DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND DIGITAL NAVIGATION AT ISANS

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Digital transformation is more than the tech or software used to deliver services: it's approaching current models for service delivery in ways enabled by technology. This makes digital transformation a human process as well as a technical one, requiring human support to implement. A settlement sector organization in Nova Scotia, ISANS, is addressing the human element of digital transformation in their support of staff and clients.

Many people say that in 2020 the world changed. In some sense that might be true, but not for digital transformation. For digital transformation, 2020 just picked up the pace for a marathon already underway.

You can find as many definitions for digital transformation as you can find people to ask but for us, in broad strokes, digital transformation is approaching existing issues and processes with the leverage that technology can provide to do more and to do it better. It's not just finding new tools, it's about using those tools to connect more, to reach more people in more places, whether that's a physical space or a social space. It's as much about approach and mindset as it is about the technology itself.

Like many other settlement services providing organizations in Canada, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) has been leveraging technology for operations and delivery of services since 2007, long before it embarked on digital transformation. ISANS had led in the sector in the use of its LMS (Learning Management System), Settlement Online, to deliver programs online. Various program teams had used technology in various ways to accomplish specific goals: smartboards, document readers for improved accessibility, and VR to create virtual spaces for participants to explore.

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Given all this use of technology, how does digital transformation make a difference? The difference is most of the earlier efforts were tactical. Programs set procedures, set up programs, and turned to technology to fix any gaps found in the course of delivering the service. With digital transformation, technology enters planning at the beginning and becomes an integral part of the overall process, and is not there just to fill a gap. Perhaps technology is there even before the beginning, as experience using technology and seeing its potential opens doors to service delivery that people had not considered before.

Creating a team dedicated to digital transformation and technology support is the logical organizational step to take with that in mind. This team brings technology-oriented teams together under one tent and offers the possibility of finding synergies between tech-oriented teams. It also offers possibilities of greater efficiency, less duplication of effort, and breaking down silos of technology innovation that used to happen in isolation from each other. No longer limited to gap-filling, the digital transformation team works with program teams to find, implement and holistically support program delivery.

If digital transformation is going to affect all parts of the settlement sector and the services it provides, it must support clients of these programs as much as support the staff that deliver them. Every client is different. Clients coming from different educational backgrounds or cultural backgrounds have various levels of digital skills and literacy. A newcomer's English proficiency does not accurately predict digital proficiency. One of the biggest challenges for clients is their limited access to technology. There are clients who are not able to get high-speed internet access due to their financial issues and this reduces their learning opportunities. There are clients who are experiencing physical challenges that hinder their abilities to attend a remote class and be engaged in the virtual learning environment.

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Programs cannot meet their potential if the clients they serve cannot access them. Therefore, our digital transformation team's work extends to facilitating access to technology by both making devices available to clients in need of them and in supporting their use by newcomers coming to Canada with a wide variety of previous experience in using technology.

To address the first issue, our Tech Lending Library has allowed clients in need of devices to access services to do so. Staff ascertain need by their work with their clients, requests the device, and handles distribution and collection. Our Digital Navigators manage the devices themselves and provide support in getting them set up and in their use.

To address the second issue, Digital Navigators work with all clients that need digital support (not just those that are provided devices by the Tech Lending Library). The role of "Digital Navigator" was created as the demand for support increased both for clients to access programs and for staff to deliver them, first with ISANS' Language Services team, then with ISANS' Settlement teams. Today, there are two teams of Digital Navigators at ISANS: the Language Services Digital Navigators with specialized training in language teaching, and the Settlement Digital Navigators that have training to support clients in settlement and community integration programs.

Digital Navigators offer comprehensive and hands-on support to facilitate language learning in individual and group orientation sessions. They use plain language to give analytical suggestions to staff and to leadership about the uses of the trending technologies in distance learning. All types of support have empowered both clients and instructors who may have been intimidated by technology in the past to both learn and embrace it.

ISANS' Digital Navigators support all types of virtual classrooms, not limited to the live conferencing sessions such as those run traditionally by language instructors or employment program facilitators. The asynchronous learning piece for after-class study and self-directed learning courses also plays a crucial role in remote learning. Amongst the software Digital Navigators have supported both staff and clients on are BigBlueButton, Zoom and now, Microsoft Teams. MS Office is one of the handy tools for Digital Navigators to do illustrations and write and design 'how-to' booklets, procedures and videos. The resources help Digital Navigators deliver information to a wide audience.

There are several challenges faced by instructors and facilitators in program delivery which Digital Navigators are working to address. Instructors have high expectations for measuring progression and program outcomes. Clients use a variety of proprietary software outside of the standard program tools. The validity and reliability of testing in online programs continue to be a challenge. Clients may not perform so well as they do paper testing due to unexpected situations, internet interruption, and the comfortability of using smart devices. Instructors may question the submissions from clients since they sometimes can't "see" the clients. These challenges are obstacles in the clients' learning journey, but they are also opportunities for Digital Navigators to think outside the traditional program delivery box to find solutions that work for both staff and clients.

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Support is not limited to in-person meetings or sessions. For remote virtual support, Digital Navigators use phone calls, Zoom, MS Teams, Chrome remote desktop and TeamViewer. During the organizational transition from Zoom to MS

Teams, Digital Navigators used Articulate Storyline to build a simulator that works both for Android and iOS operating systems to ease clients' stress during the transition. Moodle, the open-sourced learning managing system, is ISANS' major platform for continuous learning for its own LMS Settlement Online and for the IRCC-funded LMS for LINC (Language Instruction for New Canadians), called Avenue.ca. Digital Navigators support the staff by providing hands-on professional development sessions both remotely using live conferencing tools, such as the live streaming OBS Studio tool, and in-person. They help curate course pages within the Avenue.ca and Settlement Online learning management systems by following best practices and guidelines for page design and content.

Leading digital transformation by example, Digital Navigators use technology to improve work efficiency. From task handling to email tracking, we have been using Microsoft Excel, Forms and Power to automate and support their daily work. An asynchronous course has also been designed and completed to support clients with stronger English skills, which allows all parties, including Digital Navigators, program admins and LINC instructors to track new clients' progress on essential Moodle skills to get ready for their language classes at ISANS.

From strategic planning through program access and delivery, ISANS' digital transformation and digital navigation teams are helping ISANS' staff and clients use technology to write the next chapters of settlement sector services in Nova Scotia.