



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Public Administration

Feature Address

by

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for the

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Introduction

It is my pleasure to deliver this address at the 4th Annual Tech Hub Island Summit. Over the last four years AMCHAM has played a leading role in shining the light on technology, innovation and digital transformation. I want to congratulate the President and her team here at AMCHAM for their dedication and commitment to advancing this drive. The theme of the conference this year is Change in Action.

It is timely. It is relevant. It is powerful.

As we continue to emerge from the Covid 19 pandemic with all the pivots that it required and all the lessons learned, it is clear that never before has there been more opportunity and impetus to evolve business, government and the economy via digital transformation.

The world has clearly recognised this, as have we in Trinidad and Tobago, but what is DT. One definition out there is that digital transformation is the integration of digital technology into all areas of a

business, fundamentally changing how you operate and deliver value to customers. It is also a cultural change that requires organisations to continuously challenge the status quo, experiment and to get comfortable with failure.

The business mandates behind digital transformation include

- rethinking old operating models
- experimenting more
- becoming more agile in responding to customers

When I met with Permanent Secretaries in January for a Leadership in Digital Transformation Workshop, in talking to them about how we need to pivot to embrace and properly implement this digital transformation mandate that the honourable Prime Minister, Dr Keith Rowley, issued to his Cabinet and to the public service at large, I asked them to dare to dream and I could feel the eye rolls from some of them when I said that. But let me explain to you what I meant by that. I mean that it is no longer good enough for us to wait for a customer to ask for something and then try, with varying levels of enthusiasm, to deliver on that request. We need

to start anticipating needs and putting things in place to satisfy those needs. The private sector does this all the time. It is way past time for the public service to catch up.

Like Martin Luther King Jr, I have a dream – a dream of how the Public Service should interact with the citizenry from birth to death. A dream that requires a shift in how we perceive our clients and our role in serving them, but once that shift occurs a dream that is fairly easy to turn into reality

- I imagine a world where a pregnant lady can go the closest hospital when she goes into labour, because her records are easily available on line, her particular medical issues are therefore known and she can properly be taken care of. She will no longer have to wait for her physical records to be physically transported to the institution from which she is seeking services.
- I imagine a world where as the hospital technician records the details of the birth, the relevant information is automatically transmitted to

the Registrar General's office which allows an electronic copy of a birth certificate to be issued.

- A world where if that child has physical or mental challenges that the relevant info is transmitted to the social security agencies so that the parents and child can receive the support they need.
- Why can we not get pop up notifications of when our driver permits and passports are due to expire and what is needed for us to renew them?.

None of this is revolutionary, but it will make such a difference to the lives of the citizens and it is so do-able.

But there are challenges

- This requires a culture shift which is probably the biggest of all the challenges.
- The speed of implementation – which is important because as administrations change so do priorities and what does not get done before that change may not get done at all.

- Another challenge is the disruption which such a change brings since no transformation can occur without disruption. And disruption is not something that people welcome.
- The cost of transformation is another challenge, especially in these trying economic times. But this Government has committed to this transformation and is making the resources available.
- The availability of technology is a bit of a challenge as a result of the supply chain disruptions caused by the pandemic and more recently the war in Ukraine, which has slowed down delivered of supplies, but we are working through that.
- The silo behaviour is also a challenge in the context of the need for the seamless supply of services.
- And very significantly is that the invasiveness of the technology is a challenge. We live in a world where in the aftermath of the overturn Roe v Wade, women in the US have to re-assess what they put on line less that information, in terms of product purchasing, cycle tracking and service searches, provide law enforcement with evidence on which those women can be prosecuted. And this has happened. We need to come to terms with the fact that as we seek

more and more convenience through online services that we are ceding our right to privacy. And it is up to us to exercise care as to how much privacy we cede.

These hurdles are magnified in the public service. So how do we get over the hump from vision to implementation and even before that, how do we get buy in on a uniformed vision in the context of a silo mentality.

Jim Swanson, CIO of Johnson & Johnson, in recognising that digital transformation involves automating operations, changing business models, re-orienting people, all wrapped up in things like data analytics, technologies and software, says that at the centre of it all is leadership and culture. You can have all the right ingredients but if leadership and culture aren't at the heart of it, it will fail.

Behnam Tabrizi et al “ in an article in the Harvard Business Review on March 13, 2019 said digital transformation is not about Technology”. They based this conclusion on the results of a survey conducted among

senior executives who stated that the digital transformation risk was their number one concern. And that was pre-pandemic. I imagine that it is even more so now. Yet they found that 70% of all digital transformation initiatives do not reach their goal. Why? - because digital technologies provide possibilities for efficiencies. But if people lack the right mind-set to change and the organisational practices are flawed, digital transformation will not succeed.

As we drive digital transformation for our businesses, our economy, and our people, we must recognise the critical importance of managing the change.

There are some key lessons that we must consider. In Kotter's approach to change management, the first step is to create urgency that is to say, convince people of the urgent need to change. Covid-19 forced a recognition of that need. We now have to ensure that we capitalise on that momentum and do not let it die a natural death as we continue to emerge from the pandemic.

In the last two years, businesses, governments and citizens were all forced to innovate to survive. Many people harnessed the power of social media platforms to launch businesses. We also saw a rapid expansion in remote work opportunities, new business opportunities and online solutions for all sorts of services. Covid-19 was definitely a live case study on change in action. We should not let these lessons go to waste. We must build on them.

Even as we continue to drive digital transformation as a country, as the organization responsible for public service modernisation, the Ministry of Public Administration is spearheading the work to prepare and equip our Public Service with the right tools, skills and competencies to provide improved service delivery to our citizens through digital transformation. We have adopted a “people first approach – a citizen centric approach”. We have also designed our programmes and projects to build the capacity of the Public Service to facilitate and drive digital transformation. Permit

me to go through just some of the work that we have been doing in this regard.

In January 2022 we held the first symposium on Public Sector Leadership for Digital Transformation. We sought to establish a shared vision of what a digitally transformed Public Service should look like and we harnessed technology to facilitate fruitful collaboration among the leadership in the Public Service. We also received a declaration of commitment to the digital transformation effort from our Permanent Secretaries.

In May 2022 we launched our first digitally enabled Training Needs Assessment, surveying upwards of twenty-two thousand members of staff in the Public Service. This will greatly assist us in determining what are our priority capacity development needs in the Public Service. We will use the data to design and improve our learning and development programmes.

We are also working with other Ministries, Departments and Agencies in their digitalisation efforts including the digitization of records, reengineering of business processes and in system design for improved service delivery.

We are currently working on the design and implementation of a Workforce Planning Strategic Framework. This will assist Ministries, Departments and Agencies in:

- i. Determining the current state of the Public Service
- ii. Identifying the future state of the Public Service, including the skills and competencies that we will require to adequately serve the needs of the public.
- iii. Documenting what are the gaps between the current and future state
- iv. And finally developing and implementing the interventions that are required to fill those gaps

The Ministry is also responsible for advancing Open Government.

Citizen engagement is key to overall improvement in service delivery. In designing our citizen engagement initiatives, we will be harnessing technology to determine the levels of customer satisfaction in the delivery of government services. We will also seek to collaborate with citizens to accurately determine their needs and to co-create solutions to maximise benefits realisation.

We are also developing and implementing a strategic change management framework to build change management capacities throughout the Ministries, Departments and Agencies. We believe that in order for change management to be effective in transformation, this must be embedded into the operations and become standard practice. It must become a part of us.

While we are pursuing these programmes and projects to prepare and equip the Public Service to adapt to the changing needs of society, we have recognised that digital transformation is not an easy task. In fact,

any kind of transformation takes time, commitment, and the right approach. Many of us in this room have sought to transform the way in which we operate, and we have come up against challenges that seem insurmountable at times. We are challenged to adequately answer questions such as:

- i. How do we communicate the urgent need for change?
- ii. What is our vision for this transformation?
- iii. How do we get the right people to buy into this vision?
- iv. How do we achieve this vision in light of the internal and external constraints?

These are the questions that we have to answer in business and most definitely in government as seek to implement our digital transformation mandate.

Over these three days I am hopeful that the speakers, panellists and participants are able to provide meaningful insights into how they manage change, transformation and harnessing new technologies in their organisations. And at the Ministry of Public Administration, which must

assume responsibility for the culture and process change needed, we are happy to benefit from the lessons that will emerge from your deliberations and to partner with the private sector and organisations such as AMCHAM to ensure that we effectively and efficiently transform T&T into the kind of society we want it to be, with a public service that lives up to its *raison d'être* [reason for being] of serving the public.

As I look through the presenters and panellists for this summit, I see a wide range of people from different sectors. I see the technology firms like IBM, Google and Digicel, but I also see representatives from banking and finance, neuroscience, entertainment, design and law. All, I'm sure, will have varied experiences in harnessing technology for the transformation of their operations and building new products and services that meet the needs of their customers.

These are really exciting times filled with opportunities for innovation and collaboration. Over the next three days, participants will be exposed to new ideas and lessons learnt in technology and innovation. So, I want

to implore you all to seek out areas of mutual interest and explore possible synergies that can make our digital transformation journey in Trinidad and Tobago even more fruitful. As we know, we do so much better when we come together as opposed to going it alone. This is Change in Action.

Before I close let me go back to the issue of risk. Many people keep asking the question what is government doing about diversification. But diversification is getting into new areas of business and many of the same people who ask the question about what is government doing will say that government has no role to play in business. Government is about facilitating business, but it is up to the captains of industry here today, the persons with business acumen, the many bright youngsters who have great ideas and who have been doing well for years in the digital world outside of Trinidad and Tobago to create and develop this opportunity for a digital sector. The ingredients are there. It is just for the players to get together to promote it and I cannot overemphasise that it needs the support of the banks and other financiers to support these initiatives. Government's role is to facilitate, and this administration has clearly

demonstrated its willingness to facilitate this area of endeavour by providing a slew of reliefs in this area.

So as we approach the time when persons will start putting forward suggestions for inclusion in the next national budget, I urge you to clearly outline the needs for the development of this sector. I have been engaged in similar exercises in my previous life so I know that the tendency is to request a range of reliefs. One of those I have been advocating for ages is relief for research and development as referred to today by the Amcham President. Don't only say what is required, but why it is important. Put forward a business case for the development of a digital sector. The potential and skills are there and Government is committed to supporting its.

I wish all speakers and participants a fruitful and beneficial Tech Hub Island Summit 2022.

I Thank You

