Tanya Filer:	Welcome to Tech States, our interview series at the Bennett Institute for Public Policy, that sets out to explore the complex, exciting, and at times concerning relationship between government, politics, and digital and new technologies. The uptake and usage of technology by any part of a state can reflect and often amplify that state's specific ambitions and desires for the future. That's why on Tech States we want to hear from public functionaries and those who work with governments in different countries and political systems, and occupying a variety of different roles.
Tanya Filer:	Today, I'm speaking to Tom Loosemore, co-founder of Public Digital, and previously co-founder with Mike Bracken of the UK government digital service. Tom's ideas have had traction well beyond the UK, making him one of the most prominent voices in digital government around the world. In our discussion, we talk about his recent essay on government as a platform, and we drill down into topics including the need for accountability in digital government, and the promises and perils of the globalization of digital government methods, products, and services. We also think about the relationship between government as a platform, and Govtech as an industry of the economy. We hope you enjoy the conversation.
Tanya Filer:	Hi Tom.
Tom Loosemore:	Hello, hello Tanya, how are you?
Tanya Filer:	Good thank you, how are you?
Tom Loosemore:	Yeah, I'm good, I'm looking forward to this.
Tanya Filer:	Good, it's lovely to be here in the offices of Public Digital. For our listeners who don't know what Public Digital is, do you want to introduce it a little bit?
Tom Loosemore:	Sure. We're a small consultancy that helps governments and other large institutions adapt to the internet era. We like to say we add value by adding values.
Tanya Filer:	And in a way, I think we can see Public Digital as an iteration of your longer thinking and practice of digital government. And I was wondering if we could start perhaps with an earlier iteration of it, and go back to the early 2000s, a trip down memory lane perhaps? So, many of our listeners might know you as one of the co-founders of the UK Government Digital Service, or GDS. But actually, about a decade before then, you were writing about a need for something like GDS, or at least a need for transformation in government. And you wrote an article in the New Statesman with Mike Bracken, with your co-founder, which you called a Modest Proposal. And it was about a need for transformation in government.

Tanya Filer:	And while it was definitely about technology, a lot of it was also about culture. And that was really phrased in quite deliberate ways. You talked about music, and clothes, and language. And some of it was a bit tongue-in-cheek, but I think there was a really serious point there. So I'm wondering if you can tell us about what inspired you at that time, so it was just around the dot com bubble, just before it burst really, why it felt at that moment important to speak publicly about a need for a cultural transformation in government?
Tom Loosemore:	Sure, I think it was 2001. So you're right, it was just before the bubble burst. Both Mike and I had by that point spent six or seven years doing internet stuff, primarily in the private sector, although I'd done quite a bit of stuff at the BBC. But we'd also started to engage our civic brains, and from about 1998 onwards, we were part of a broader group of people who actually went on to find my society, the Civic Tech Charity, who were looking to use the new capabilities of the internet to improve the health of our democracy and the performance of our government.
Tom Loosemore:	And we did that from outside in, so we made it much easier for you to find out who your MP was, and send them a message. Fax your MP, the only way you could contact them in those days was faxes. Later on we built theyworkforyou.com, to make it easier to understand what your representative does in your name. But throughout that period, we started to get a much better sense of what the root cause problems were in how government thought about technology more broadly, and the internet more specifically. And realized there was a fundamental cultural chasm, a category error almost, between how the internet era companies that Mike and I had both been technology journalists in the mid-90's, that we knew intimately and had been part of, and that culture of how you do things, the internet way, versus how the government was thinking about how you made great services.
Tom Loosemore:	Bluntly, the government thought you would buy services from a large supplier, like you would buy a motorway. Whereas when you enter to the Google's of this world, it was a much more humble, organic, design thinking, user centered view, with much smaller teams. Much, much lower budgets. [inaudible 00:04:58] lower budgets. But highly motivated, highly talented, diverse, relatively diverse groups of people compared to men in suits. Focused on really understanding what the problems are citizens have, users have, and iteratively humbly not pretending they knew what the answer was, but iterating their way towards an ever better answer, hopefully.
Tom Loosemore:	So, we realized that wasn't really about technology at all, it's about how the senior civil servant, and ministers and senior politicians understood the potential of what the prize was, and how big the change needed to be. And by 2001, both Mike and I had spent enough time with ministers of different flavors, shadow ministers in many cases as well, to know that there was the beginning of a receptive audience for that.

Tom Loosemore:	The NHS IT debacle hadn't happened yet, but there had been enough already for senior politicians to start asking questions around the approach that procurement led big IT approach, that had been utterly dominant.
Tanya Filer:	Part of what you were doing was writing as a way of beginning that thought process, and setting out those ideas. And it's something you've really continued to do up until now, which brings us ... we'll come back to what happened in the middle, but that brings us to this year, where you've written a new essay, which is about the idea of government as a platform. And I'm wondering if you can set out for some of our listeners who maybe don't know what government as a platform is, what your vision of it is? There are various different definitions of what government as a platform is, but I think underlying all of them is this idea that it's a vision for the future of government. So, what's your vision of that future?
Tom Loosemore:	Well it's not mine, it's Richard Pope's.
Tanya Filer:	Okay.
Tom Loosemore:	I should say that, it's as much anyone's as it is mine, that's for sure. And actually the thinking is about three years old to be fair, we've just only really now got around to writing it up, which is a bit of a testament. So, in answer to your question specifically, when you look at organizations that are native to the internet era, that were born of this era, where information does not need to be restricted to one department. Where one capability that's been developed, maybe paying money in or out of an organization. Maybe it's registering as a user. It's just obvious that all different parts of that business, or that organization would use that common capability.
Tom Loosemore:	But also, and I'm thinking specifically of the Amazons of this world, why not allow third parties to access those capabilities? To with the appropriate consent, to create an ecosystem. To fertilize the fields of the possible, like Amazon has done with Amazon Web Services. It's profitable for them, but why wouldn't governments think that way too?
Tom Loosemore:	It's nearly half of GDP, or more in some cases in many governments around the world. Actually government is brilliantly positioned, and has traditionally played that role. If you look at things like registers of land, you have the transport system in the UK, they are fundamentally platforms for a broader ecosystem of both profit and non-profit third sector. And government's own purposes too.
Tom Loosemore:	So that thinking that the government should play an active and deliberate role in creating possibilities for other people to build on top of. Both public services built by other people, but private sector services that are unimaginable, rather than just living in the world of silo's and departmental silo's which only deliver the very narrow service that they're setup to do.

Tom Loosemore:	That's the fundamental idea, is that you change the shape of government, that is now possible thanks to the internet, thanks to digital technologies becoming commoditized and cheap. And what we've learnt over the last 30, 40, 50 years about digital data. To unlock a whole new possibility of simpler, faster, cheaper, more empathetic public services. But also, and this is almost the bigger idea, actually be a catalyst, a fertilizer, an enabler of an almost unimaginable ecosystem of new services, new possibilities in the third sector, in the private sector, well beyond government.
Tanya Filer:	Yeah, it's a really interesting developing arena, and I definitely want to come back to the idea of Govtech as a sector, or an ecosystem.
Tanya Filer:	So, between 2001 and 2018, or perhaps 2015 when these ideas were really coming together, you were working for some of that period in GDS, in government. And I'm wondering how much of your thinking that we see in this essay written this year was already there, already in place before you got to GDS, and how much of it was really a development of being in government, and seeing the challenges there, and understanding the politics of digitizing government?
Tom Loosemore:	Some of it was very obvious, and I did some of this in the BBC. Let's have one search engine, let's have one database to register. The sort of technological view of government as a platform, which is an important idea, but quite a small idea in the grand scheme of things. That was fully formed. I've done that in the BBC. It was very painful, the politics of herding federated cats. Mike had done it in the Guardian. We knew that was a thing. What I don't think we knew was quite how strong the institutional resistance would be to the changes in shape and accountability needed to allow that, despite having experienced them in other federated organizations like the BBC.
Tom Loosemore:	The level of departmental sovereignty, or claims of departmental sovereignty, even though departments can be destroyed tomorrow with a swipe of the Prime Minister's pen, is quite astounding. And a huge problem in the UK long term, that perm sec's think they're sovereign, and their job is to protect their department. That is a big problem, and I hadn't fully perceived how deep that culture lay, where the power really lies. Ministers are here today, gone tomorrow. A perm sec's job is to protect their department. Wow, that's a problem.
Tom Loosemore:	I think the second area, which I was definitely borderline naïve about, are the downsides. Thinking really clear around okay, if you adopt this model, it gives potential for power to be aggregated, and accumulated, that are just impossible in a less efficient, less modern institutional architecture. And you have to very deliberately watch out for abuses of power, and design in from day one institutional checks and balances, technological checks and balances. But more importantly accountability, deep into the institutional architecture of a government as a platform.

Tom Loosemore:	You know, if it was going to be rather ill informedly critical of Estonia, which is the closest to this model, I'm not fully sure they did that when they designed their institutional architecture. And I wouldn't say this, but I think if I was an Estonian, I might worry occasionally that the technology and the institutional architecture supporting the technology deployed in Estonia might make it easier for a future dictator than they would like it to be in an ideal world.
Tanya Filer:	So, you talk about the need for an independent regulator who maybe is reporting to parliament, as you say. And I'm wondering what you think the profile of individuals who would take on that role would look like? Who do we need to be fulfilling that position?
Tom Loosemore:	That's a great question. Actually, it needs to be people who deeply understand how data can be aggregated, and data can be targeted in such a way that undermines ...

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Tom Loosemore:	... in such a way that undermines people's rights as citizens, actually undermines maybe the legitimacy of government, and as a trust, but also at the same time deeply understands the real politic of a government and don't glue everything up to the point of it being ridiculous.
Tom Loosemore:	If we could claim Martha Lane Fox a million times, you know, one of those would do, we're going to have some more women regulating us, but it needs to be someone who's valued and native to this era really, and whose understanding is profound. It's still a disappointment to me in the senior levels of the civil service how few people I could point to who could do that, and that's disappointing.
Tanya Filer:	In the essay you talk about a need to be bold, but also to have political capital.
Tom Loosemore:	I think in order to be bold you need political capital, otherwise you won't be as a politician. Francis Maude with GDS was this, he had political capital, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to force through the changes that were needed on the status quo, which is not a political status quo with a big B, it is the bureaucracy of the permanent civil service's inertia. You need that political capital to be bold to change the shape of that.
Tanya Filer:	What about then building, I guess a broader based kind of political capital, because I think you're right, there are certain visionaries who absolutely will give you political capital while they're in office, but I think there's also a need for a kind of broader based insurgent culture across government, across civil service. How do you build that kind of capital while also pursuing a bold vision?
Tom Loosemore:	I mean, to be honest, that capital is latent in the mid levels of the UK civil service. Now, I'm very hopeful about the UK civil service in 15 years time. I think

the ideas that were popularized by GDS, they weren't created by GDS, have landed deeply in the minds of a generation of civil servants who are going to lead it in 15 years time.

Tom Loosemore: This slightly comes on to what the role of the center is in driving forward some of the changes that are needed. Bluntly, I don't think the civil service will reform itself, okay, with this generation of leaders or the next, I'm afraid. That's partly Brexit, that's an easy excuse, but not really, it's about the culture that formed these individuals that are in senior leadership positions, and the values that they had to adopt to succeed in that environment.

Tom Loosemore: They are all about sovereignty of the department, bluntly. That's going to take some time to change during that era, for the next 10 years will require external political ministerial capital to be spent.

Tom Loosemore: Meanwhile, there's really great stuff happening slightly lower down, despite the architecture that constrains the possible, at the moment. I think one of the wonderful things that Stephen Foreshew-Cain did in his unfortunately short tenure running GDS, was adopt a mindset of, we've got your back. So the center's job is to protect and enable those in departments at mid and lower levels trying to do the right thing.

Tom Loosemore: I used that example repeatedly with other governments around the world saying, "That the role of the center isn't, initially you have to disrupt." I think that's nearly always in the ... some degree of that, not always, but actually that's the easy bit. The hard bit is pivoting to be an enabler of the center, of good stuff happening under the radar, or whatever, despite the architecture and the culture not supporting that and that requires real bravery.

Tanya Filer: You talked at the beginning about Google back in the day, let's say, as being humble and relatively diverse. I don't think those are words that would immediately be associated with Google today. How do you then bring about some of the changes that you've just been talking about in a sustainable way, because what you are saying is that we need humility, we need diversity to produce these differences in government. Whether we have enough of it yet is I think a question still on the table, but how do you do this in a sustainable way, because if we're taking Google as a comparison, as it's grown, it's been difficult to keep hold of those kinds of features?

Tom Loosemore: I remember going to see Google the late ... 18 months in, in 2000, and again in 2001 I went to see them, and they were humble, all about understanding the needs of users and keeping things simple for people. The person running the product was a woman, wasn't as bad as most bits of government, things changed, and a level of hubris and a level of deep sort of West Coast, male dominated [inaudible 00:16:23] culture has infected the place, to some degree.

Tom Loosemore:	I think as an organization grows keeping culture pointed in the right direction is incredibly hard, and if you grow up at that pace. Growing at pace is not a problem government has in terms of ... in fact, it's likely to be the opposite problem, generally.
Tanya Filer:	Yeah, it's true.
Tom Loosemore:	What I do think is, how do you bring people along with you that are not going anywhere, career civil servants who have been educated with a little e, about not taking risks, about covering their back, about doing what the last person did because you won't get fired for that?
Tom Loosemore:	Keeping that culture, being bold but sympathetic to bringing people with you, that's the challenge of large legacy organizations. I don't mean legacy pejoratively, but large organizations that have been around a long time, that aren't growing massively. Now, that's a very different challenge and can equally go wrong.
Tom Loosemore:	You know I wrote when I left government in 2015, "I've done my time," and that's because I know what kind of person I am. I am a change agent. I am relatively disruptive. I like that, sorry. 2015 didn't need that. The government didn't need a me, it needed a Stephen Foreshew-Cain, who's a very different kind of leader, that's all around, "How do I help and support what's already happening? How do I stop being so, in some ways potentially disruptive in ways that are perceived as a threat and start to bring a much broader range of people along the journey," maybe more slowly than I would like or tolerate. So that's the challenge really is that kind of cultural movement, shifting from being specks of light, being much broader based.
Tanya Filer:	Yeah. I want to think a bit more about this culture change that I mention and think about it's kind of practical aspects, because government as a platform is really about in large infrastructural change, the kind of horizontality of it. As you were saying, we often talk about governments as being risk averse, which I think is true or perhaps overly risk averse, but at the end of the day, government does still have a responsibility to provide stability, especially when serving vulnerable populations. How can it find this balance of radical innovation, but at the same time providing that stability?
Tom Loosemore:	That's a really interesting strawman. I'm going to use a pejorative term there deliberately-
Tanya Filer:	Go for it.
Tom Loosemore:	... because it's fundamentally a strawman because it starts with a premise that everything's fine at the moment and it's risky to change it. Everything's so not fine at the moment, there's bits of string and sticky tape. There are services that are just about staying alive, there's data that's not secure. It's an absolute

cornucopia of mess, to coin a not very elegant phrase. Doing nothing has far more risk than doing things very differently the right way.

Tom Loosemore: I think we have some evidence of this. The threat environment we're working within, I think it always was risky, but the realization of just how much risk there is out there that we're carrying today from a national security perspective, from the nation state and the proxies of the nation state attacking infrastructure and data that was built in the 1960s, pre-internet, that is not to be underestimated, and that gets greater every month that passes and doing nothing is the bolt.

Tanya Filer: I think that also comes back to the question that you mentioned earlier, but is also one of the questions you kind of leave the reader with at the end of the essays, which is what happens if you have this kind of system and it gets into the hands of a dictator who might like to use this kind of system for nefarious purposes, let's say, have you had time to think about any answers to the question?

Tom Loosemore: I mean, don't get a dictator. I mean, I think the giving citizens as part of this true control over their data, to opt out, even at the cost of their inconvenience, massive inconvenience. That has to be for me, a sort of fundamental safety valve. It's kind of like a big red individual personal button, "I'm going to be able to delete things."

Tom Loosemore: Now, that may not work in practice, and I think the more pressing need is actually to educate our political classes with a big and little Ps, as to the power that resides in aggregations of data. Accelerating that is the best protection, I think that we can look to. There's a bit of me says in 30 years this is going to be less of a risk because the awareness of the possibilities of aggregating in data and how much power that gives people, Facebook have shown, as you know, arguably by accident, just how much power resides in aggregated data.

Tom Loosemore: Healthy democracy will accommodate that risk and deal with it. I don't think there's a technological answer. I mean, I think the whole blockchain nonsense is risible, really in terms of technology can solve these problems, they are fundamentally around accountability and democracy, and protection of people's rights.

Tom Loosemore: Let's be clear, there's some very interesting technology that is going to be very useful embedded within blockchain. Merkle tree cryptography, the ability to provably amend or have immutable data that's provably immutable is interesting, and these uses are going to be very boring.

Tom Loosemore: The downside risks are huge. Of course, you have everyone's personal data on a blockchain. on an immutable append only record, and if there's a mistake, well you correct it. You kind of go, "Yeah, that's fine," unless you're a battered wife whose husband's found you and killed you, you can correct it, but she's dead. Well, you've got a witness protection scheme or national security.

Tom Loosemore:	Part of this comes from me having seen this so many times before as a tech journalist in the mid '90s, it's just the latest way, but don't underestimate how much the interesting, boring stuff will happen with the underpinning technology, I don't think we've necessarily seen that phase yet.
Tanya Filer:	Yeah. I think this brings us onto the relationship really between Govtech, so that's an industry or ecosystem where startups and SMEs try to provide services and products to government, and government as a platform, so the relationship between the two of them. I think there are different ways to think about it actually because on the one hand, government as a platform could provide the infrastructure for GovTech companies to be able to serve government, and to perhaps move away from a model of using always larger technology companies.
Tanya Filer:	On the other hand, I do think they come from slightly different visions. So government as a platform in its initial kind of version, at least in the UK, was very much about reform from within, and also cost cutting. Govtech as an industry is also about economic growth, and so the global Govtech market is typically spoken of as worth 400 billion annually, and countries who are developing Govtech programs and policies are very much pushing this angle as well.
Tanya Filer:	You know, it's not just about innovation for the domestic public sector, it's also about creating an industry that will contribute to economic growth through selling products and services to other countries as well. So I can see how there's potentially also a bit of tension here between these two ideas. How do you perceive the relationship between the two?
Tom Loosemore:	I think there are two very different angles here. One is, what range of suppliers do you want that government can buy products and services from? I would argue you want as diverse a group as possible, and actually if you can stimulate that diversity and strength of those companies providing services to government, for government then to offer to the public, if they can go global with that, bring it on.
Tom Loosemore:	I think Digital Marketplace in the UK has provided the opportunity for some SMEs in the UK to start to go global, and that's brilliant, and I've no problems with that at all, but that's actually a [inaudible 00:11:52], actually, not that interesting in the grand scheme of things. Not that dangerous politically. If you look at what a lot of GovTech programs are doing ...

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| Tom Loosemore: | If you look at what a lot of Govtech programs are doing, however, they're blurring that kind of activity with something very different, which is the privatization of public services. It's the Babylons, to take a UK example, whereby actually you're taking the government as a platform possibility and saying, "Brilliant, the private sector can provide public services now." We're done, in an |

implicit small state, minimal state politics, under the guise of economic growth. It's an insert exclusion here, insert cherry picking. What about accountability? None of these questions are being asked at all. At all, at all. And I think that actually applies in the UK as much as any other area.

Tom Loosemore: I don't have a problem at all with governments in the right way encouraging their services to be offered through private sector bits of software and products and services, enabled by government as a platform thinking, as long as the accountability is clear and the risks to people's rights are managed, and trust is managed really well. I think actually HMRC, the tax authority in the UK, has been doing this for nearly 20 years with accountancy software providers. And actually has a very mature, sophisticated process for auditing and checking that those software providers are doing the right thing. And HMRC kind of stand behind them.

Tom Loosemore: And accountability is really clear, is something goes wrong, a treasury minister will be hauled in front of parliament and shouted at. If say [inaudible 00:25:28] do something terrible, I don't think that thinking has even begun to permeate broadly around the ecosystem of gov-tech that's about supplanting government services.

Tom Loosemore: I look at services like Babylon, and I can't deny I worry. I worry. Not because they're not interesting, they are. And I'd be a great customer of them. But, apart from the fact that they'll cherry pick easy to serve citizens, I wonder about accountability. Have we really thought about the bad things that could happen, and collectively designed our way to manage those risks? I'm not sure we have.

Tom Loosemore: What I would say is the prize of government as a platform in terms of services is well beyond public services however. If we were to have say a really great part of the government as a platform would be a single address register for the UK. Every single business in the country would use it. Every single charity in the country would use it. Why wouldn't they? And this is where Estonia's got it right, they recognize that it's not just about the provision of public services, it's the role of the public about providing infrastructure to a nation, where the infrastructure is made of data, not of things.

Tom Loosemore: That's really powerful, and if you get the accountability right on that as well, it's a good trust improving, accountability improving, democratic engagement improvement thing to have done.

Tanya Filer: I think this accountability dimension is even more important because this area is so international, actually. If you compare it to any other policy area, let's say whether that's economics, or education, I think there's much more idea sharing, code sharing, lesson sharing in digital government than many, many other areas. And I think that this kind of globalization of digital government methods and language and products and services definitely serves efficiency, and it could prove cost effective, because it avoids reinventing the wheel. But it does mean

that there's an additional criticality of the ethical and governance decisions upon which they're premised.

Tanya Filer: And I'm wondering, in your experience working with governments around the world, the extent to which there is thinking about this area, perhaps more so in other countries than here?

Tom Loosemore: I think there is an emerging movement, a sort of internet era government movement. Still emerging, and it's not the dominant one. The dominant force in provision of technologically enabled government is the 1990's big IT kind of model, by miles. And the values and the ethics baked into that are not often bought to the surface enough.

Tom Loosemore: We already have a problem, we just don't see it. What I like about the nascent but emerging digital government movement, where digital is ... the practices of the internet and the culture of the internet era, is there is a recognition of the downsides of technology, not just the upsides. The people who tend to be attracted to it, I think are interested in notions of accountability. And that's getting much greater as the evidence from the Facebook's of this world, of the power that accrues from doing it. And with great power comes great responsibility, blah, blah, blah.

Tom Loosemore: There is also in that movement a bias to be open. You make things open, you make things better. And a really interesting culture of sharing mistakes. There's some trust. In part that comes to the fact that the internet has just made it easier for us to communicate, like I jump on a video call with Nova Scotia, and bring them into the conversation with Argentina and Peru. And do that for free, and it takes two minutes.

Tanya Filer: And the people working in this area are open to doing that, and able to do that perhaps more so than policy makers and others working in other parts of government.

Tom Loosemore: There's an expectation that that's normal. And I think that'll come to other areas, I think that's just the environment you're in. If those tools just become normalized, and they are outside of work, if they become normalized inside work, practices will change.

Tom Loosemore: But I think there's a sort of layer of ... it comes from the open source, open standards movements really, where a rising tide lifts all boats. So, treating your knowledge as something that you lock away, rather than how can you learn from other people, and gift to other people, and pay it forward? And that open source culture has won on the internet. Counterintuitively economically, it was the openness that beat proprietary. I think that culture runs pretty deep within the digital government people, in a way that maybe it doesn't naturally within some other professions, or from other areas.

Tanya Filer:	I think that's right. It is interesting, because there's almost a sense of two different models of digital government being globalized at the same time, because on the other hand, in parallel, we see China is said to be exporting its model of digital government, along the so called digital silk road, but also further afield. So, digital government in a sense, in its many iterations, is almost becoming a form of soft power.
Tom Loosemore:	Absolutely. China is overtaking the Valley in terms of leading in this stuff, unequivocally. And the political ambitions of a new [inaudible 00:30:20], they're not hard to spot. And you know, the values that are baked into that kind of digital government are ones that are appealing to certain types of political leaders. Maybe not ones I want to associate with. And there are countries we don't work with. So, it is a bit of a competitive race. The heartening thing for me is the notion of digital government as soft power was something ... to the credit of the Foreign Office, they picked up on that really quickly in the early days of GDS. And hopefully continue to do so, that this is an opportunity for the UK to provide some thought leadership, and ergo some soft power.
Tom Loosemore:	Certainly I've talked to a couple of countries where the appeal of the China model is one of pure efficiency. And they definitely hadn't thought through the consequences.
Tanya Filer:	Yeah, I think it can be seen as a more technocratic agenda, rather than necessarily an authoritarian one.
Tom Loosemore:	Completely. And I'm going to be mildly critical of some global institutions now, around things like identity, and purchasing particular forms of understanding identity. Or who owns identity? Do you have a single identity scheme? I think that's been viewed as a very technocratic initiative to be supportive. Of course it's a good idea. Not at all is it a good idea. Not at all. It might be, but not for technocratic reasons.
Tom Loosemore:	And the downsides I think have been massively under thought about. That's the tension really, the technocratic versus the accountability.
Tanya Filer:	So, this segues into my penultimate question, which is why it matters that you write about this stuff. You don't just do it, you also write about it.
Tom Loosemore:	First of all, if you don't write things down, you don't really understand them clearly. Secondly, it makes things open, it makes things better. The feedback you get is brilliant, and the people throwing rocks at you is brilliant, because they're often rocks that you've deserved. But it's also the fact that you are getting ideas out there. The written word is brilliant at it. And actually in the essay there's tons of pictures and diagrams too, and they're important, and the videos as well, so it's not just the writing. But it's the communicating ideas in accessible ways that we put a lot of effort into ... really a huge amount of effort into

writing simply, and into doing the hard work to make it simple. And I think too few people do.

Tom Loosemore: I mean I'm an ex-journalist, I always rely on people that write far better than I ever will to edit my stuff. The amount of editing that goes on to stuff we produce now, and produced when we were at GDS, was huge. And the Giles Turnbull's of this world, who are amazing editors, too few countries recognize that importance of words, and the simplicity of words. And I think it's critical, absolutely critical.

Tanya Filer: So, to end, I want to ask about what our students should know. At the Bennett Institute for Public Policy, we have many students who want to go into work at the intersection of government and technology. What do you think are the key things that they need to know as they move into this space at the beginning of their professional careers?

Tom Loosemore: Okay, I'm going to start with the thing that sounds like a joke, but not. But they should go to Ross Anderson's classes on cyber security. And if they've not been to all those classes, and an aspect of that course, they are leaving naked. Cyber security is so important, and it's not about putting fences around things.

Tom Loosemore: Secondly, I think they need to understand the notion of humble iteration. That you start within a policy intent, and you now, in this era, can, should, and must iterate your way to the least bad solution to meeting that policy intent. So, stripping away that you're clever, and you're chosen, and you'll come up with the answer in a room with other clever chosen people. And that will be the answer, and aren't you brilliant. No, you're not problem, you are dangerous, actively dangerous. The skills you need are ones of understanding what clarity of intent, can you get the intent from the minister? Can they express it clearly in clear language? And can you then bring together the right kind of team with diversity of perspective to design a first version of a service, put in front of real users, get it wrong, no how to iterate it to improve it. Keep iterating, and build a culture and a community of constant improvement, constant iteration.

Tom Loosemore: That's a very different kind of serve and leadership than the traditional ivory tower one. And I've had it with clever people in an academic clever sense. I've just had it, you know, I don't care what degree you go. I care can you work in a team, can you bring that humility to bear? Can you recognize when you've got things wrong, and respond quickly and appropriately to it? Can you build a culture where failure is embraced quickly? They're the hard skills, they're the skills that really, really matter.

Tanya Filer: The need for humility and iteration I think have punctuated the whole conversation, so that's a great note to end on. Thank you so much.

Tom Loosemore: Thank you.

PART 3 OF 3 ENDS [00:35:07]