

Sent: 02 November 2005 21:30
To: Watmore Ian - e-Government Unit -
Subject: Members' Bench Response

Ian,

My initial thoughts on the document are that it represents an exciting and ambitious vision and that's good and important.

Crucial to success is the short term realisation of that vision through "finishing what we started" since without that its credibility will inevitably be called into question.

On the other hand completing a few outstanding projects of questionable current status and showing how they form part of the grand design (if necessary using a bit of post hoc rationalisation) will add credibility and while it's a cliché it's also a truism that success breeds success.

At Cambridge we have a smaller but similar problem of organisation based on democracy and robber barons in the departments. It is impossible to impose centralised control in this kind of organisation but there is always the temptation to get a clean and tidy world. Sadly this if pursued this becomes just another doomed attempt to boil the ocean, even at the Cambridge scale and quite unachievable on a Government scale where the technology moves faster than you can implement and roll out a major change project.

My solution to this is to address coherence rather than control and your strategy appears to be heading in this direction. It is worthy of note that the Internet has been a huge success BECAUSE no one is in charge, but there is a clear advantage in agreeing a consensus on common areas where standardisation is essential to enable delivery of products that can interwork rather than integrate.

Your shared service approach together with CIO council could be seen as analogous to ICANN and the IETF where standards are established in response to collective need possibly started from a single requirement in a single department.

You face an immense challenge and it seems to me that a reasonable clear and simple direction and some sensible groups to maintain a level of coherence in progress is the only way to get the scale down to human proportions.

I believe that you are heading in the right direction with a good approach and I wish you well.

I'll be very happy to help if I can even if it's just to act as a dispassionate sounding board for ideas and issues. Cambridge is after all supposed to be one of the ideal places for that sort of thing! However I've only been in Academe three years, like you the rest of my 35 year career has been in industry on the delivery side, so I know to my cost what works and what doesn't!

Yours

John Milner

MIS Director Cambridge University