

FUTURE DOT NOW

“Light a fire” – Practical action for practitioners

30 April 2020

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“The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled”

Plutarch

”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Situation:** Digital skills training isn't working as well as it could be precisely because it is positioned as 'digital'. Those most in need of essential digital skills training are suffering as a result of the current approaches.
- **Evidence:** A review of key literature identified five key themes in support of this
 - **Correlation** between digital & social exclusion; (think Maslow's hierarchy)
 - A **lack of infrastructure** and services not being designed to meet users needs
 - The **voice of the end user** is missing from the literature
 - The divide between **policy makers, practitioners and end users** (the former's research focusses on quantifying & measuring digital skills rather than the **reality "on the ground"**), and
 - A need for **inclusive language**
- **Evidence:** In parallel, interaction with initiative partners identified five themes:
 - **Motives:** Getting people to engage with Digital skills is about **MOTIVE** not **MOTIVATION**
 - **Culture:** The first gap needed to be addressed is cultural – about fundamental differences in how stakeholder groups perceive this topic
 - **Projection:** We need to avoid projecting our world view and assumptions
 - **Recognition:** Don't assume that our "target" audience recognise themselves as being in need of support – this is not a CSR side-project!
 - **Network:** There is a need to leverage network effects - real impact comes from mobilising existing stakeholder coalitions at multi levels
- **Complication:** Nonetheless, The stakeholder landscape is complex, and "digital deprivation" means different things to different people
 - Large Corporates
 - Small Medium Enterprises
 - Initiative Partners
 - "Real People" – by which we mean *everyone* not just the 'deprived'
- **Solution:** However, we believe we can light a fire.... We need to "teach people to teach"
- **Methodology:** A simple approach to move trainers from the "Problem" > "The People" > "The Plan"
- **Guidelines:** To support this, we are providing stakeholders with the above approach framework and some tangible guidelines & principles to support & evolve their ongoing efforts, which include:
 - **Dos & Don'ts**
 - **Key principles**
- All of this is captured in two key documents: (1) Digital Skills Fire Lighting Primer [3 pager] and (2) Digital Skills Fire Lighting Guidelines.

TODAY, DIGITAL SKILLS TRAINING ISN'T ATTRACTIVE

11.3m

Today, 11.3 million adults (22%) still lack the essential skills to access the internet, communicate and solve problems online

53%

53% of UK employees do not have the essential digital skills required for the workplace

1/3

In 2019 one in three internet users had not improved their skills in the past year

4.1m

4.1 million adults in the UK are still 'offline'

1/3

Only a third of the UK workforce have received *any* digital training from their employer

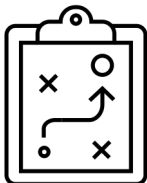
OUR APPROACH

1 Literature review

2 Primary research

3 Strategic recommendations/tangible guidelines

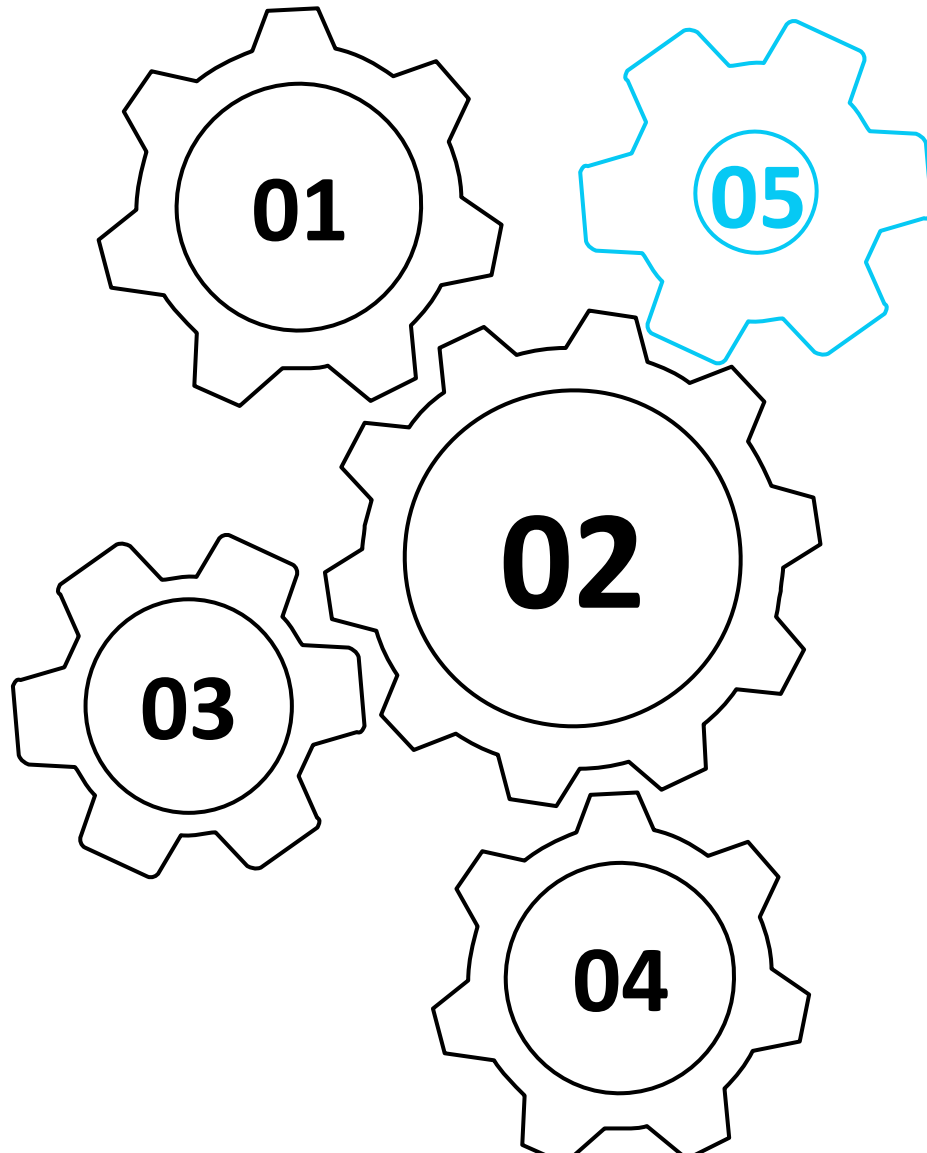
4 “Learn out loud”



DIGITAL SKILLS TRAINING ISN'T WORKING AS WELL AS IT COULD BE

- Numerous reports talk of a 'digital divide' with millions of people still lack the essential technical skills to engage in an increasingly technology-driven society
- There is thus a sense that a *gap* exists that needs to be closed by a raft of interventions and initiatives; that KPIs need defining and targets set and met
- This is framed as a behavioural change challenge – if we can just motivate and mobilise people to act and take advantage of training opportunities we can close the gap
- But, this is not the same as encouraging recycling or vaccination – things most people already see the immediate *relevance* and benefits of
- The digital skills gap stubbornly refuses to close because ***digital skills are the wrong place to start***
- What **we** mean by 'digital skills' and how **we** define 'working' are typically based on a one-sided perspective – we risk approaching this issue in the wrong way
 - *Digital is an amorphous term – and one which actually often serves to alienate and push people away*
 - *There is no 'end-point' at which we become digitally 'skilled' – technology is highly mutable, so what will a 'foundation' skill look like in 3 years time?*
 - *It's not that skills training is failing – it's because we're trying to solve the wrong problem*

A REVIEW OF KEY LITERATURE IDENTIFIED FIVE KEY THEMES IN SUPPORT OF THIS



- 01 Developing Digital Skills/Reducing Digital Exclusion**

The research shows a clear correlation between digital exclusion and social exclusion. This means those already at a disadvantage and arguably with the most to gain from the internet, are the least likely to be making use of it, and therefore become further disadvantaged by not using it. There is also a need to consider those ‘hidden in plain sight’ who are at the greatest risk of having their lives digitally disrupted negatively e.g. people in jobs that are fast being replaced.
- 02 Defining Digital Skills and Digital Inclusion**

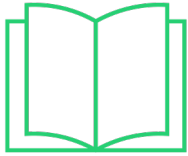
Many studies have attempted to quantify digital skills in order to measure them, but the don’t resonate with real people ‘on the ground’ who think rather in terms of ‘hooks’ – non-digital drivers that create a *reason* to explore how digital can help.
- 03 Influencing Digital Behaviour Change**

Studies from numerous sectors have looked at how to influence the digital behaviour of their consumers or service users to increase sales or improve behaviour have shown mixed degrees of success. A classic mistake is to start with ‘business’ requirements – what *you* want your audience to do with you rather than what they want you do with them.
- 04 Nudges, Peer Pressure & Social Norms for New Behaviours**

Applying an understanding of human psychology – and especially the power of emotion – can be far more impactful in driving desired behaviours than appealing to reason. There is historical precedent that clever nudges can be used to influence behaviour, both in the physical (The Startup 2019) and digital world (Crobox 2019).
- 05 The voice of the end user is missing...**

The worthy cause of trying to influence policy has left a gap in the literature: the voice of the end user. What is *their* view on digital skills? Do they see a ‘gap’? What language engages them/demotivates them?

01. DEVELOPING DIGITAL SKILLS/ REDUCING DIGITAL EXCLUSION



The Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index (2019) uses the behavioural data of one million people to create the UK's largest measure of digital capability. Similarly, the Tech Partnership (2017) mapped UK regions to assess digital exclusion throughout the country. What these studies found is that there are widespread geographic and demographic inequalities in terms of digital capabilities in the UK.

Worryingly, the research shows a clear correlation between digital exclusion and social exclusion. This means that those already at a disadvantage and arguably with the most to gain from the internet are the least likely to be making use of it, and therefore become further disadvantaged by not using it. Elderly people are most likely to be excluded (AGE UK 2018; RGS 2019), but there are many examples of young people also suffering from digital exclusion (Digit 2018), along with the many whom we know are at a variety of points on the Digital Skills Index but not receiving any digital training whatsoever (e.g. apprentices without access to an email client).

This exclusion compounds pre-existing health (NHS 2020), financial (Good Things Foundation 2018) and social (Nominet 2019) inequalities.

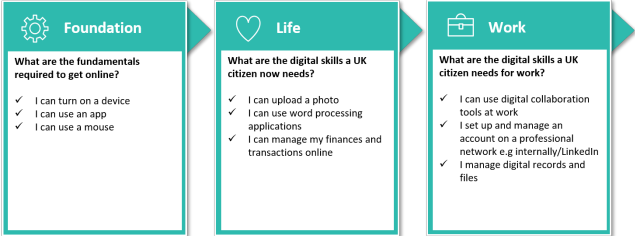
02. DEFINING DIGITAL SKILLS AND DIGITAL INCLUSION



Many studies have attempted to quantify digital skills in order to measure them, The ITU (2018) distinguish between basic, intermediate and advanced digital skills.

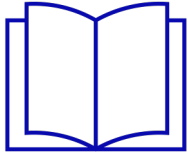
The aforementioned Lloyd’s study (2019) takes a slightly more nuanced approach, identifying foundation skills, essential skills for life and essential skills for work, but they don’t resonate with real people ‘on the ground’.

Taking influence from DCMS, the NHS (2020) looks at digital inclusion not just through the lens of digital skills, but also connectivity and accessibility, making the point that lack of digital skills isn’t necessarily the biggest barrier for people, rather the lack of infrastructure and services not being designed to meet users’ needs.



The UK Government’s Essential Digital Skills Framework is of high utility to corporations, but, as the primary research detailed in this document shows, can be detrimental to end users.

03. INFLUENCING DIGITAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

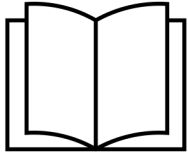


Studies from numerous sectors have looked at how to influence the digital behaviour of their consumers or service users to increase sales or improve behaviour have shown mixed degrees of success. An Experian (2019) report demonstrated how financial service providers are seeing the necessity to respond to consumers' growing expectations and become part of their overall digital lifestyle. Research from Girl Effect showed how digital interventions influence offline change amongst adolescent girls across the world, highlighting best practice and measuring impact.

However, in terms of negative or inconclusive digital interventions, a Lancet study (2019) investigating coach-supported internet intervention to optimise self-management of cardiovascular disease risk factors in older people demonstrated limited effectiveness over 18 months. Similarly, a Sustainability (2019) study on digital behaviour change interventions for more sustainable food consumption showed very little evidence of success.

You don't influence *digital* behaviour change, you influence behaviour change – which could account for the mixed success found using this approach to date.

04. NUDGES, PEER PRESSURE & SOCIAL NORMS FOR NEW BEHAVIOURS



Public Health England (2018) explored how to apply behavioural and social sciences to improve population health and wellbeing in England, highlighting the need for inclusive language that doesn't alienate service users as one of their principles.

Likewise, the CCC (2019) found that there are numerous ways to influence UK consumers to change their food consumption habits in order to reduce carbon emission. Much of this has to do with food-labelling and feedback from supermarkets.

There is also some historical precedent that clever nudges can be used to influence behaviour, both in the physical (The Startup 2019) and digital world (Crobox 2019).

But behavioural economics is *not* an exact science. People are 'messy' and it would be a mistake simply to copy a programme that's been successfully elsewhere and expect it to work in exactly the same way. The trick is to design strategies around your target audience – and *test* – and you may then achieve even better results.

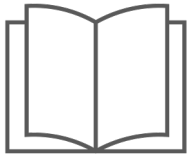
04. NUDGES, PEER PRESSURE & SOCIAL NORMS FOR NEW BEHAVIOURS



*“There are two great things about behavioural interventions. **The first is that they work. The second is that they don’t always work completely, or not in the way we expect.** For people obsessed with conceptual neatness and reductionist models of the world, this messiness is a constant source of frustration. I believe it is an underappreciated virtue of the behavioural approach.”*

Rory Sutherland

05. LITERATURE REVIEW: BREAKDOWN OF MAIN THEMES

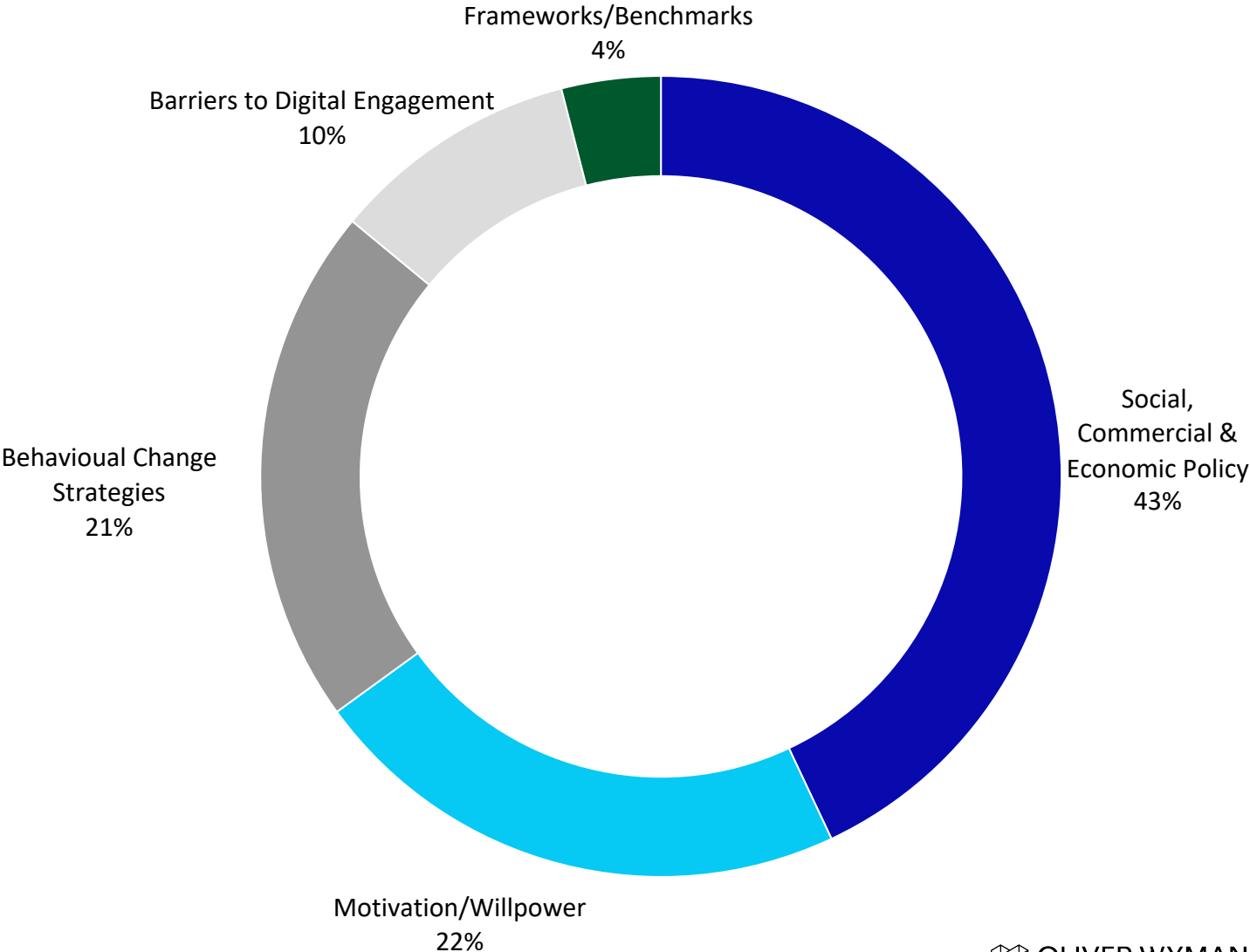


'Top-down' perspectives from government & industry dominate the literature.

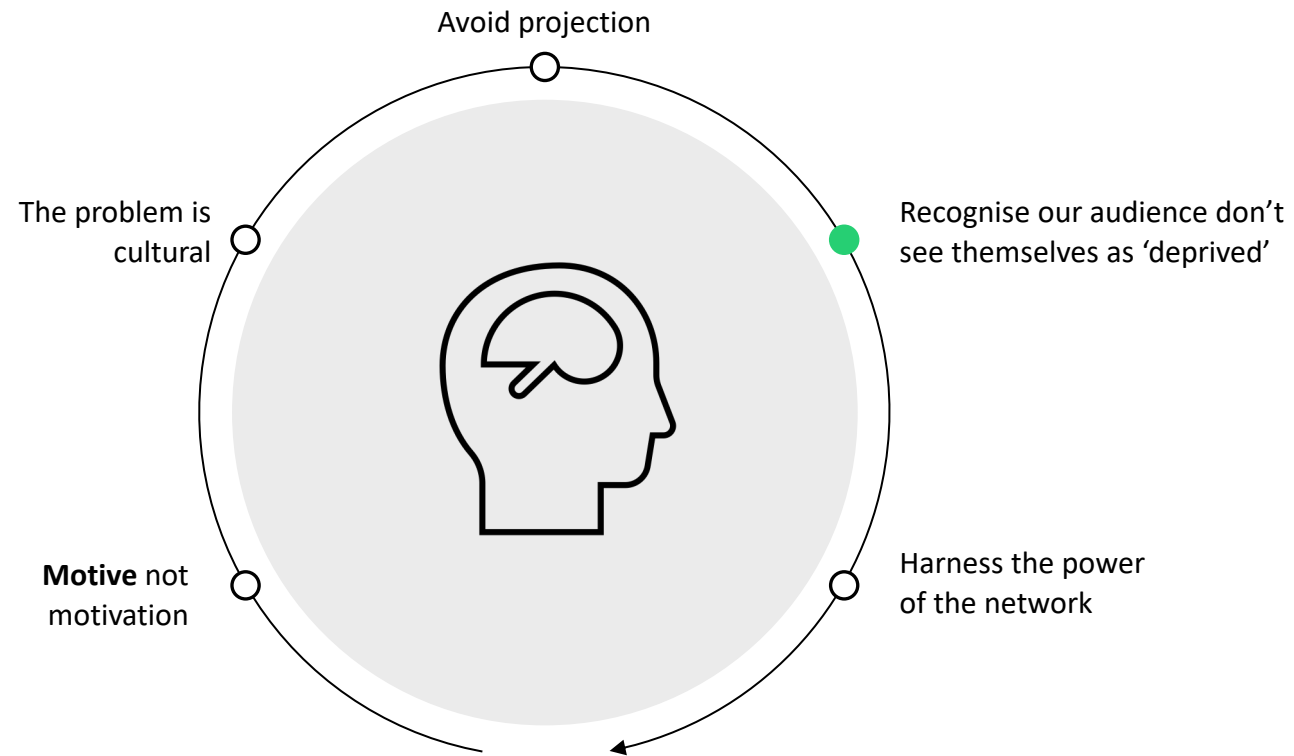
Strategies for overcoming digital engagement barriers are comparatively few.

The Literature Review highlights a 'voice of the end user' gap.

There is therefore real value in the recommendations this project will produce **focusing on how to engage with the people**, rather than an academic model/framework.



IN PARALLEL, INTERACTION WITH **INITIATIVE PARTNERS** IDENTIFIED FIVE KEY THEMES



MOTIVE NOT MOTIVATION

- **Motivation** is like having a vague desire to tidy up your garden. A **motive** occurs is when your partner tells you you're hosting a BBQ on Sunday. Motivation is nurtured when you feel pleased with the results of your hard work...
- Motivation tends to become more tangible *after* a behaviour is started – it's a *product* of behavioural change rather than a cause (which is why the best way to increase your motivation to go to the gym more is to go to the gym more...)
- So talking in terms of a lack motivation as the problem to be fixed first is to misunderstand the real problem: finding the 'hook' that will really grab the attention of your audience
- Digital skills need to be framed as a way of helping achieve an existing *analogue* objective (the 'hook') i.e. as a way to augment the familiar, and not as something additional (and possibly scary) to add to people's anxiety and actually create a barrier to learning
- So focus on the real-life problem and the positive outcome that digital can help enable, not the (digital) means

THE PROBLEM IS CULTURAL: THE REAL DIVIDE

- Reviewing the nature of the literature and most importantly, talking with people deemed to be 'disadvantaged', has revealed that the gap we need to address first is **cultural**.
- The language we use when talking about digital skills and indeed some of the digital tools themselves can do more harm than good.
 - *Digital 'learning' must not feel like learning: talking about 'courses', 'training' and 'attainment levels' to an audience failed by a traditional, Taylorist influenced educational system is guaranteed to cause the shutters to slam down*
 - *And, more prosaically expecting a 17-year-old apprentice to open a PowerPoint sent via email is about as realistic as expecting a 50-something to use Instagram or Slack!*

AVOID PROJECTION

- There's a danger of assuming that our 'target' audiences recognise themselves as being in need of saving by some benevolent third-party who will 'rescue' them from their digital ignorance.
- We need to avoid assuming that there's a one-size-fits-all framework for everyone, or indeed a universal measure index of what 'good' means – it's relative for each person.
- Such a viewpoint could be seen as highly patronising and fails to acknowledge the widespread **mis-trust** felt towards large corporations and the State – especially amongst many amongst the very people we are concerned with.
- What does it even mean to be 'digitally skilled'? Imposing success measures and targets from on high will backfire. Instead, success but be seen as unique to the individual - As one digital initiative service-user put it *"I feel empowered not because I know everything but because I can always learn something."*

RECOGNISE OUR AUDIENCE DON'T SEE THEMSELVES AS 'DEPRIVED'

- Without a reason or inclination to play golf I am not remotely concerned about my abysmal lack of golfing skills – the absence of an ability only becomes really salient when faced with a situation where you know such a skill would make a real difference. Therefore, a vague sense of lacking digital skills in itself is not enough, we also need to talk to the problem such skills will help address
- The deprivation that *is* more keenly felt (social exclusion, financial hardship, unemployment etc.) currently serves to act as a barrier to engaging with digital and so our job is to flip this into a driver

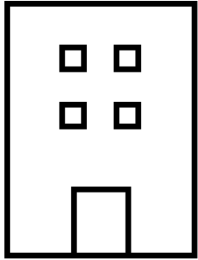
HARNESS THE POWER OF THE NETWORK

*“When I can help **other people** learn something new, I gain more confidence.”*

- What has become clear from this project is that a top-down, hierarchical framework to encouraging the growth of digital skills is not nearly as effective as a more organic, networked approach
- This works both within and across stakeholder groups – e.g.
 - *A more experienced user of a grass-roots service provider becomes a ‘champion’ passing on their knowledge and experience to their peers*
 - *A SME can connect with other SMEs on shared concerns and with Corporates for whom they are clients and customers*
 - *A corporate can apply ideas used by others to help up-skill their staff and understand how better to engage with their own customers digitally*

THE STAKEHOLDER LANDSCAPE IS COMPLEX

...AND “DIGITAL” MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

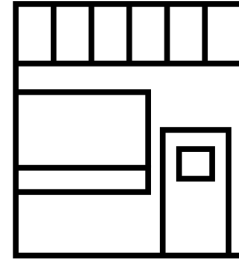


LARGE COMPANIES

Want staff to improve digital skills

Want their customers to engage through digital channels

Want CSR credential

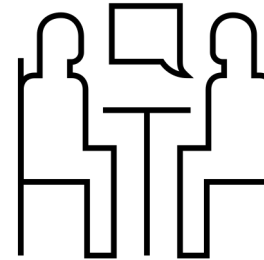


SMEs

Don't want digital to be 'imposed' on them

Want digital to reduce hassle not exacerbate it

Don't want to have to train staff in the basics

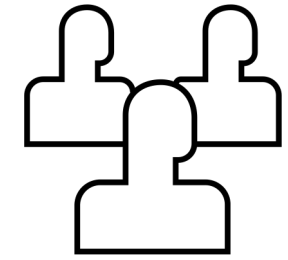


INITIATIVE PARTNERS

Want to deliver the maximum impact with finite resource

Want to harness pragmatic tools and approaches

Want digital to support their core purpose
Want to amplify existing initiatives – not add new ones



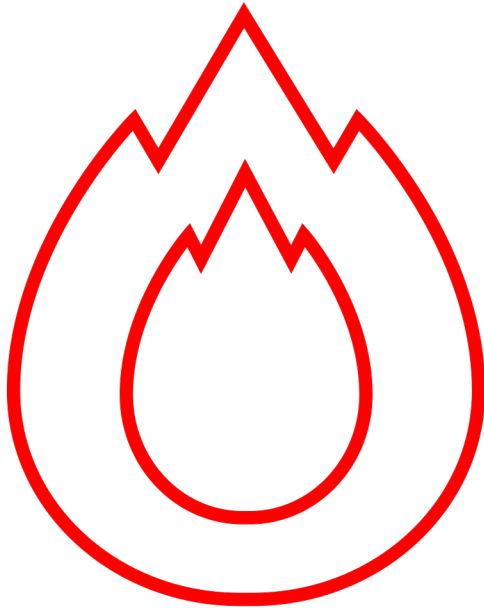
REAL PEOPLE

Want anything that makes life easier

Want to be given a reason to engage with digital

Don't want to feel it's being imposed on them

HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE WE CAN **LIGHT A FIRE...**



To make skills training work more effectively, and to spread it farther and wider, we must **increase reach** and **inspire** by:

- 'Smuggling' digital skills training in by basing it on real people's real goals so they see tangible benefits
- "Teaching people to teach" to make sure learning lands and network effects are harnessed/companies can realise CSR benefits in a way that helps real people
- Providing practitioners with **actionable solutions** and **guidelines**.

A SIMPLE PROCESS

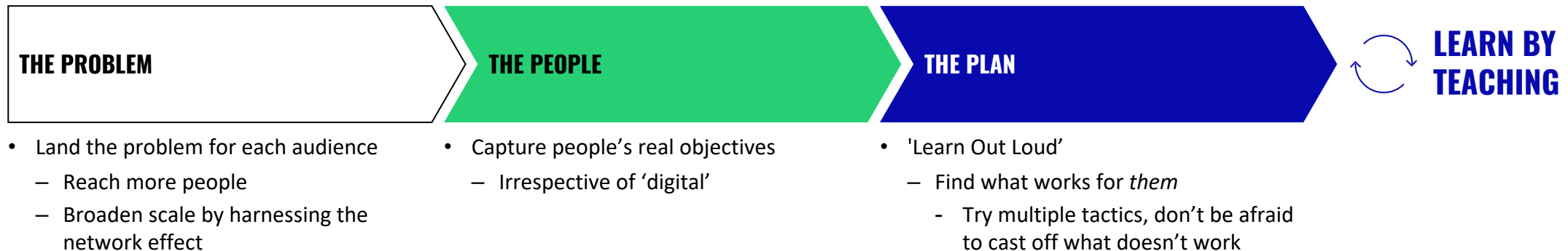
Towards a solution...

We want to make key stakeholders **understand the problem**, then provide them with **inspiration** and **guidance**.

We know there are many companies, initiatives and people currently conducting digital skills training - we want to help them **build upon the great work they're already doing**.

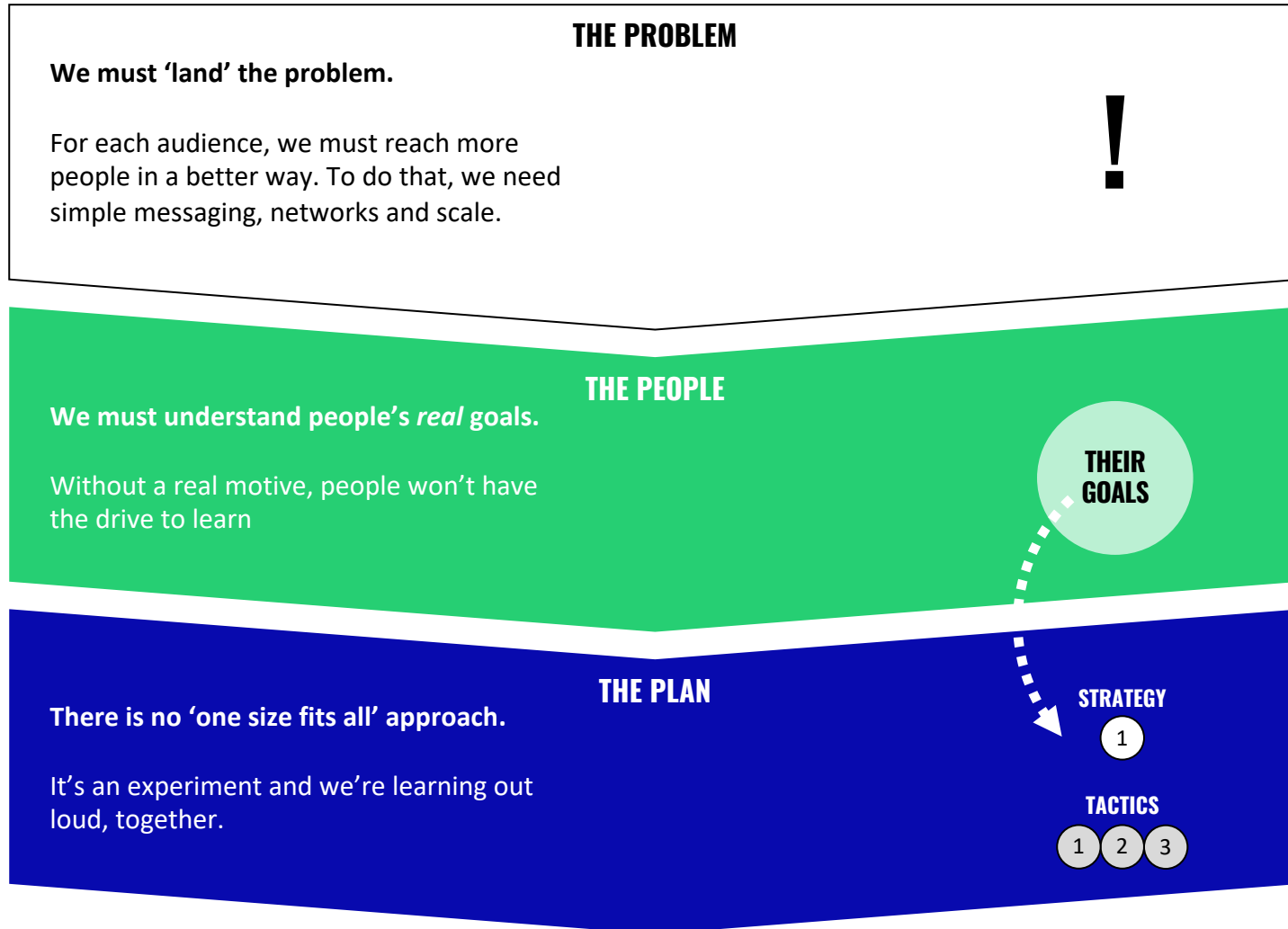
We also want to help those who **don't know where to start**.

To do *that*, we're recommending a **three-step process**, which should then be passed on wherever possible when completed:



A SIMPLE PROCESS

Towards a solution...



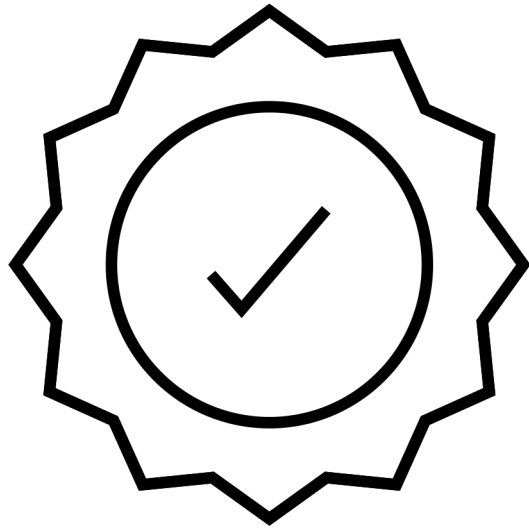
WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM SIMILAR APPROACHES?

SOME TAKE-OUTS FROM IPPR REVIEW OF ‘GROW WITH GOOGLE’



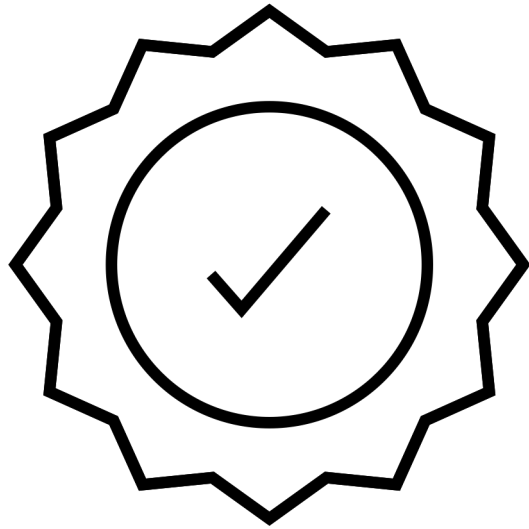
- Reported enhanced learner satisfaction, behavioural change and enhanced confidence
- Identified that the most effective way to improve digital skills is to couple them with the tangible aims of a community
- Programme delivery, format and content are more effective when tailored to local contexts and needs
- Public/Private partnerships, and partnerships between companies, government and civil society are powerful and should be nurtured
- Policymakers and programme designers need to ‘think differently’ about digital to maximise access to training
- Successful programmes challenge assumptions about who needs skills training and where digital belongs socially
- Initiatives which frame digital as being about learning, interaction and creativity are more powerful than those focused on providing access to hardware
- Facilitating life-long learning is as important as addressing immediate needs
- Networks are powerful drivers of learning – training should support (and learn from) both formal and informal learning networks
- Impact studies are more likely to yield useful insights when conducted at a small geographical, demographic or sectoral scale

WHAT TO DO



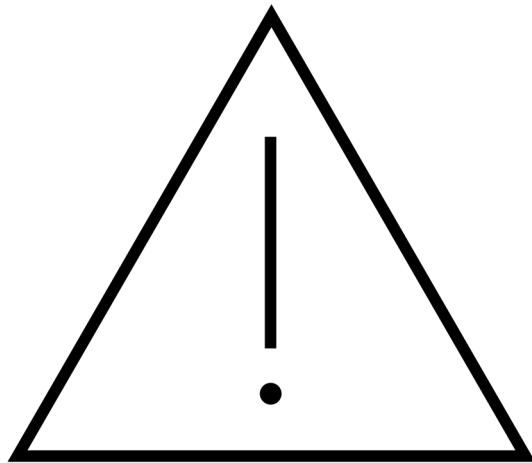
- **Context is key:** the *environment* in which knowledge is shared is just as important as the information itself, so don't make it feel like school!
- Position digital learning as being about taking **one step at a time** and not a big, scary, audacious goal
- **Recognise the things that de-motivate first** (which may be pretty significant) and consider how to address them
- Identify and if possible **remove barriers:** make taking the *first* step easier than not taking it
- Recognise that **everyone has a different starting point**, no-one knows it all. So the message is: "you're not unusual"
- **Remember the strength of *weak* ties** – find the people who act as a *bridge* to other networks, knowledge and experience
- **Find the hooks** (motive not motivation) – frame digital learning as being a smart way to solve 'real-life' challenges

WHAT TO DO



- The more people see digital being used in everyday contexts the more **normalised** it will become
- Consider 'learning circles' - encourage participants to **learn by teaching others** – and get them to *commit* to do so
- Help people create new *habits* associated with digital learning (i.e. so they engage without thinking about it). Identify the 'bad' habits these could *replace*.
- Utilise 'System 3' thinking – help people visualise themselves in the *future* benefiting from what they are learning
- Involve people in the design of their own learning programme (c.f. the 'IKEA effect')
- Remember your primary purpose is not to push a digital training programme (that will quickly age)... it's to be **trusted** to develop **confidence, resilience** and **adaptability**
- ...and remember, treat digital as just another **life skill**

WHAT **NOT** TO DO



- **Don't use words beginning with 'dis'** - 'disadvantaged', 'disempowered'...
– ...or 'gap', 'divide', 'catch-up'...
- Don't assume that what you say is what people hear
- **Don't talk about digital skill 'levels'** or imply there is some 'benchmark' that needs to be reached
- If possible, try and **avoid using the word 'digital'** at all
- **Don't label, categorise, segment** or otherwise forget you're dealing with people
- **Avoid cognitive load:** be careful not to overwhelm people with too many new terms or jargon (unfamiliarity and perceived complexity are a lethal combination)
- **Don't let people 'discount the future'** and assume that digital skill is a 'far off' status'.
– *Ensure they get value from their very first engagement*

KEY PRINCIPLES

1. Mind your language

- “If you wish to persuade me, you must think my thoughts, feel my feelings, and speak my words”- *Cicero*

2. To promote digital, use analogue technology

- “We’re all the heroes of our own stories” – *George R.R. Martin*
- The best way to spread an idea is to smuggle it out as a story - the oldest, most proven technology for promoting behaviour change
- This is a fertile ground for powerful plot and protagonist archetypes: journeys of discovery, transitions, over-coming the monster, side-kicks etc...
- Stories give the listener a voice...

3. Teaching others is the best way to learn

- “When we care, we share” – *Jonah Berger*
- Harness the zeal of the convert - they’re the best recruitment strategy out there
- ...because they are just like the people you are trying to reach
- ...because they’re **trusted**
- “When I can help other people learn something new - helping people gives you confidence.” – *Digital Champion, Starting Point*



KEY PRINCIPLES

4. Digital means different things to different people

- “When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new.” – *The Dalai Lama*
- Does the very word ‘digital’ excite & engage or scare & repel your audience?
- We all have different perceptions of what exactly the word means. Don’t assume your audience shares yours.
- If we’re going to talk about ‘digital’ It’s important to understand what the person listening actually *hears*.



5. There is no master template

- “Put simply, best practices are not always best” – Simon Sinek
- Learn from others, but don’t think you can copy what’s worked elsewhere and expect the same results
- Start with your **audience** and their lived experience

6. Don’t start with the solution, start with the problem

- “Happiness is not the absence of problems, it’s the ability to deal with them.” – *Steve Maraboli*
- Don’t *start* by talking about “digital”, rather focus and leverage your organisation’s credibility (in whatever field) as a means of smuggling in digital skills training.
- Doing so to help your end users solve their real world problems will help nurture an effective long-term learning relationship with digital.

 OLIVER WYMAN

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