the programme, the DGA is required to know all the details related to the programme execution and proposals from participating public sector organisations as it defends the budget proposals in front of the Parliamentary Budget Committee.

Fundamentally, the Annual Digital Government Integration Programme and the Digital Economy and Society Development Fund do not overlap. The programme is specifically dedicated to advancing the digital government agenda while the fund has a broader scope that includes digital security, infrastructure, workforce and application in addition to digital government. More active participation of the DGA in the budgetary process at a higher level (namely, across the MDES and BB budget planning process where relevant) would help in building greater coherence among ICT/digital projects. For example, as suggested by peers during the OECD mission to Thailand, there are clear opportunities to tie the budget allocation for these projects with the precondition of meeting digital and data standards – if available.

The participation of the DGA could also help in reducing duplication of efforts among different project proposals so that synergies could be scaled up and resources better utilised. This could help in avoiding duplication and higher expenditure when procuring ICT/digital services and solutions. For instance, the Working Group of the Information and Communication Technology Centre within the Thai Ministry of Justice's Office of the Permanent Secretary conduct a redundant project analysis when analysing departments' ICT/digital project proposals. If duplications are found, owner agencies are recommended to integrate the different projects into a single proposal. These practices could be scaled up in relation to the DGA's involvement in the budgetary process.

In addition, the Digital Government Development Commission was set up in 2019 under the Digitalisation of Public Administration and Services Delivery Act, B.E. 2562 (2019), for the purposes of formulating the Digital Government Development Plans and monitoring government agencies' compliance with them to name but a few. Yet, it seems that the focus of this commission is more on recommending, formulating plans and tracking progress rather than on taking an active role during the approval process of digital projects. This is a missed opportunity as evidence from OECD countries has shown that advisory bodies

can play a key role in relation to allocating resources that were really needed. For instance, in the United States (US), a data council advises the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on budget priorities for data management and use in line with the objectives of the US Federal Data Strategy (OECD, 2019^[9]).

The advisory role of this commission could help in informing the DGA in terms of priority projects with a focus on value for citizens. This advice could then help the DGA in informing higher decision-making bodies such as the BB, and the MDES where appropriate, and embedding an outcome-oriented approach by design once projects are approved and enter the procurement stage (see next section). Yet, the focus on the public value of this body would depend on its membership, namely on the participation of actors from outside government. As discussed in Chapter 2, the objectives of the Digital Government Development Plans are ambitious but, in light of the reduced participation of the DGA in the budget process, there is great risk of fragmentation and duplication in the planning and implementation stage.

Thailand also lacks a common ICT/digital business case model to standardise the preparation and analysis of ICT/digital project proposals across public sector organisations. Evidence from the OECD mission to Bangkok indicates that these efforts are ad hoc and – if done – take place at the sectoral or ministerial level.

For instance, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) calculates business' benefits using both qualitative and quantitative factors, e.g. return on investment (ROI) resulting from more efficient SEC services and reduction of using papers. While in itself this is a good practice at the organisational level, the development of a common model would also help to ensure greater coherence among the different funding schemes available for public sector digitalisation projects (including MDES funding models) and also across the different initiatives taking place within specific sectors.

The importance of developing these project management instruments is highlighted in Principle 9 of the OECD *Recommendation of the Council on Digital Government Strategies* (2014^[11]). For this purpose, the OECD, in collaboration with delegates from the OECD Working Party of Senior Digital Government Officials has developed the OECD Business Case Playbook to provide hands-on guidance to public sector organisations to support the development of their business cases. The playbook highlights ten actions (called plays) which “describe the essential processes, components and actions of developing a business case to support investment in digital transformation and new ICT/digital capability” (UK GDS, 2018^[10]). These actions aim at scaling up the focus of business cases from mere technology-oriented tools to comprehensive instruments that help in assessing digital projects' feasibility with a multi-faceted approach (Box 4.3).

Box 4.3. Developing better business cases: The OECD Business Case Playbook

A business case is a formal framework used to explain the need to start an initiative. It gives decision makers a clear understanding of the problems to be solved, offers practical solutions and explains to decision makers the purpose, risks and intent of a proposed ICT/digital investment. All good business cases share common qualities: they are clear and easy to understand, succinct (privilege quality vs. quantity) and persuasive (they present a robust and compelling argument). Business cases focus on delivering measurable outcomes and consider realistic and feasible alternatives to assess options and make decisions on how to move forward.

In light of the above, the OECD Business Case Playbook's ten plays aim at helping public officials describe the value that the project proposal brings to the final users and its broader economic, social and policy benefits. These include:

- Establishing a team, engaging with sponsors and scoping the preliminary work to set the foundations for the business case preparation.
- Understanding the problem, engaging stakeholders early and often and exploring options to undertake discovery, define the problem in context and understand what change would look like for users and stakeholders.
- Defining options and selecting preferred solutions to develop and test practicable solutions to the problem.
- Drafting the business case to make a convincing argument and plan for change.
- Reviewing and refreshing to stay on track after the business case is approved.

Source: OECD/Australian Digital Transformation Agency (forthcoming^[11]), *Developing Better Business Cases: A Business Case Playbook*.

Examples from OECD countries in the use of common and coherent business cases include the Danish Business Case Model¹ and New Zealand's Business Case Options Framework.² Other examples include that of Argentina where the National Office of Information Technologies (ONTI) developed two standardised ICT/digital project models which public bodies use for submitting project proposals for funding. While these two models - known as Standardised/Complex Technical Requirements – vary in terms of complexity based on their focus, they seek to ensure projects' compliance with technology standards defined by the central government (including the use of open, cloud-based and shared solutions) (OECD, 2018^[12]).

Moreover, the absence of core elements for the design of digital services (e.g. digital standards) also opens the window for asymmetries in relation to the development of new digital services. Without guidance and standards, the quality of digital services across government can vary. Setting enforceable tools would be one way to create, share and use standardised technology and services across government (including for internal software and services for the civil service). This could become part of the budget process, where the budget would only be allocated if the relevant body complies with these standards.

In the United Kingdom (UK), the Government Digital Service found spend control levels extremely effective for digital transformation. Combining the budget allocation with a provision to adhere to digital standards and assurance could allow Thailand to have an effective method of ensuring quality digital services. As expressed by the UK peer during the OECD mission to Bangkok, the UK government has also found it very useful to be aware of the technology pipeline in departments (as part of the spend control process) so it is aware of the technology landscape and can make more useful recommendations and challenges.

Procurement: Openness by default as a precondition for trust

As expressed by public officials during the OECD mission to Bangkok, public procurement in Thailand – including that of digital products and services – can be improved in terms of efficiency and coherence.

Key players involved in public procurement include the Public Procurement Management Office (PPMO), which comes under the Comptroller-General's Department (CGD) within the Ministry of Finance (MoF). The procurement of digital products and services does not benefit from any specific arrangements; thus, it follows and adheres to the same regulations and guides developed mainly by the CGD (ADB/OECD, n.d.^[13]) and the MoF (including the 2017 Procurement Act and its secondary regulations).

While the 2017 Procurement Act is itself an achievement for the Thai government, as it aims at reducing corruption and paved the way for the use of integrity tools such as Integrity Pacts and greater external monitoring, the procurement of digital products and services could be better structured in the pursuit of more efficient and strategic government expenditure in this area.

Results from the survey (OECD, 2019^[8]) administered for the purpose of this review indicate that most procurement activity for digital products and services takes place in the form of open public tenders. Yet, the process does not take into consideration the implementation of framework agreements that could help in consolidating government expenditure and reduce the risk of multiple agencies procuring similar technology products at a higher cost.

For instance, in Mexico, the 2012-18 government administration set up the “Framework Agreement for Software Licencing (*Contrato Marco en Materia de Software*, CMMS) which led to agreements with 31 software providers,³ and had the value of making procurement simpler and more agile” (OECD, 2020^[14]) As its name implies, the purpose of the framework was to reduce burdensome processes in the procurement of software solutions for the public sector. While the change of administration in 2018 brought changes to digital governance in Mexico (including the cancellation of this tool due to the transfer of responsibilities among different public bodies), its implementation also helped in curating a pool of service providers that could provide solutions to the Mexican government under specific conditions and in respect of whole-of-government standards. The framework however had a strong focus on the participation of major technology players and ignored the inclusion of smaller service providers (e.g. Govtech community) which are often left aside due to their capacity to deal with cumbersome and highly restrictive procurement processes.

Also, there are great opportunities to further implement “open by default” and data-driven approaches across the ICT/digital procurement process. The CGD is an active player in this respect.

For instance, the CGD collects and uses data from different public sector organisations to assess procurement requests from different ministries. This data-driven approach helps in preventing, spotting and correcting corruption and flagging those cases that would require the intervention of the Thai National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC). The CG created a government spending website⁴ in collaboration with the DGA, where public bodies publish information and datasets on government expenditure and procurement. The platform allows users to visualise data and to geolocate government expenditure by level of government. The DGA also developed a data standard to make the site interoperable with other agency websites and provides the option of accessing data through application programming interfaces (APIs), once users register on the Thai central open data portal.⁵ These efforts are generally in line with other initiatives such as Thailand’s work on the implementation of the CoST Infrastructure Data Standard, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Yet, there are some challenges the Thai government faces at this stage. One is related to maintaining adequate funding so that initiatives like the government spending website and related data initiatives can continue. The Comptroller-General has encountered difficulties in making the case for the funding of open government initiatives at the BB level. This would also require securing top leadership support so that open and data-driven approaches in public procurement (including those of digital products and services) are the rule and not the exception.

Second, trust-based and collaborative instruments like the Integrity Pacts could integrate specific arrangements on the mandatory publication of procurement information as open data from both public bodies and private providers. This would follow the premise that those projects funded with public resources should comply with open, digital and data standards so that watchdogs from inside and outside government (including the Comptroller-General and Audit Offices) can monitor these practices drawing on the value of digital technologies.

Non-governmental organisations such as the Anti-Corruption Organization of Thailand (ACT) have been quite vocal on how digital technologies and data analytics can help non-governmental actors in the fight against corruption in the country.⁶ Yet, while the 2017 Procurement Act is clear in relation to the value of civil society monitoring the procurement process, this requires making information and data open, discoverable, available, interoperable and re-usable by default.

In line with the above, these efforts would also benefit from implementing a broader approach that comprises the publication of additional categories as open data (e.g. declarations of interest, beneficial ownership). By doing so, watchdogs could cross-match data linkages and obtain more insights at hand to prevent, identify and prosecute corruption based on their capacity to create relationships (e.g. public officials' interests or links with private companies) that otherwise would go unnoticed.

ICT/digital project management and monitoring

Thailand lacks a common ICT/digital project management approach, mechanism and tools and monitoring actions take place mostly at the ministerial or sectoral level. Bodies like the SEC and the National Science and Technology Development Agency report involving external actors such as project managers and other relevant stakeholders to conduct joint evaluations of digital projects. Yet, this is not a common practice.

Evidence collected during the OECD mission to Bangkok indicates that assessment or monitoring does not take place in an active, iterative and agile fashion beyond the audit process at the end of the year. This lengthy process increases the risks of over expenditure (particularly in large-scale digital projects like those of the MDES) and reduces the capacity of the government to deliver as expected, intervene earlier during the project implementation phase and take corrective measures (including the cancellation of projects) when needed. It is also not clear how bodies such as the OPDC, the DGA, the MDES and the NIA are taking proactive action to promote more innovative approaches in the management of digital projects.

The work on the application of agile methodologies such as DevOps in the US provides a valuable example in this regard. The 18F (an office within the US General Services Administration or GSA) “collaborates with other agencies to fix technical problems, build products, and improve how government serves the public through technology” (GSA, n.d.^[15]). Parts of 18F have focused on mainstreaming the use of Modular Contracting – an approach that helps public sector organisations in reducing the complexity and increasing the flexibility of digital projects by breaking down single projects into smaller-scale elements. By doing so, failure of one link of the procurement chain can be better addressed and fixed whenever needed. This model also aims at reducing vendor lock-in as suppliers work following specific standards with shared knowledge on how the system as a whole works. Another example is that of the UK, where the Service Manual provides guidance for public servants to apply an agile approach when designing and managing digital projects and services.⁷

Building talent and competencies for implementing the open and connected government agenda

Digital government

Thailand's central government recognises that greater public sector capability for the digital era requires building, upskilling and attracting the right talent to the public sector. The Office of the Civil Service Commission (OCSC), under the PMO, plays a key role in leading the way in this regard, so that the public sector workforce is skilled enough to face societal change, citizens' growing expectations and changing behaviours, including the demand for more user-friendly services and greater participation in government decision making. This leading role of the OCSC is fully acknowledged by public officials in Thailand, as expressed during the OECD mission to Bangkok (April 2019) and confirmed by the results of the survey that was administered for this review (OECD, 2019^[8]).

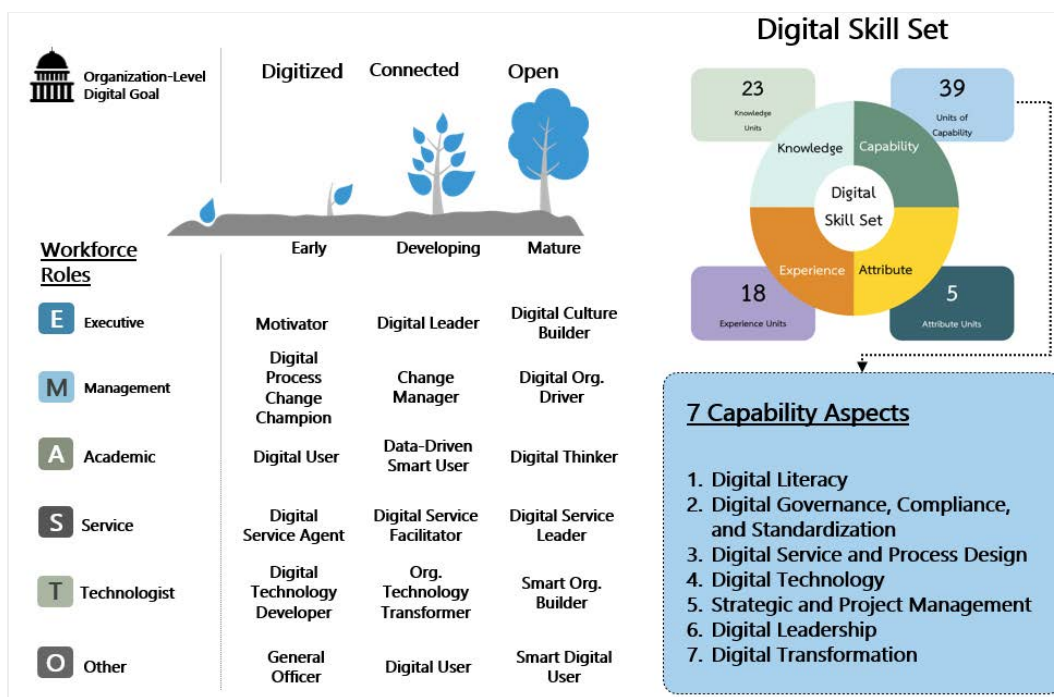
The OCSC's initiatives connect to the goals of the Digital Economy and Society Development Plan (or Digital Thailand) which, as discussed in Chapter 2, includes a specific strategy covering the development of a public sector workforce capable of coping with the challenges of the digital era. These efforts also respond to different government resolutions published since 2017. Among those, the 2017 Cabinet

Resolution on Digital Transformation and the Skill Development Framework for the Civil Service and Public Sector Human Resources have played a central role in how the OCSC has structured its approach for building greater digital capability within the public sector.

As a result of the 2017 resolution, the OCSC developed a Skill Development Framework for Digital Capability within the public sector. As shown in Figure 4.2, the framework covers different skill levels applied to specific public official roles (from executives to managers and technicians) as a measure to assess the digital maturity of the public sector workforce.

The framework was developed collaboratively with the participation of the MDES, the Thailand Professional Qualification Institute (TPQI) and universities in Thailand. The OCSC also conducted an internal assessment (which covered 15 000 samples collected across the public sector) to identify skills needs and implement skill development programmes drawing on identified capacity gaps.

Figure 4.2. OCSC – Thailand’s Skill Development Framework



Source: OCSC (2019_[16]), “Civil service and public sector HRD achieving Royal Thai Government’s digital transformation”, Presentation by the OCSC in the context of the OECD mission to Bangkok, April 2019.

However, currently, Thailand has no specific skills development framework to enhance the capability of public officials with regard to open government. In order to advance a culture change towards more openness, the principles and values of open government need to be identified, discussed and reinforced at every possible opportunity (OECD, 2016_[7]). They should therefore not only be included in policy documents and aspirational statements but directly incorporated in people management systems by enshrining them in public sector values statements and civil servant competency frameworks. A majority (57%) of OECD countries lists open government principles in values frameworks (OECD, 2016_[7]) and one-quarter (23%) of OECD members include principles in competency frameworks, performance agreements and/or accountability frameworks (OECD, 2016_[7]). Many countries also specify the competency needed to enhance open government reforms in job descriptions and recruitment criteria.

For instance, with regard to the open government principle of participation, civil servants require a framework for skills. Accordingly, the OECD report *Skills for a High Performing Civil Service* finds that “civil servants work directly with citizens and users of government services. New skills are required for civil servants to effectively engage citizens, crowdsource ideas and co-create better services” (OECD, 2017_[17]). One of the four pillars of the report’s framework focuses on the new skills needed for citizen engagement and service delivery (Box 4.4).

The OCSC could thus consider amending the Skill Development Framework for Digital Capability to ensure that it includes all of the skills needed to advance the open and connected government agenda. Alternatively, the government could also explore developing a separate but complementary skills framework for open government.

Box 4.4. Skills needed for citizen engagement and service delivery

Employees involved in service management, design and/or policy making require skillsets that encourage input from citizens to these processes. While service delivery, communication, consultation and engagement have long been recognised as desired competencies for public officials, three trends are altering the demand for skills:

- Many countries now have an increasingly complex service delivery landscape.
- Technological change is resulting in new channels and tools for engagement.
- The push for a more open and innovative government means that civil services are expected to incorporate meaningful input and participation at a greater number of stages of the policy/service design process.

The 2017 OECD report *Skills for a High Performing Civil Service* (2017_[17]) summarises the skills needed as:

- **Professional:** Traditional building blocks of service and engagement skills including professionals with expertise in public relations, communications, marketing, consultation, facilitation, service delivery, conflict resolution, community development, outreach, etc.
- **Strategic:** The use of engagement skills to achieve specific outcomes to inform better-targeted interventions, for example, or nudge public behaviour towards desirable outcomes, such as healthier eating habits or smoking reduction.
- **Innovative:** The application of innovation skills to engagement to expand and redesign the tools themselves through, for example, co-creation, prototyping, social media, crowdsourcing, challenge prizes, ethnography, opinion research and data, branding, behavioural insights/nudging, digital service environments and user data analytics.

Source: OECD (2017_[17]), *Skills for a High Performing Civil Service*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264280724-en>.

In terms of implementation, results from the OECD mission to Bangkok and the survey (OECD, 2019_[8]) administered for the purpose of this review show that the development of public sector digital capability follows two main approaches. The first focuses on upskilling the public sector workforce through digital leadership development, continuous learning and capacity-building programmes, whereas the second focuses on attracting new talent to the public sector. By April 2019, the OCSC was working on a skill development strategy for the Thai public sector, which would aim at further clarifying the goals and actions to be implemented for this purpose (Figure 4.3).

Other bodies such as the DGA, the Thailand Digital Government Academy (TDGA), the MDES and the NIA are taking action to develop digital talent within the public sector. For instance, the NIA holds capacity

building programmes and technical skills development courses with the participation of actors such as the National Information Committee under the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT), the Royal Thai Armed Forces and the Royal Thai Navy. The Thailand Digital Government Academy on the other hand provides physical and online training courses for public officials in areas such as digital security, digital transformation and data governance.⁸ The MDES has also put on one-year and three-year human resource development programmes for public officials, including the development of digital skills.

Additional practices include the Career for the Future Academy (CFA) of the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA), which provides training services for digital skill development. Yet, CFA activities are mostly focused on building capacities within the private sector (e.g. manufacturing sector).

Figure 4.3. Thailand: OCSC's Draft Development Strategy for achieving Government's Digital Transformation



Source: OCSC (2019^[16]), "Civil service and public sector HRD achieving Royal Thai Government's digital transformation", Presentation by the OCSC in the context of the OECD mission to Bangkok, April 2019.

In terms of digital capability, capacity-building programmes should remain a priority in Thailand as evidence collected during the OECD mission to Thailand showed that the current lack of digital talent in the public sector has led to a situation where most digital projects are outsourced. Putting aside the specific implications of this context in terms of ICT/digital commissioning (see the previous section), peers clearly expressed the dangers of this approach. Experience at the international level has shown that outsourcing can lead to technology-driven solutions, rather than developing projects that focus on the needs of users of both public organisations and citizens. Therefore, digital capacity and capability programmes could help to reverse this trend and find the right balance between outsourcing and insourcing projects in line with the government's plans for digital transformation and the strategic relevance of specific projects for this purpose.

In terms of attracting and retaining new digital talent to the public sector, examinations are held for entry into the civil service, including assessments on digital skills. This helps not only in assessing the abilities of applicants but also in ensuring the possibility of long-term professional development, in line with the digital skills framework of the OCSC. The latter has a huge Digital Literacy Project that aims to enhance digital literacy among public officials by equipping them with skills needed in the digital era and for them to

integrate technology into their work for better efficiency and productivity. Under this project, the OCSC has hosted a significant number of workshops and capacity-building activities. The Digital Literacy Self-Assessment was also developed for public officials. Alongside this self-assessment, the Individual Development Plan for Digital Literacy and the Digital Literacy Development Space has been adopted to encourage public officials to improve and change on an individual basis and at their own capacity. Overall, the OCSC encourages all government agencies to mobilise a long-term plan for their public officials' career development.

However, while a key aspect of the process is to secure long-term employment, including for those hired for digital core competencies, the recruitment process is cumbersome and long. Public officials expressed that the process can last 5 to 12 months on average, which underlines the need for balancing long-term policy goals in terms of digital capacity with the need for delivering in the short and medium terms, particularly given the current digital skills gap in the public sector.

There are two approaches that could help in this regard. First, the creation of a preapproved digital talent pool, integrating external service providers and talent, could help in streamlining the hiring process. Indeed, during the OECD mission to Bangkok, public officials expressed their preference for collaborating with external suppliers and outsourcing digital projects as they were unable to recruit the relevant talent (e.g. data scientists, engineers) given cumbersome hiring processes and the challenge of catching up with more competitive salaries in the private sector (as evidence from the OECD survey also confirmed). Addressing this challenge would imply putting in place the right policy arrangements so that external talent can collaborate with public officials in the co-design of public sector solutions on an ad hoc, project-focused and more agile basis while ensuring that digital solutions remain owned by public sector organisations.

Second, talent mobility could help in securing continuous learning and tap the valuable digital talent available across the public sector so that skilled officials can apply and share their knowledge in other areas outside their organisation. The OCSC is already taking steps in this sense.

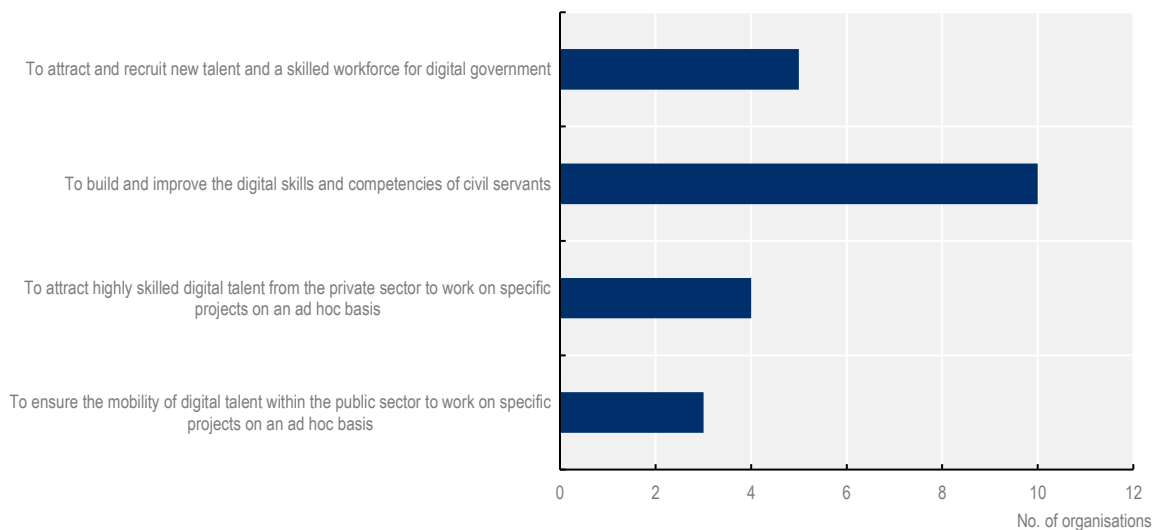
For instance, the OCSC's High Performance and Potential System (HiPPS) Administration Program, established in 2003, focuses on hiring, retaining and securing the mobility of high performing officials so they can become senior leaders in the future. The programme includes an intensive applicant selection process plus one-year policy work in different areas within the public sector. The OCSC has a Strategist Development Program under the Policy Study/Work Team Project, which is a talent mobility programme that allows top-level public officials in different public sector organisations to work on assigned projects that have high impact at the national level. The intention is to create space for creativity and exchange of perspectives to tackle the issue at hand. The assigned projects are typically around policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and special assignments by the cabinet office. Participants in the Strategist Development Program can receive incentive packages and special personalised training that aim to further cultivate a team player culture. These top talents are acquired from participating public sector organisations through a memorandum of understanding with the OCSC and the progression of the programme will be under the supervision of a mentor and monitored by the OCSC and participating public sector organisations.

Yet, the HiPPS Administration Program and the Strategist Development Program are limited to management positions, therefore opening a window of opportunity to expand its scope to other levels including those defined in the digital leadership and skills framework of the OCSC. Also, such an approach would help in building digital capacity across the broad public sector in the long run, in line with the goals of the Digital Economy and Society Development Plan, particularly those related to the development of the public sector workforce. Also, as expressed by country peers, greater mobility could help develop informal knowledge-based networks and promote self-learning opportunities for public officials and build a better base of expertise to reinforce Thailand's public sector capacity and digital maturity to develop new digital services at the institutional level whenever needed.

Results from the survey administered for the purpose of this review confirmed the urgency of taking action in relation to both of the aforementioned aspects. As shown in Figure 4.4, responses collected from public sector organisations in Thailand show the strong focus on building digital skills and upskilling the public sector workforce, followed by a focus on the acquisition of new talent. However, results also show that the mobility of digital talent within the public sector and ad hoc approaches to public-private collaboration remain third and fourth level priorities for both the central government and public sector organisations.

Figure 4.4. Level of priority for actions as part of the central/institutional digital government agenda

Results for high priority category



Note: Answers to the question: “How would you classify the level of priority given to the following actions as part of the central digital government agenda/institutional digital government agenda?”.

Source: Questionnaire for public sector organisations: Digital government: Questions 50 and 54 in OECD (2019^[6]), “OECD Survey on Open and Connected Government in Thailand”, OECD, Paris.

Open government

Similar to the development of digital capacity, it is also important to enhance capacities related to open government principles, which are currently not subject to any programme or course. Capacity building in the form of courses for public officials can help to advance their understanding of the benefits of the open government principles of transparency, accountability, integrity and stakeholder participation in their respective areas of work. To that end, 51% of schools of public administration in OECD countries offer courses with a special focus on open government, designed for staff working in the field of public administration (OECD, 2016^[7]).

To support the development of a culture of openness, Thailand could thus consider integrating open government principles into existing courses or introducing a government-wide training programme focusing specifically on open government. The programme’s courses could be tailored to the needs of public officials and their respective areas. Needs-based courses, which for instance focus on the engagement with citizens, the private sector and civil society organisations (CSOs), could help to raise awareness among officials of the economic, political and social benefits of open government. Concretely, the courses could make the case for the economic, political and social benefits of mainstreaming open government in policy making in all policy areas, including environment, health and education, among others. As the designated institution in charge of co-ordinating open government, the OPDC could support the conceptualisation and implementation of the training programme.

In October 2020, the OPDC launched a seminar to provide background knowledge on open government to representatives from 42 public sector organisations that have work related to the open and connected government agenda. The seminar aimed to provide an understanding of open government to public officials, address the role of central government agencies in promoting open and innovative government and the various direct and indirect benefits that result. Going forward, the OPDC is planning to host more events related to open government for public officials to increase their understanding of open government and drive transformative changes within their organisations.

In addition to training courses, the collection and communication of good open government practices within the whole public administration could help to advance Thailand's open government agenda. To that end, the OPDC could consider identifying ministries and government agencies that lead with reforms and promote these open government champions within the government. The OPDC has already begun to identify relevant stakeholders within public sector organisations with which to co-operate in advancing Thailand's open government agenda. These stakeholders have been categorised into central government agencies, local administrations, law enforcement agencies and public service entities.

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Notes

- ¹ For more information, see <https://en.digst.dk/ict-portfolio-management/the-business-case-model/>.
- ² For more information, see <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-08/bbc-options-framework-analysis.pdf>.
- ³ For more information, see <https://www.gob.mx/sfp/documentos/contrato-marco-licencias-de-software>.
- ⁴ For more information, see <https://govspending.data.go.th/>.
- ⁵ For more information, see <https://opendata.data.go.th>.
- ⁶ See for instance <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1530674/act-claims-billions-in-state-funds-saved>.
- ⁷ For more information, see <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/agile-delivery>.
- ⁸ For more information, see <https://tdga.dga.or.th/>.



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