I2I Project

Abertay / SeeScape 2023

Cover Sheet

Abertay & SeeScape: Digital Transformation

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Abertay's I2I team have worked with long term partner SeeScape to help develop a digital transformation strategy for service provision in the post-Covid world.

Background

SeeScape hold the official register of people with sight loss and severe sight impairment in the region of Fife. SeeScape is responsible for providing sight support services to those eligible. Fife region includes a large divers population including large industrial towns such as Dunfermline and Kirkaldy as well as fishing villages, farming communities and famous golf resorts such as St Andrews which is also a major University town.

Serving such a diverse community presents multiple challenges and these are only exacerbated by the increasing constraints on funding from Fife Council which provides the majority of the funds to support people in need through a service level agreement with SeeScape.

Co-Creating a digital transformation strategy.

As a participant in the I2I project, SeeScape recognised early in the pandemic that their traditional face to face working mode was going to have to change to adapt to the requirements of the changing world.

Using the principles of the quadruple helix co-design approach, SeeScape set about raising awareness of digital transformation to tackle the problems facing the organisation and its service users. These centre around social isolation, loneliness and lack of accessibility of services.

With the closure of almost all in-person services, SeeScape service providers and service users had to rapidly adjust to the crisis. SeeScape's crisis response can be seen as a multi-phase approach.

1) React & Respond
2) Adapt & Survive
3) Recovery & Resilience

Reflecting on this process, several stages of reaction and adaptation can be identified:

- Adoption of tele-services in lieu of face-to-face provision
- Emerging recognition of a change in SeeScape's need for physical buildings
- Identifying new income streams and divesting loss-making, non-core activity
- Developing a Digital Transformation Strategy for service provision

These have ultimately led to a repositioned charity both geographically and strategically. A charity developing an ongoing iterative digital transformation. The following describes the transformation process in more detail.

Technology need not be hi-tech

Early observations during the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, were that some simple technology solutions such as the telephone was surprisingly effective at replacing the need for face-to-face meetings. This had the double benefit of increasing the capacity for service provision because of the reduction in time spent travelling.

Move away from property ownership

A secondary observation emerging from the transition to tele-care, was that there was a reduction in need for office accommodation at the large building housing the SeeScape HQ. Temporary closure of the building due to flooding during the pandemic only emphasised the relative change in focus from bricks and mortar premises to remote service provision. The previous tenants, another charity, also no longer needed the space, resulting in a loss of rental income for the charity. SeeScape initiated a review of the property market and resulted in the sale of the Wilson Avenue HQ in Kirkaldy and the acquisition of a lease for a new smaller HQ located in the regional capital Glenrothes. This had the twin benefit of locating the HQ in the centre of the region at the transport hub, minimising journey times for Fife Residents who needed to access services, and at the same time locating the charity in the same town as the Fife Council HQ. The sale of the HQ released capital for charitable activity, reduced the risk of ownership of an ageing building, and upgraded the heating lighting and access.

Emergence of digital collaboration platforms

As emergent phase of digital transformation was precipitated by the early adoption of Microsoft Teams (via Office 365) as a co-working environment for staff and trustees of SeeScape, this supplemented the existing OneDrive provision exclusively for file storage. The adoption of the full Office 365 suite immediately brought operational benefits through integration of workflow process and remote staff collaboration within the digital ecosystem,

security was also enhanced with this investment. Subsequent additional benefits emerged: instead of hosting board meetings at a commercial conference venue with video conferencing, SeeScape is now able to hosts board meetings at is new HQ with a 'Teams Bar' audio visual display, adaptive-camera and -microphone system. The new system ensures that external stakeholders can dial in effectively and participate fully in the meeting. This is particularly useful for compliance and finance professionals who ordinarily attend only small sections of board meetings, and they can now do this more flexibly and efficiently. An example of board level digitisation is the procurement and subsequent adoption of an online bank deposit provider who offer an integrated multi bank account management service. This allows SeeScape to de-risk bank savings by diversifying bank holdings, and simultaneously maximising available return on reserve deposits.

Retreat from loss making enterprise

SeeScape took the decision to close its loss-making Optician's business. This was unable to compete with high street providers with larger economies of scale. The reduced building footprint needed for the remaining services, allowed for the organisation to sell its HQ and rent more appropriate premises.

The above stages represent the conclusion of the Adapt and Survive Phase of Crisis response (and much of the recovery phase) and the final emergence on an ongoing sustainable resilience strategy for the charity.

Service Provision Development

The reactive and adaptive response digital transformations were part of a wider review of SeeScape's digital service provision to develop SeeScape's mission through a quadruple helix approach. A key milestone in this approach was a multi-perspective, professionally facilitated in-person co-creation day on 22 July 2022. This event allowed for an offsite review and design of new services with input from the perspectives of blind people, the private sector, the public sector and third sector; a quadruple helix approach.

An immediate outcome was an understanding of the incomplete transition of the renaming of the Charity from 'Fife Society for the Blind' to SeeScape. There was uncertainty remaining about the new name and its scope. Accordingly, a refinement of the charity 'brand' was instigated with Abertay working with graphic designers and the board to focus the name and strapline of the charity to include more direct reference to its purpose and redesigning the logo to include this; see Figures 1 and 2 for a comparison of new and old logo.

Figure 1. New SeeScape logo, including Strapline indicating 'Visual impairment support across Fife' making the role of the charity clear from the logo and including a new more obvious 'eye' logo.

Fig 2. Old SeeScape logo, lacking in any situational context. The original logo was criticised for featuring an angled logo that most observers did not recognise as an eye at all.

Developing a Digital Transformation Strategy.

From the multistakeholder event, a substantial outcome was the emergence of a shared understanding of the scope for SeeScape to expand its provision of sight support to emphasise new technologies to educate business and employers in the region and beyond of the needs of blind people, but also the scope for blind and partially sighted people to contribute to the economy and wider society. This should maximise the scope of technology to reduce social isolation and increase the employability of its users. Further, it should expand the pool of SeeScape service beneficiaries to include all elements of the quadruple helix.

As an example, Abertay proposed a collaborative scheme for SeeScape to offer businesses, charities and public sector the chance to place staff on Continuing Professional Development seminars and workshops to help them learn about accessibility issues associated with different forms of sight loss. The combination of theoretical and practical insights, led by a SeeScape

Trainer could offer immersive experiences to develop empathy and insight in the trainees, and to foster constructive adaptations of practice to include people with sight loss. These workshops could be provided in-person, and online or in hybrid formats.

Beyond this example, SeeScape realised that fully fledged Accessible Technology Service (ATS) is possible thanks to the prominent role of SeeScape's Head of Technology Service promoting novel technologies in so many areas of society. As a user with lived experience of blindness they are especially well placed to build trust and promote awareness of technologies to other people with sight loss.

The final i2i element of this digital service development process was a paper presented to the board of trustees and a discussion in May 2023. This culminated in the board adopting a proposal for a full development of a model for business services to include:

- consultancy support for businesses, e.g. accessibility audits, website and app testing, tech support and guidance etc

- further development of SeeScape's technology training service

- building SeeScape's reputation as experts/market leaders in accessibility technology by building the Head of Accessible Technology's reputation as a tech figurehead/sector leader, e.g. webinars, podcasts, TED talks, blogs, media work etc

- improved approach to marketing for direct tech sales

- exploring corporate sponsorship and/or partnerships

- income opportunities from testing new technology in development stages.

These elements should improve the innovation capacity of SeeScape and its funding partner Fife Council to develop innovative services through a continuous cycle of Quadruple Helix and service/co-design exercises. This process should have the effect of raising awareness and stimulating decision makers across society to promote social inclusion of blind people in the community by highlighting the social and economic contribution people with sight loss to can make to business and wider society. The post-pandemic move to hybrid social systems can tackle isolation, loneliness, and can help integrate services across sectors.

A formal digital transformation strategy which was adopted by the Board of Trustees in May 2023 with a goal of developing a sustainable Accessible Technology Service.

Summary

Having been in operation for over 150 years. The last three and half years have seen the most unprecedented and rapid changes in operation for the charity. It has gone through a rapid react

and respond phase of change precipitating digital transformation, that has accelerated to allow the charity to survive and adapt to the 'new normal' of hybrid working. The recent adoption by the board of a new approach to ongoing digital transformation represents the ongoing recovery of the charity and the quadruple helix designed ongoing resilience of the charity as it seeks to widen its business operations.

Ends