

Case Study

The National Archives & Kainos: Transforming Digital Services through Agile Coaching



The National Archives is the custodian of iconic national documents. From Shakespeare's will to Downing Street tweets, they collect and preserve public records.

More than 737,000 people use the UK Government Web Archive every month. The National Archives is focused on changing the way people think about archives by organising information differently and using digital techniques to serve the nation better.

Read on to find out how we delivered this important project.

Kainos' Role

Because of its culture of technical excellence, coaching, and sharing knowledge with customers Kainos was appointed, following a competitive tender to help The National Archives build digital capability across the organisation with the goal of delivering a high performing digital service and teams. As an organisation with over 30 years' experience of delivering IT projects (including multiple recent digital transformation engagements in UK government), the Kainos approach to agile coaching is grounded in real service delivery. This means that recommendations are relevant, have measurable business outcomes and are actionable. At The National Archives, this involved the following fundamental elements:



A holistic approach that created change in both process and mind-set at all levels, and was supported by a diverse set of skills spanning project management, software engineering, user research and design.



Change through challenge tailored to The National Archives' agile journey. Kainos consultants shared a wealth of experience of delivering projects and agile transformation simultaneously and provided a pragmatic but ambitious approach to overcoming operational challenges.



Cultural fit which was essential to success and was realised by applying the Kainos culture of coaching and lifelong learning to create open and productive partnerships.



Background

The National Archives is in the first year of a four year plan to change the way users think about archives and improve digital services for users. A key goal is to grow the archive audience by attracting new users, providing a joined-up experience on-site and online, and using technology to make routine services more efficient.

As part of this transformation, The National Archives is building an agile capability that is in line with the Government Digital Service (GDS) model. Kainos was asked to build on the success already delivered to The National Archives by its agile coaches, mobilising its digital teams around an agile transformation by:

- 1 Maintaining the momentum of adoption of agile at team level
- 2 Supporting experiential learning and giving confidence to the delivery teams in applying agile methods
- 3 Ensuring that the adoption of agile is sustained beyond the end of the engagement
- 4 Deepening the understanding of agile and its benefits across stakeholder groups, including Product Owners, Directors and the CEO

Kainos also identified the opportunity to support technology teams in improving engineering practices.

The Solution

The Kainos approach incorporated coaching principles that were focused on bringing out the best in people and letting them own and lead their own change. The coaching centred on:



Working closely with executive managers from the beginning to get a full, clear understanding of the organisation's aims and ambitions. By carrying out an assessment, the Kainos team confirmed the basis of the engagement and ensured correct targeting of time and focus.



Building agile awareness and skills through a series of short training courses for those working to deliver digital services and those working with them. More than 110 staff benefitted from this training.



Coaching The National Archives' digital teams to create opportunities for immediate feedback and reflection, as well as invaluable insight into the challenges being faced. This method of experiential learning enables individuals to more easily understand and action feedback, gaining confidence and ensuring more sustainable learning along the way.



The Solution (continued)

As well as coaching teams, Kainos helped The National Archives develop critical capabilities such as product ownership, software development, business analysis, and user research and design. For example, Kainos facilitated the introduction of a product owner capability, which gave the product owners the skills they needed, along with more visibility and confidence. Similarly, specific Kainos experts were on hand to explain how to optimise user research for agile delivery to GDS standards, and to coach the introduction of technical best practice in the delivery teams.



Highlights

Kainos coached, benchmarked and accelerated the creation of long-lasting digital delivery capabilities, establishing a sustainable skills and cultural change legacy within The National Archives' Digital Teams.

The internal team has started to take the lead on advising colleagues and departments across the organisation on the implementation and continuous improvement of agile practices.



What's Next?

The National Archives continues to undergo significant digital transformation, putting digital skills and processes firmly at the centre of its strategy. Because the adoption of agile practices for the delivery of products and services is key to this transformation, The National Archives is focused on becoming an organisation that delivers digital products and services that meet user needs.

What the client had to say...

"Kainos has helped us to make significant changes across our digital teams by working closely alongside our teams as coaches, providing agile training and collaborating with senior management. Kainos' work has greatly supported us on our journey to transform The National Archives into a digital-led organisation."

Alison Webster
Head of Strategic Projects
The National Archives

To find out how we can help deliver your digital aspirations contact us:

Tel: +44 28 9057 1100

Web: www.kainos.com

Twitter: @kainossoftware