

Strategy Team
eGovernment Unit
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2 February 2006

Dear Sir,

Comments on Transformational Government – Enabled by Technology

I am writing to make a few comments on the above strategy.

1. We wholeheartedly support the strategy and particularly the intent to design services around citizens and businesses.
2. We would prefer to see the customer first, and technology second, and are therefore concerned that the strategy risks placing the cart before the horse.
3. We believe that more can be done to improve public services for citizens and businesses by using existing, well-established technologies developed around customer-designed services than by looking for opportunities to deploy new and exciting technologies (solutions in search of problems). This does not mean one must not use new technologies; it simply means one must ensure the first priority is to place customers at the centre.
4. Customer-centricity is a powerful force but difficult to spot! It is our experience of working in government that few truly understand customer-centricity. For this reason, our response focuses on how to embed customer-centricity into a project.

We do not wish to request our response remains confidential.

If you would like to discuss any of the points made in the attached note, please feel free to ask, we would be happy to explain our views, or provide further detail if required.

Yours sincerely

Paul Simpson
Director

Comments on Transformational Government – Enabled by Technology

"... put the parent and pupil and patient and law-abiding citizen at the centre of it."

Prime Minister – 9 July 2005

Introduction

We welcome the strategy which, as noted in the Prime Minister's foreword, is bold and has the potential for real transformation of public services. Both are required; without boldness, transformation cannot be achieved.

We strongly believe, however, that the "boldness" required is not about heavy expenditure or the pursuit of a new technological solution (especially if developed in advance of the problem). The boldness required is a cultural shift which must encompass policymakers as well as public service providers. This is an uncomfortable place and unfamiliar territory for government.

This is the central thesis of our response.

Our response – in a nutshell

1. We wholeheartedly support the strategy and particularly the intent to design services around citizens and businesses.
2. We would prefer to see the customer first, and technology second, and are therefore concerned that the strategy risks placing the cart before the horse.
3. The cultural shift towards the customer must cover policymakers as well as service providers, and requires adequate funding.
4. We believe that more can be done to improve public services for citizens and businesses by using existing, well-established technologies developed around customer-designed services than by looking for opportunities to deploy new and exciting technologies (solutions in search of problems). This does not mean one must not use new technologies; it simply means ensure the first priority is to place customers at the centre.
5. Customer-centricity is a powerful force but difficult to spot! It is our experience of working in government that few truly understand customer-centricity.

For these reasons, we believe that the greatest risk to the strategy is from not putting enough commitment and expertise into developing services around the customer. Our response therefore focuses on how to embed customer-centricity into a project.

Comments on the strategy

1. The strategy, and background papers, represents an impressive body of work.
 - The *vision* appeals and provides helpful direction (paras. 4 – 9)
 - We agree with assessment of the *current position* (paras. 10. – 20.)
 - The strategy and the *three transformations* are spot on (para. 21)

2. In short, we agree with the lion's share of the paper and feel the time is right. Having risen to the Prime Minister's challenge to try to get 100% of services online by 2005, a new agenda is required; this is it.

3. The greatest challenge lies in successful delivery – this is not to be underestimated. Success relies more on readiness to adopt customer-centricity than in our collective ability to deliver technology projects. The priority order is 1) design a service for the customer, and 2), design technical solution(s). Technology must be the servant, not the master.

4. The cultural shift towards the customer must cover policymakers as well as service providers, requires proper funding and senior buy-in from key departments. For example, seed-corn funding will be required in the early design and development of prototypes, which should only be subject to business case scrutiny once successfully through the prototyping stage.

5. The key actions defined in *citizen and business centred services* (paras. 22 to 38) are reasonable, but alone are insufficient. Further actions are required to ensure the customer stays at the centre. Our recommended actions are outlined in the following section.

6. The remaining sections on strategy, namely *shared services, professionalism, leadership and governance, portfolio management, IT profession in government, reliable project delivery, supplier management* and *innovation* are difficult to argue with but require more specific actions, a clearer view of what success looks like and a common view on best practice.

7. The timetable for change looks slow. We believe that a greater impact and faster roll-out could be achieved if one can demonstrate some early successes in prototype development so as to build momentum across government.

8. Few people understand customer-centricity; in our experience too few people working in government "get it"¹. More dangerously, many working in government think they get it, but don't. The section below offers our insight into how to embed customer-centricity in the design and delivery of new service offerings.

¹ Customer-centricity is an unfamiliar game for government, perhaps because so many are charged with a policy-making or enforcement role.

Putting the customer at the centre - keeping the horse before the cart

The following recommendations seek to answer the question ...what does it mean, and how will I know, if a project is putting customers at the centre?

1. **Customer projects** - Think of projects as "customer projects" not IT projects. If the customer offer is not right, if it does not satisfy needs, no amount of technology or effective project management can compensate.
2. **Understand customers' needs** - This is one danger area² - it is difficult to distinguish between those who talk a good game and those who play a good game.
 - Do customer research first (before one has scoped or centred the proposed service, certainly before one has chosen technologies).
 - Research can include a sweep of all existing desk research, but must involve real customers early on in the design process. Start research within weeks, possibly even days of commencement, start when it's uncomfortably early; then allow the customers to (re)design the service.
 - Talk to front-line staff; they know the customer better than any policy-maker, manager, researcher or consultant.
 - Understand your customers (segments) – use any techniques to get an insight into what customers think, want, like and dislike. Developing a few fictional personas is a simple approach that is easy, inexpensive and effective.
 - Test, test, test with customers (and respond to what you hear).
3. **Review competitor examples** – look at other countries' public services for ideas. Nothing is new. Energy invested in competitor research is usually well-rewarded.
4. **Design and development of service offering** – this is another danger area. The trick is to get clear as early as possible what problem the service is seeking to solve.
 - Take care to include a consideration of all delivery channels in developing solutions, most successful services will be multi-channel services.
 - Allow yourself the freedom to iterate, but do not allow freedom to do it slowly. At the incubation stage, ideas will need protection from predation; limit exposure to criticism or go / no-go gate reviews.
 - Allow great latitude about the nature of the service, but allow little flexibility about how long it takes to identify an outline of the offering. If it takes longer than a few months, it's too hard and time would be better spent in another area.
 - Ensure that proposed new services are better than existing services across at least one service dimension (e.g. speed, ease of access, convenience, confidence, cost etc.)

² Danger areas are where we fear many people "talk" customer without truly understanding what it means (whether they realise it or not).

- Complete a thorough review of all related business processes, across all existing and potential delivery channels (post, phone, online, email, F2F, publications etc.) before deciding the role for new technologies.
 - Avoid complexity. Keep it simple even if it means limiting customer choice. Do not assume choice is good, nor assume customers need choice.
5. **Choose the right approach (to build momentum)** – it is important to choose the right initial projects to serve as exemplars.
- Bring ideas to life using prototypes - in new radical situations as is proposed in the strategy, it would be enormously helpful to choose one or two areas, assign a small team to each and develop prototypes to convey the service offering. Ideas need proper seed-corn funding and protecting until prototype stage at which point, they must be able to make their case.
 - Criteria for assessing exemplar projects should include:
 - Poorly served customers / events - it is easier to improve a mess than improve upon a service that already functions well (e.g. VAT online found it difficult to improve upon the existing simple one-page return).
 - Events / services cutting across many departments - typically, these coincide with poorly served customers.
 - New services which do not require a change of customer behaviour - encouraging changing behaviour can be frustratingly difficult. Of course, in time, success demands behavioural changes, but for exemplar services, it would be wise to choose a segment like the bereaved whose need is acute, not chronic.
6. **Stay in scope** – ruthlessly avoid extending the service offering into new areas. This was the downfall of many government web-sites, as well-meaning departments decided to extend their site’s content beyond the scope of their core responsibilities. The resulting proliferation of sites and web-content remains a legacy that citizens and businesses still battle regularly. We call it the “while we here let’s provide some helpful content on pensions” syndrome.
7. **Small team, powerful leaders** - breakthrough initiatives are only ever created by small dedicated teams. Powerful leadership is required as, to be fully effective, new services must push back and drive change within departments. Immerse the team in the challenge and in the customer. Demand every team-member sees at least one customer every month.
8. **Centre of excellence** – Establish a centre of excellence:
- to identify and promote emerging best practice
 - to gather and share learning
9. **Beyond launch** – the real work begins once new services are launched. It is essential that services’ running costs are fully costed and adequately resourced. Particular care is required to stay in tune with the customer as new technologies often obscure customer feedback (walk-in centres or call-centres find out what customers think very quickly, online services require greater effort to know what’s going on).

We wish you every success in delivering your strategy; our public services depend on it.