Public sector 'not yet equipped' to support AI and digital transformation'

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Plans to move from 'an analogue to a digital NHS' and modernise public sector technology through AI adoption are at risk due to a combination of outdated legacy platforms, ineffective procurement and a lack of relevant leadership skills. That's according to specialist software consultancy, Scott Logic, who argued at a recent event that artificial intelligence is being treated as a quick fix solution without an appropriate consideration of what is needed for effective integration.

Speaking at the recent 'How should government use AI' event – hosted by the Institute for Government (IfG), Scott Logic warned that artificial intelligence integration could be slowed unless core blockers including ageing legacy systems are addressed. According to the expert, while there is a broad recognition that the static tools of the public sector aren't built to integrate with more intuitive technology, this is unlikely to be resolved unless leaders and procurement decision makers are trained to make more informed AI buying decisions.

Stephen Foreshew-Cain, CEO of Scott Logic, and former Executive Director of Government Digital Services, explained:

"There's no doubt that a widespread adoption of AI and other emerging technologies to support the digital transformation of the public sector is being slowed and blocked because of the constraints of ageing platforms built on legacy technology. However, addressing this itself being hindered by two core challenges."

"Firstly, there are simply not enough leaders with technology backgrounds at senior levels of government, meaning that the full potential of some of the available solutions isn't being appreciated where it matters most. Secondly, there are deep-rooted issues with public sector procurement processes. There has been a tendency to choose the biggest organisations for major digital programmes and to go for an 'off the shelf', all-encompassing solution, when a more pragmatic, and nuanced, approach is required. This malaise within procurement has led to a situation where government technology is now hugely outdated, and we have a massive technical debt to manage."

"It's clear that existing procurement frameworks need to be reviewed and updated to prevent the biggest organisations from being selected purely because of their scale or name. Moving the dial here, and bringing in more niche technical experts to work as a collective will then enable the government to be more forward-thinking about its technology needs, which in turn will help to attract more cutting-edge skills to the public sector. The expansion in the size and scope of the Department for Science, Innovation and Transport (DSIT) is a step in the right direction, but a more radical overhaul is needed. The likes of AI and other emerging tech will only play a more fundamental role in wider governance in the future, so the government must look to modernise existing stacks to provide a platform for transformation, and bring in more people with the ability to lead this change."

Press contact:
Bruce Callander
bruce@bluesky-pr.com||07725331476

About Scott Logic
Scott Logic is a UK-based technology consultancy that helps organisations achieve their goals through technology. They work with clients in a variety of industries, including financial services and the public sector. Headquartered in Newcastle, Scott Logic is a certified B Corp, and has strong values around sustainability and equitable growth.

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