

Topic: Transformational Government – Enabled by Technology

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About the Author

My studies have always been along the lines of Computers and Communications and Migrated to Information Communications Technologies (ICT). My last degree was MSc Operational Communications, Coventry University, conducted by the Engineering School in collaboration with Cable and Wireless.

Since the conclusion of my MSc I have been a Telecommunications Engineer and Project Manager of a Phase 1, E-Government Communications Backbone Infrastructure Project for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Since the recent completion of this infrastructure project I was requested to become the Manager of E-Government to move the strategy forward for implementation, management and evolution of Services on this implemented Government Wide Area Network (GWAN) Infrastructure.

A Change management plan was/is a part of the Project and without a doubt, whilst the project has ended the Change Management continues.

Needless to say the challenges have been insurmountable prior, during and presently with this and many other E-government initiatives. Nonetheless, I have no doubt there will continue to have arising issues of multiple dimensions, but none that are impassable.

On a final note, from my time in the UK, USA, Canada and English-Speaking West Indies I have noticed marked similarities in the Public Service culture and environment. I believe this would be a factor of the education inherited by these nations from the British Empire. However, there are also marked difference as each nation, having gained independence developed their own unique cultural attributes and decided on different pathways towards development. As a result, each growth, development and understanding of such a project and strategy will have similar influencing issues as well as distinct differentiations. For example, the Health Care in Trinidad and Tobago and UK are almost identical, whilst the Police Services are worlds apart.

This is a concise background to where my comments on the strategy emanate from.

Comments

The Good of the Strategies

- It was not solely a visionary strategy; foresight of “How to” were also discussed within the document
- The philosophies of
 - “Government transformation through the use of Technology”
 - “Doing IT differently” (20)
 - “What works ... do more of and use it to assist in the transformation” (38) (40-4)
- Citizen and Business Centred Services
 - The emphasis on understanding the Citizen and Business needs and behaviours to develop the required processes to meet the end-users requirements
 - Identified the need for Public feedback and comments on service delivery to enhance, improve and/or implement better and/or new innovative service delivery channels, techniques and processes
 - The understanding for the creation of customer groups and customers do exhibit dynamic behaviours, where they may exist in different groups at different times and situations
 - Independences of accumulating customer information and developing customer groups as well as technological foundation implementations. As a result they can be done in parallel to reduce timeframes.
 - The identified need to have dedicated “Customer Group Team” to continually assess the service delivery as viewed/perceived by the end-users (Citizens and Business). They should also manage expectations and can proactively inform the Service Transformation Board, to ensure these expectations are met.
 - There are good ideas for the channels to deliver services such as:
 - Portals, MCommerce, ECommerce, Non-Emergency number (311), etc
- Shared Services
 - The creation of One-stop-shops customer service centres (40)
 - Recognising the need to balance of Accessibility/Convenience and Security
 - The need for a Common infrastructure and a Common Infrastructure Board
 - Recognition for Geographical Information Panels to assist in the technology standards and architect as the Geography and Demography of any nation can never be effectively understood and managed from one central location
 - The emphasis of legalities and privacy of data sharing, as well as policies
 - Endorsing the full support from the top (Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Councillors, Chief Executives, etc)
- Professionalism
 - Restructuring of the CORE for accelerated change to “Do IT differently” through Leadership and Governance (42)
 - All points expressed under Portfolio Management, IT Profession in the Government, Reliable Project Delivery, Supplier Management and Innovation

Consideration points of the Strategies

- Importance of frontline staff as they are:
 - First point of Contact
 - First impression and as result the image of the Government
- More emphasis on the front-line staff training and customer facing training and development. The strategy stressed mainly on IT Profession and this classification of staff and their development
- The need to understand the magnitude of a Change Management project to ensure the current “paper-based” staff will be equip and willing to accept the Technology enabling tools to conduct their work. The change can only be gradual, rather drastic, else there is the possibility that the public could possibly have NO service owing the lack of proper, coordinated orientation of the front-line staff to the new systems and processes
- Consideration of the timeframe to put legislation and policies in place can affect timelines as this is necessary to get the implementation with a high quality and meeting international standards. Otherwise, executive persons can deem that their needs and requests are beyond the recommended standards. As a result, in the absence of proper policies and legislation, the implementation could end up messy trying to accommodate each and everyone’s expectations.
- Sectionalised implementation for Education, Health, Taxes, Social Services, etc can be done, however if it is not implemented with the STB and a CIB in place looking at the big picture then the integration will be far more costly and time-consuming.
- The importance of policies are indeed a necessity however the strategy makes emphasis on the need for policies and information accumulation to the point where it seems that much deliberation on policies and standards will be done prior to any commencement of technology implementation. This can lead to an “*Analysis Paralysis*” scenario. This is a reality, especially with technology, since the current lifetime of technology is between 3-6 months. As a result after several months of deliberation, standards and technology can/will become obsolete starting the process again ... this is evidently a viscous non-productive cycle – *Analysis Paralysis*
- There should a mixture of public and private sector engagement and buy-in into the processes where there are clear deliverables and penalties for low productivity, inadequacy to deliver milestones on proposed budgets. China and Singapore (also possibly Malaysia) Public service works on a competing performance appraisal assure High quality of services to all end-users (Citizens and Businesses alike). Healthy designed competition will bring healthy service delivery (e.g. the Mobile market in the UK)
- The need to understand the need for more than restructuring to form new groups for task such as STB, CIB, Customer Groups, etc. The processes they contribute must be understood and structured, as there is much overlap from one to the all the others. Hence a rotated matrix core structuring is necessary else the bureaucratic hierarchical organisational model will once again emerge delaying the realisation of the vision outlined in the strategy.

- The balancing act of Accessibility/Convenience and Security is extremely difficult and should not be underestimated. If security is compromised to deliver services to meet end-users expectation the possibility of hacking, viruses and loss of privacy/confidentiality & integrity could cost the Government tremendously in lawsuits, slander and credibility
- If this Governmental Transformation (E-Government) strategy is to be taken seriously annual auditing is insufficient, but at minimum bi-annually
- IT Profession in the Government to achieve the Prime Minister's stand point where the Public service delivery is comparable to the Private sector's, then the IT professionals level must be at minimum equivalent to that of the Private sector certifications e.g. CEng, ITIL, PRINCE2, MCSE, CCNA, etc
- The need to Develop an effective and evolving communication strategy to reach all the stakeholders (inclusive of staff and customers) is critical. If stakeholders are left in the dark perceptions usually tends to run wild resulting in much negative feedback leading to possibly project setbacks and even failure
- Timetable for change:
 - This is a very ambitious agenda for 2005-2006
 - Considerations of independent tasks in the identified activities must be explored to maximise concurrent processes and efficiency
 - Prioritisation the relevant needs to ensure the right activities are completed whereby other more activities can start before the end of 2006
 - Finally a process for collaboration of outputs from these activities must be in place to ensure, in a "real-time" sense all the relevant and accurate information is collected and analysed for moving forward

Possible Options and Recommendations

- Change Management needs to be implemented as another activity. It should look at:
 - Change agents geographically and demographically allocated
 - These should be permanent groups ensuring continuous improvement and evolution of processes and people's service delivery as the customer groups identify new needs that require changing roles and approaches
 - Conduct GAP Analysis, training, etc
 - Utilise an ongoing (operational) Project management approach to ensure successes are identified and celebrated, since change management tangibles are usually indistinguishable
- The persons employed to do this Transformation MUST be well motivated financially and personally, otherwise the lost of good staff will cause gaps and unnecessary hiccup in the strategy and timelines
- There must be a Centralise, fault-tolerant, redundant, scalable network core meeting a uniform standard capable of supporting all applications (Internet Protocol (IP) based) – CIB responsibility
- Applications should be employed with some standard and uniformity as different platforms are difficult to integrate in a timely manner thus resulting additional time and cost overheads
 - Open Source
 - Interoperability – Middleware or clear standard Interface Definition Languages (Electronic Data Interchange, XML, etc)
 - Seize the power of the E-Commerce distribution
- The Common Infrastructure must be a platform that is well designed were applications can be added on like “plug and play” modules – STB responsibility or a Technical Design Authority
- The need for Network Operations Management (both centralised and distributed). With this the creation of a test lab will be a vital necessity as is the current reality in Trinidad and Tobago
- There is a need for a Business Re-engineering Process (BPR) team to analyse of business processes both Top-Down and Bottom-Up ensuring all possible gaps and needs can be identified from end-user to front-line staff to Executive managers, and vice versus
- To accelerate policies development, the use of international standards and industry best practices should be adopted e.g. IEE, IEEE, ISO, ITIL

Conclusion

In conclusion, 2011 is possible, provided the right resources are employed, motivated and committed to the ideals/objectives of the strategy, knowing that this will be an ever-evolving plan as people and technologies mature with time.