

Who was it for?

A programme can connect every discipline, resolve every dependency and still produce something the public does not value.

I have watched programmes reach a point where the technology was sound, the risks had been considered, the operating impacts were known and the governance was active, yet no one could explain why users would change what they currently did or how the public would experience the benefit used to justify the investment.

Technology confirmed the system could do what was required. Risk identified the controls needed to manage the exposure. Operations explained that those controls would create work the frontline could not absorb. Finance confirmed there was no funding for another option.

Each view was reasonable. The programme still did not have an answer that worked for the people expected to use it.

The usual diagnosis is a failure of integration. The disciplines have not joined up, so another meeting is established, dependencies are documented or a programme layer is placed over the work. Those things can help. They make differences visible and give leaders a clearer view of where the parts do not fit.

Integration, however, solves only one part of the problem.

One gap appears between disciplines. The system is delivered, but the operating process is not ready. The policy is approved, but the controls do not work consistently. Several advisers provide sound recommendations, but no one resolves where they compete, overlap or depend on one another.

Another gap opens over time.

As a programme moves from defining the problem to building the solution, responsibility gradually shifts towards what can be delivered. The problem may have been defined by one group. Another designs and builds the solution. The intended benefit depends on users, operational teams or other organisations changing what they do.

The build gains a budget, a team, milestones, contracts and a reporting rhythm. The benefit remains an assumption in the business case.

Progress is then measured through delivery. Features are completed. Controls are implemented. Milestones are achieved. These measures are real, but they do not establish whether the original problem is being reduced or whether users value the result enough to change their behaviour.

A coherent solution can still be a solution nobody wants.



This distinction matters particularly in government because user behaviour does not provide the same market signal available to a private product.

A commercial product can test value through purchase, usage, renewal, churn and choice. Those signals are imperfect, but they expose whether people see enough value to continue.

Government operates under different conditions. Users may have no alternative provider. They may be required to use a service or continue through a poor process because the underlying outcome is essential. They may comply with a new requirement without accepting that it improves anything.

Government can and should test user sentiment through research, consultation, pilots, service data and direct engagement. What it cannot do is rely on purchase, choice or churn to expose weak value quickly.

Usage can therefore be mistaken for endorsement. Compliance can be mistaken for acceptance.

A service may be used at scale and still feel as though it has been done to the public rather than designed for them. The programme may meet its milestones, the service may be live and uptake may appear strong, while the intended public benefit remains uncertain.

Digital identity provides a useful example.

A digital credential can be technically sound, privacy conscious and consistent with the policy intent. Its value still depends on two separate decisions. Members of the public must see enough reason to obtain and use it, while the organisations relying on the credential must see enough reason to accept it.

Neither decision can be delivered by the technical build alone.

The credential may be available, but users continue relying on the existing process. Organisations retain their current checks because accepting the credential requires operational changes they cannot yet justify. The new capability then operates beside the old one, adding cost and complexity without materially improving the user experience or producing the public benefit used to justify the investment.

Low adoption may be treated as a communication or change-management problem. Sometimes that will be true. It can also be evidence that the solution was never held closely enough to what users and relying organisations actually valued.

This is the distinction that integration can hide. Integration can connect the disciplines, resolve dependencies and make the build coherent. It does not, by itself, keep the build connected to the benefit.

The connection is difficult to protect because public-sector responsibility is often fragmented by design. The agency that owns the policy problem may not build the service. The team delivering the technology may not operate it. The users whose behaviour determines whether the solution works may sit outside all of them.

Each group works under different mandates, budgets and timeframes. The delivery team has approved funding, a defined scope and regular reporting obligations. Users and the broader public rarely have the same organisational weight.

The solution therefore acquires momentum. The benefit does not.





This is not because the people involved have stopped caring about the outcome. They are responding rationally to the conditions around them. Governance asks for evidence of progress, and delivery provides evidence that is easier to see and report. It is simpler to demonstrate that a capability has been released than to show that it is useful, trusted and producing the outcome that justified the investment.

The build gradually becomes the point because the build is what the organisation has structured itself to govern.

Agencies are rarely short of governance in the committee sense. The missing element is not usually another forum. It is clear responsibility for protecting the benefit while there is still time to change the work.

Someone needs the standing to say that the solution may remain technically sound while moving away from the problem it was meant to solve. They need a practical way to bring that concern to the right decision-maker, challenge assumptions that no longer hold and recommend changes to scope, sequence or direction.

A steering committee may see that a programme is drifting, but it cannot correct that drift unless responsibility for the benefit is clear and the forum has a practical way to influence the build.

Holding the connection between the problem, the solution and the benefit over the full life of the programme requires context, independence and judgement. Delivery teams will often concentrate on what they have been funded and directed to build. Specialists will examine the issue through their own disciplines. Operational teams will focus on whether the result can be sustained.

Each perspective is necessary, but none automatically holds the whole arc.

What is often missing is a combination of independent assurance and orchestration.

Independent assurance, in this context, is not another review at the end of the programme or a check that the required process was followed. It provides an objective line of sight over whether the original problem, the solution being built and the intended public benefit remain connected, and whether the evidence still supports continuing in the same direction.

Orchestration brings together the users, specialists, operational knowledge, evidence and decisions required to maintain or restore that connection. It exposes competing assumptions and makes sure unresolved questions reach the people with authority while the work can still change.

These responsibilities do not require one person to replace the sponsor, delivery team or specialists. Where the capability does not exist internally, it may require a small, senior core that can remain close enough to understand the work, independent enough to challenge it and capable of bringing the necessary expertise together around the outcome.

This is the space Bearing & Course is designed to occupy.

The value is not another layer of advice or more people attached to the programme. It is independent judgement over the whole, supported by the orchestration required to keep the work connected to the public benefit it was meant to produce.





That model will not suit every piece of work. Some programmes need the scale of a large firm. Others need a single deep specialist. The issue is whether someone remains responsible for the connection between the original problem, the solution being built and the value expected by users and the public.

Before adding another adviser, workstream or governance forum, three questions are worth answering plainly.

What public benefit does this programme exist to produce, stated as an improvement users will recognise rather than as a deliverable?

Who owns that benefit from the original problem through to adoption, sustained use and the point at which the public should experience the improvement?

Who has the standing to stop or redirect the build when the evidence shows that users do not value the solution or the intended public benefit is no longer credible?

Producing an answer to each question is not enough. The benefit must be specific enough to test, ownership must continue beyond delivery and the person protecting it must have a practical way to influence the programme.

Government cannot treat use as proof of value. The real test is whether users experience the improvement the programme exists to create, and whether someone can change the work when the evidence says they do not. Without that, a coherent solution can still become something done to the public rather than for them.

