

Sent: 04 January 2006 14:34
To: IT Strategy Project Team
Subject: COMMENTS ON TRANSFORMATIONAL GOVERNMENT PAPER

You asked for comments.

Para 27, 36-38. The Customer Group Directors are a very good idea and it is exactly right to appoint about 3 and learn from the experience. They will have to be very capable individuals and considerable support to develop sound projects and the investment programmes will need to be managed to support their work. Selecting and rewarding individuals to be Customer Group Directors will be difficult.

Para 28. How is the Service Transformation Board to get information on designs that contradict its principles? They will need to have all designs reviewed independently. You could have a procedure that forces every CIO to have an independent check that all designs comply with the principles and to refer all ones that are not clearly within the design principles to the secretariat. I suggest that every CIO will need someone, say a transformational strategy compliance officer to read and assess plans and advise the CIO.

Para 33 (3). The centralization of websites is exactly right and long overdue. There should be much simpler provision of the services - in principle govt could (and probably should) have one service provider for all websites and departments could publish their information on their named website which would be provided by the central provider. You will need appropriate controls - such as a requirement to refer any expenditure on any website to HMT - to prevent departments continuing with their existing websites by one means or another. Or I suppose the strategy compliance officer could approve these plans too.

Para 46. The IT professionalism section is not strong enough - better training and use of skills need to be supported and the reward of those who display the use of skills to achieve results. Without rewarding the people who use skills, you'll not encourage the mass to develop skills. Also we need to improve the way we recruit people into govt IT. I suggest that we need something like a fast-stream for IT professionals - some of the people who are not quite suitable for the fast-stream could be remarkably good for development as IT professionals and keen to join the public service - we'll need to develop a training plan for them, with the aim of them becoming the project managers and govt CIOs of the future.

Para 48. The key to reliable project delivery is well trained and competent staff, particularly project managers, working on projects and the proper resourcing of projects. Sound plans and frequent monitoring of progress against plans are important. Changing procedures and tools may not have a very great impact. I think better project managers need better pay and promotion and effective assessment and reward of project management. Also, but less important is proper definition of the scope and objectives of a project and proper change control, these are also worth mentioning. All this needs to go in the later version of the document.

Para 48(3) and 56. There is a key need for simplification of policy so that it can be easily implemented and your paper supports this, but not strongly enough. Part of the transformation of policy to implementation should be pilot implementation (para 48 (3)),

preferably the pilot implementation of simple and complex alternatives to policy, so that the benefits of simplicity show through clearly. Also draft policy should be assessed for implementation - crucially by the people who will implement it - before it is finalised and the people who do this should have sufficient weight in the final decision as to what the policy is - this will be completely counter to the civil service culture and extremely difficult to achieve. (Part of the problem with govt projects is the complexity of policy - generally govt policies and solutions are vastly more complicated than private sector ones and we tend to pay, train and recruit less well and then we wonder why govt is poor at delivery. But complex policy is seen as good and subtle and the rewards for developing it high, while the rewards for developing achievable policy are zero.)

Para 50. Part of the problem with suppliers is our top-level management of them. We need training for managers in managing contracts. They should be assessing matters such as the overall performance of the individual leading the supplier's performance and the overall performance of the supplier and feeding back to the supplier, quite possibly at the MD level for large contracts. We also have some fairly poor suppliers. Partly this is because we do not use our experience of how existing suppliers work in our work of selecting suppliers - I'm told procurement law makes this difficult - that is worth investigating further. The current arrangements for selecting suppliers do not reduce the chances of suppliers who have given us poor work of being selected. If we had better assessment of supplier performance and we circulated that back to suppliers and other government departments for them to use in selection of suppliers, we would put more pressure on suppliers to perform competently. We could usefully assess suppliers on matters such as :

- speed in implementing solutions
- business usefulness of solutions
- additional costs paid to supplier in addition to contracted minimums
- time spent discussing contractual matters with suppliers
- time spent discussing matters that are apparently clear in the contract

We also need to simplify the paperwork processes we use for tender assessment - they are too long and detailed, the private sector is simpler and more effective at this.

Also all teams selecting suppliers tend to not talk to the existing customers and managers of the existing suppliers (they always quote commercial confidentiality) and so the requirement suppliers are given tends to be poor and out of date. The managers of procurements need to be trained to simplify the paperwork and work openly with colleagues with relevant experience and to use assessments of existing suppliers in assessing tenders.

Also I hear that the private sector simply gets rid of poor suppliers, we could do with more frequent break clauses in contracts - say every two years.

Para 55. More sharing would be good, but we'll need processes and people to make that work. We should develop more expertise in new subjects at the centre and find ways of transmitting it to departments. The successes of the Customer Group Directors would be good to use for this purpose.

You'll need to keep up the pressure on CIOs to deliver the strategy or they'll be able to ignore it. That may need to involve permanent secretaries in driving the work of CIOs in that direction.

John Golding