



Building Great Digital Teams for the Future
Digital Teams that raise Millions

Carmen Barlow Digital

What we're talking about today

- 1 Centralised vs decentralised digital teams and when you need which.
- 2 Generalists or specialists? And other options.
- 3 What skills do you need and when to in-house or outsource them.
- 4 How big should your digital team or expertise body be?
- 5 Have the right team now but how do you ensure you have the right skills for the future?

And then we'll also do some Q&As



Not all of what we are covering today will be **NEW**

- Some of this will be known to some of you
- Not everything is *new* but it is all *relevant*
- We're bringing lots of things together to gain deeper understanding of what *good* looks like
- And there is of course some very timely new stuff too



Why listen to me?



I am the director of Carmen Barlow Digital - a digital strategy and transformation consultancy that has helped charities raise millions.

I have led major digital transformation projects including at Amnesty UK, Refuge, and Plan International UK & most recently at Marie Curie.

I have been in senior leadership roles **in-house** and as a consultant, leading change, allowing me to see this from different sides.

I am also a **co-founder of the Charity Change Collective** - we are 12 change makers working with nonprofits to sharing research and best practice on digital transformation to create a resilient, responsive and impactful sector, **fit for the future.**

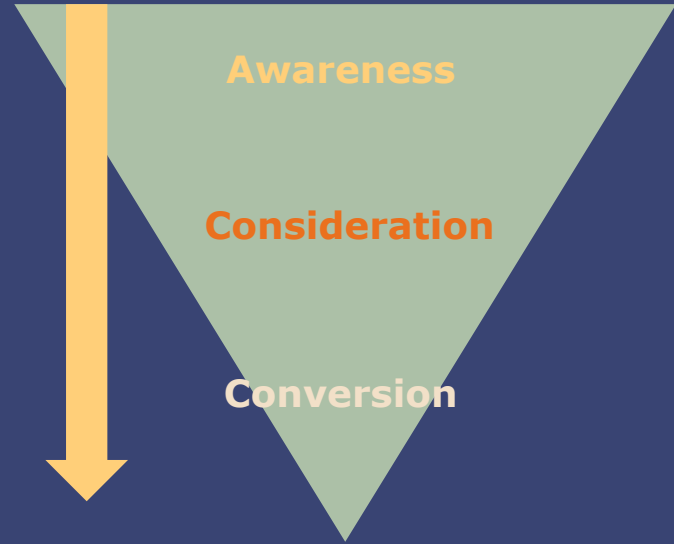


What's a digital team that raises millions?

The focus here is to build digital teams that raise money online - these teams need to work across the digital ecosystem.

I approach this holistically, always. Looking across the marketing funnel - supporters don't just appear at the point of conversion.

We need to attract and move our audience through the funnel from initially getting in front of them, to engaging them to action (giving their time, money or voice) and building a long term relationship. This isn't linear either or transaction but there are some important measures of if it is working - including, importantly, income.



1

Centralised vs decentralised digital teams?

3

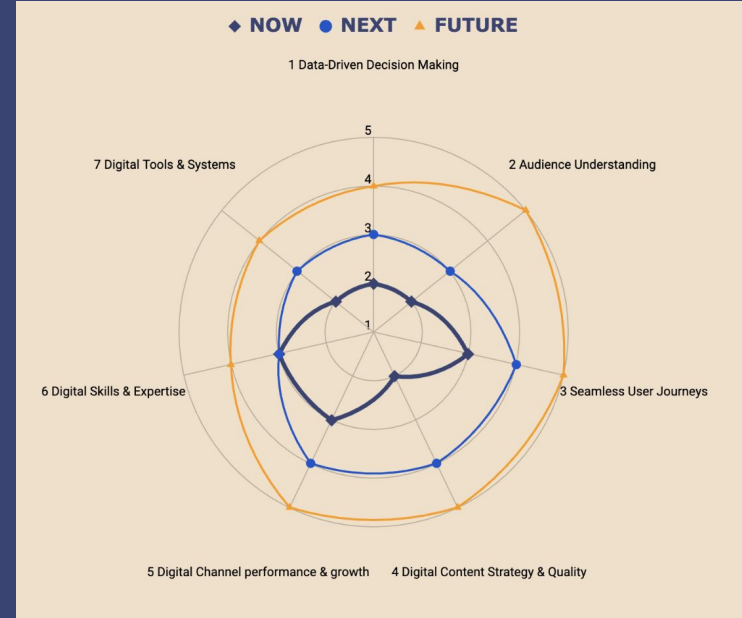
Should your digital team be centralised or not?

In short, it depends on how digitally mature you are.

High Digital Maturity → Go Decentralised

Low Digital Maturity → Build Centrally First

Think Long Term → aim to decentralise.



Not sure how digitally mature you are?

Use my **free** quiz ->>

Or book a session with me to
make you a custom digital
maturity assessment.



2

Generalists vs specialist digital teams?



Digital generalist or specialist, what should I hire?

Finding the Right Team Mix:

- Depends on org size, complexity, budget
- Generalists = flexible but risk lack of deep expertise
- Specialists = deep knowledge but less adaptable (no stretch) or scalable

→ **Go T-shaped:** deep in one area, broad in others e.g. a paid ads expert who can also tag forms or set up pages.

- Evolve your team: upskill generalists/specialists to become T-shaped
- Boosts motivation, retention, and organisational digital maturity



3

What digital skills do I need in my team and should these be in-house or outsourced?

3

What skills should I have in my digital team?

We're all fundraisers

**Team leader
(HOD)**

SEO/content

**Social media/
rapid response**

**Supporter
journey**

**Marketing
analyst / CRM**

**UX/UI web
developer**

**Content
producer (video)**

**Paid social
media**

**Paid search
media**

*Depending on your org size, you might need multiple people doing these jobs.
I prefer flat team structures though - less hierarchy, more collaboration.*



But what about in-house vs outsourced?

Some specialist roles don't need full-time staff year-round:

Software dev, podcast/audio, paid search & ads, Google Grants, community management in S/M org

Outsource set-piece projects:

New website, major creative campaigns, email optimisation, new strategy, team upskilling

Why keep some skills in-house?

- Your team knows your org best
- Can be more efficient & cost-effective with the right budget
- Build internal knowledge and adaptability

Avoid big agencies:

- Use specialist freelancers or small digital agencies
- Benchmark ROAS performance (e.g. with M+R Rally) to ensure value



4

How big should my digital team be?

3

How many 'digital' people is enough?

10%*

*and think about AI in hiring



5

How do I future-proof my digital team?



The Three Pillars of Future-Ready Digital Teams

Charity Change Collective research with 60 sector leaders earlier this year, found these three areas were identified as **essential**, for building digital teams and organisations **for the future**:

1. **It's all about growth mindset**
2. **A user-centric and data-led culture**
3. **And seriously investing in learning**



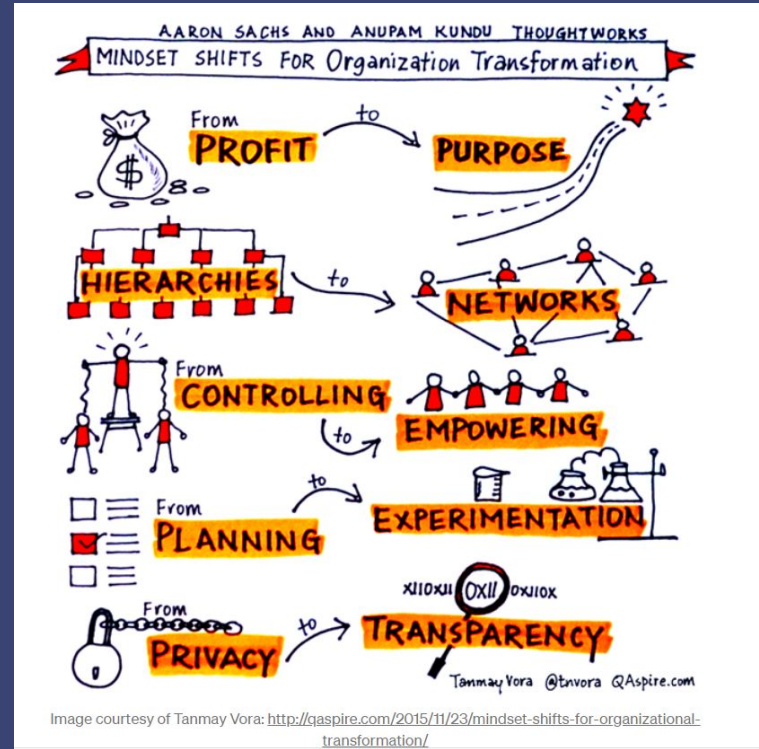
1. It's all about the growth mindset

"The biggest thing that I've seen time and time again, is about people with a growth mindset who are willing to try and learn new things. If you can recruit for that, you're probably okay. It's every time we've had that more fixed mindset, it's very difficult."

— Gemma Sherrington, CEO of Refuge

When **hiring**, prioritise **adaptability** over specific technical skills.

Technologies change, but the willingness to learn and evolve is what separates thriving teams from struggling ones.



2. Build a Culture of Adaptability

1. **User-centric:** Start with “How does this help our users/supporters?”
2. **Data-led:** Decisions based on evidence, not opinion
3. **Goal-oriented:** Clear, measurable targets for all
4. **Accountable:** Teams own outcomes and learn from failures
5. **Curious and open:** Test ideas, look for solutions — every experiment starts with a hypothesis

This isn't just for the digital team — everyone should feel confident using data and thinking about the user experience in their work (I'm looking at you finance 😏).



3. Invest in Learning & Development — Seriously

Pro athletes train 80–90% of the time VS In charities? It's the opposite. It shows

Digital moves fast. Skills from 2 years ago may already be out of date. If you're not learning, you're falling behind... plus

- Teams get frustrated
- Great people leave

The fix? Make learning part of your culture:

- Dedicate 20% of time to development
- Budget for courses, conferences, and certs
- Encourage experimentation and intelligent failure & share what you learn across the org
- Have communities of practice and internal learning sessions

→ Learning isn't time away from the work — it *is* the work.








Amnesty UK: A Case Study



Transforming Amnesty International UK's Digital Team

Initial Situation:

-  Team consistently missing ambitious targets - income especially + low morale
-  No additional resources available
-  Talented team bogged down in reactive work
-  Siloed working, poor information sharing
-  Too many unproductive meetings



10 steps that transformed the team and drove engagement & income (1-5)

- ✓ **Conducted a comprehensive audit** and listening exercise to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities.
- ✓ **Developed a clear digital vision**, supported by strategic pillars, priorities, and an accessible roadmap, ensuring cross-organisational alignment.
- ✓ **Agreed prioritised and quantified goals** across directorates (and directors) and led all decisions from these shared objectives.
- ✓ **Focused on ongoing optimisation**, using data-driven insights to continuously improve digital performance across key income-driving channels and platforms.
- ✓ **Created space and budget for innovation**, introducing new ideas, technologies, and approaches to engage audiences in fresh ways.



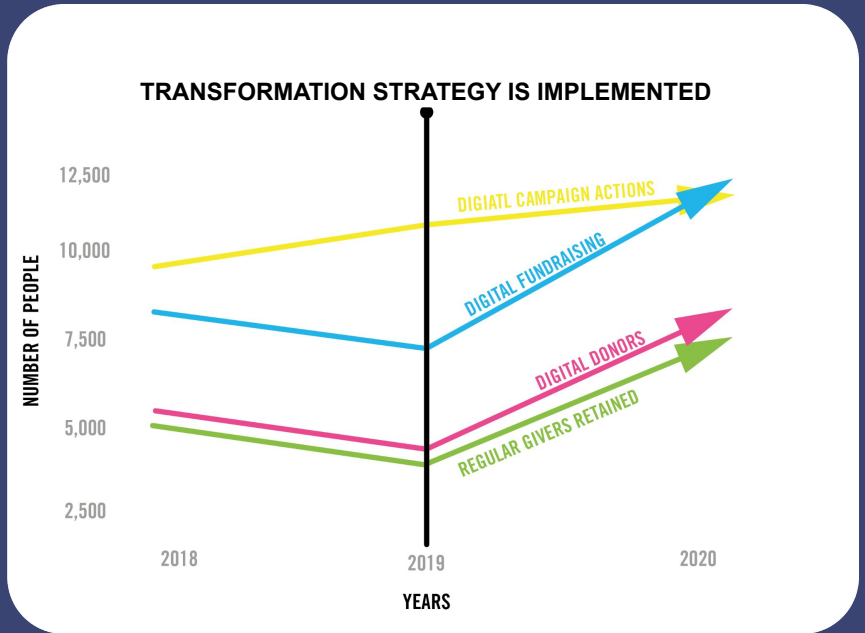
10 steps that transformed the team and drove engagement & income (5-10)

- ✓ **Introduced agile ways of working**, enabling *faster* delivery, testing, and iteration of digital initiatives — driving a mindset shift and breaking down silos.
- ✓ **Shifted from a reactive service function to a strategic, high-impact function** by introducing a triage briefing process.
- ✓ **Defined and communicated clear digital roles and remits** across the organisation, working closely with fundraising, policy, and campaigns teams to ensure digital efforts supported income and engagement goals.
- ✓ **Launched a digital upskilling and cross-learning programme** to build internal capability.
- ✓ **Moved to radical transparency**, ensuring everyone knew what and how we were doing, always, and why — proactively sharing plans to break down silos, create alignment, and reduce time spent fielding questions and requests about work already in progress.



The results

We turned a downward trajectory around



The feedback

“That was BEST digital fundraising year Amnesty has ever seen”

Rosie Chinchon, Director of Fundraising, Amnesty UK

“We’ve had more moments of celebration in the last 5 months than in my previous 3 years at Amnesty”







Libby Griffin-Carino, digital manager at Amnesty International UK



So what can you take away from this?



In Sum

-  Structure for your maturity: Centralise early, decentralise when you're ready.
-  Hire and develop T-shaped people: Deep expertise + broad skills = resilient, flexible teams.
-  Invest in learning: 20% of time should go to development. It pays off.
-  Prioritise adaptability: Hire for growth mindset, not just tech skills.
-  Use the 10% rule: 1 in 10 staff should have strong digital skills, more if digital does more.
-  Don't just build for now, build for what's next. Digital transformation isn't about tech. It's about people, culture, and how you work. Great tech doesn't matter, if your people can't or won't use it.. So remember to at least equally invest in our skills and culture.

This is what is what you need to adapt and thrive and raise millions with great digital.



The question *isn't*
"What technology should we prepare for?"

The question *is* "How do we build teams that
can adapt to whatever comes next?"





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Q&A



Another Case Study: Refuge



"Carmen transformed how we work: helping us be more agile, better grow and mobilise our supporters, diversify our digital channels to drive supporter and income growth. She developed our digital team structure and helped us hire a brilliant Head of Digital!"

Gabi Field, Director of Fundraising & Communication

The Challenge

Refuge wanted to grow their supporter base, digital fundraising and develop their mobilisation programme to increase the impact of their vital services.

Delivered

I developed and embedded their digital mobilisation and transformation strategy working with leadership and teams over a one year period.

Results

In the first year the programme attracted an additional 70,000 new supporters, who took 150,000 actions and raised over a quarter of a million pounds. A 53% increase from the same period the previous year for this project.

Refuge developed a digital function and hired their first digital leadership role, with my support.

Start small.

Have a plan.

Get buy-in.

Define success.

Prioritise. *Properly.*

Resource. *Properly.*

Measure. Report.

Learn & iterate.

Innovate. Fail fast.

Ask for help.

Use resources.

Celebrate!

And remember:

Change isn't possible without YOU

