# Creating the right conditions for success

*Paper 3: Using the full range of levers to drive the digital agenda*

*This is the third of our quarterly insights papers published as part of the [Digital ICS programme](#).*

When delivering digital leadership sessions with integrated care boards (ICBs) around the country, one of the key topics we are discussing is what levers for influence system leaders can and should be harnessing to drive the digital agenda. By 'levers' we are talking about the means by which leaders can effect digital transformation and change - and in a system there are many and varied levers available to integrated care system (ICS) leaders.

### Levers can be either soft or hard

Often we think of 'hard levers' as our first port of call - such as controlling flows of money, or only permitting spending on technology that aligns with the overall strategy or meets an agreed technical or accessibility standard. But it's the 'soft levers' that we sometimes lose sight of that are often more impactful in creating the conditions for success for digital transformation - using convening power to bring together a coalition of the willing, or using compelling examples of where progress has already been made to create advocacy and engagement. That's not to say that levers like standards aren't important or effective - but that alone they will not deliver the outcomes needed across a system.

### There's a need for balance

We see problems arise when ICBs over rely on one set of levers - usually related to programme and project performance management, without investing the time and energy into getting under the skin of what's happening in their system. Metrics do of course play an important role in helping leaders judge the health of their programmes, often acting as indicators of potential issues/blockers, but it's building the trusted relationships between organisations that enables you to really understand what the data is telling you.

One board we spoke to talked about the need to bundle levers together - using convening powers alongside clear technical standards to get alignment and buy in.

*"We have an ICS that has a strong performance management focus - unless the board understand that digital is transformation first and technology second, it will be problematic."*
CEO, acute trust and ICB member

### Levers can be earnt, lost, gifted or simply built

Some levers are earnt or gifted (and can equally be easily lost). Credibility is a great example of an effective earnt lever - having credibility allows you to make bolder choices and decisions, and to take more risks. Credibility is earned through successful delivery - further underlining the need to start showing value early from digital change.

One of the most underrated levers is storytelling - finding and amplifying those teams and services that are working in new ways, who are making the most of shared data and new technologies, and who are delivering value to the users of those services as a result. Building a culture of celebration, sharing and working in the open is a very powerful lever to drive the digital agenda.

Working openly and celebrating success was an extremely effective soft lever for the Government Digital Service as it built Gov.uk and raised [digital service standards](#) across government. Their mantra of *simpler, clearer, faster* services, regular blog posts about new teams and services who were succeeding, coupled with easy to use openly published design toolkits formed the rallying cry for digital transformation across government and made it easy for teams from across the government system to design better services.

### The most successful boards are intentional in their use of levers

Taking the time to think about the levers you have now, and the ones you would like to build - as well as understanding which ones to pull when, will pay dividends in helping you create alignment and collaboration.

Shared data is a powerful lever in any system - and where we have seen systems start to share data effectively is where we have also seen the biggest changes to services that are having a direct impact on people.

For example, in One Gloucestershire ICS, sharing real time data between acute hospitals, community trusts and ambulance trusts has enabled better, faster joint decision making at team level about the right treatment for patients waiting in ambulance queues - leading to better care for patients and reducing hospital admissions.

### Be persistently curious

ICSs are complex ecosystems where success will depend on creating a culture of empowerment and on trusted relationships. It is too complicated to be across everything. As a result the model of leadership will need to shift, from command and control to convenor in the system. We heard one ICS leader talking about the power of curiosity - asking open and supportive questions about what is happening and importantly why,

finding opportunities to support the leverage points and people in the system where you can make the most impact.

*"We need different levers at different stages of our journey with our partners. What we'll use at the beginning won't be right when we reach a certain level of maturity".* ICB chair

## Our offer

*"The Digital ICS session with our multiple partners from across South Yorkshire has helped us identify how we as leaders can practically support digital delivery across the ICS. During the session, we identified a gap in our understanding of our users and as a result we have iterated and extended our membership of the Digital, Research and Innovation system delivery group (SDG), which will enable us to have a more diverse set of voices from across the system.*

*The session enabled us to identify other key areas of work to focus on, and we're looking forward to further sessions as part of the programme, both with the group and our integrated care board."* David Crichton, chief medical officer, South Yorkshire ICB

The [Digital ICS programme](#) is a free and voluntary offer for ICBs, thanks to funding from NHS England as part of their Digital Academy programmes. It is delivered in partnership with NHS Confederation and Public Digital, a consultancy that has experience of working with over 30 governments, global businesses, and multilateral organisations on digital transformation.

It builds on the learning from the NHS Providers' [Digital Boards](#) programme which has engaged over 1,800 board members from 200 NHS trusts, including delivery of almost 100 trust board development sessions.

The programme is available to all members of NHS Confederation's ICS Network, and works closely with existing ICS forums to capture and share board level good practice and learning on digital transformation. It also offers free and bespoke leadership development sessions, designed to build consensus among the board and equip leaders with a clear understanding of the conditions needed for successful digital transformation across systems. All our sessions are bespoke and can include specific sessions to explore your levers for digital change.

Please [contact us](#) to find out more.