

Kable response to Transformational Government

Introduction:

1. *Transformational Government: enabled by technology* is concise and energetic. It reflects high standards and aspirations for Government. Kable is glad to be invited to comment on a policy so pivotal for the future of public services in the UK.
2. *Transformational Government* has generated enthusiastic debate among Kable's readers and clients, with specific discussion on Kable's *Ideal Government* blog to be found at <http://www.idealgovernment.com/index.php/weblog/C37/> . A copy is attached to the printed version of this response.

Many commentators have made constructive interventions on detailed issues of technology. We invite the e-Government Unit to consider them carefully on their own merits. Kable's response below draws on the most important substantive issues to emerge from this online debate together with input from the *Government Computing* magazine editorial team.

Non-negotiables and critical success factors:

3. Kable has said for a decade that the key parameters for transformed services are efficacy, efficiency and trust. Each gets a mention in the document, but it is not clear whether all are valued equally (eg para 22 appears to suggest that it's acceptable to release savings if customers aren't happy with what's delivered).

We all want to avoid a vicious cycle where complex services, low take-up and high unit cost creates a trend towards coercion to switch channels. The essential starting point to break that vicious cycle, Kable believes, is to construct e-enabled government on an explicitly defined foundation of trust. We point to Stefan Brands' work over many years which defines the security and privacy aspects of this very well, and to the Dutch government's *e-Citizen Charter* which engages people imaginatively in the issues at stake.

This foundation of trust in e-enabled public services is prerequisite. It's not an area for wooliness, compromise, group think or bad science. The trade-off between cost and service quality is then a matter for debate.

4. Paragraph 20 suggests that the real challenge is not just to do IT better, it is to do IT differently. We would suggest that a deliberately mainstreaming approach to this strategy is absolutely critical: the challenge is to do *policy strategy differently*, including the IT parts. It might be stimulating to have independent audit or review of the "transformational" or e-enabling dimension in a range of existing policies.

5. When we deliver truly citizen-focused services then ensuring take-up will become relatively straightforward. This is the lesson from existing success stories. Paragraph 37 suggests that people should be told what is the responsible channel to use in order to save money for the state. A preferable incentive is if the 'right' channel meets the customer's needs better, in a more intuitive and convenient way.
6. Government has lived with the mainstream internet for a decade. But the task of creating a credible customer-centred vision of e-enabled services still lies ahead of those of us who try to lead thinking in the government IT community. We still have to create a sophisticated and rich understanding of what we actually want, or what success will look and feel like. We're not alone: the think tanks, NGOs, industry and public servants all want to help. Particularly helpful contributions in the last year in Kable's view come from MySociety, the Design Council's *Touching the state* and Will Davies' work on the IPPR Digital Manifesto.

Customer or citizen-centricity: who are the customers?

7. The Prime Minister's foreword makes it clear that designing things around the end-user and meeting the customer's needs and aspirations is mission critical. This is welcome but there are a number of aspects that require further work.

Diversity

8. We must at this decisive early stage ensure that the needs of a diverse range of UK customers/citizens have been fully understood. It is not clear that the opportunities and challenges posed by e-enabled service provision have been explored in detail with the public. The existence of real customer intelligence does not come through strongly in the document, despite the fact that there are many places where the strategy *implies* that what is presented is what people want. How do you know? What does the public know about shared services, data sharing, personalised services and identity architecture? How do these views change as they find out more about these things?

Just because plans were mentioned briefly in the 2005 New Labour Manifesto does not mean that they were understood or explicitly welcomed by the voting public. Socially excluded groups are no doubt particularly in the dark about what is being proposed.

9. Despite a notional commitment to diversity - even personalisation - the document uses a language of customer needs and experiences that is oversimplified. Some will want personalised services, others will find the techniques necessary to persuade them to use personalized services intrusive.

Paragraph 25 suggests that the needs of key user groups are best viewed in the round, rather than service by service. This may make sense for government, but may not be appropriate for the individuals involved.

People who deliver services know that, for example, parents or patients want different things at different times, in different places and in different ways. The same person may act quite differently in the capacity of parent or patient, older person, complainant, or taxpayer and so on. This has implications for how people access or consume services.

An e-enabled world must reflect this diversity in its service structures and specifically in its identity management (see below).

Social Justice

10. Good decisions about people's real needs require good understanding of the end-user, based on respect for their dignity and rights. Assertions are sometimes made that 'the average citizen' cares less about identity and privacy than a vocal IT-savvy elite. But even if this really were the case, evidence is unequivocal that poorer, more disadvantaged citizens are often more difficult to engage in public services because they do not easily trust the one offering the service. This is why some of the most needy in society are reached almost exclusively by non-governmental organizations such as those in the voluntary and community sector.
11. There is a greater responsibility deliberately to earn trust in systems where the end-user has no alternative (tax, benefits, etc). The 2005 Manifesto made clear this Government's on-going commitment to social justice and reducing the social class gap in achievement and well-being. The Social Exclusion Unit's recent report *Inclusion through Innovation: tackling social exclusion through new technologies (Nov 2005)* makes clear that there must be explicit focus on the needs of the socially excluded, if they are not to benefit least and last from transformational government. It is absolutely critical that our architecture for e-enabled services works for the most disadvantaged, as well as for the quick to engage.

Trust: identity and privacy

12. The 2005 Manifesto committed the Government thus: *"No going back to one-size-fits-all monolithic services. Going forward by... raising investment and driving innovation through diversity of provision and power in the hands of the patient, the parent and the citizen."* Later, it proclaims *"We will continue to work to protect the rights of consumers..."* It is absolutely critical that the public trusts Government and trusts the services it offers. But this trust cannot be assumed. We know that it is long term internet users who are abandoning online services such as banking in the biggest numbers as they begin to understand the risks.
13. Government must work in partnership with experts and with the public to resolve problems of trust and identity. It must deliberately build confidence into transformed government, be it e-enabled or outsourced, from the start. Without this, our attempts at transformational change are fatally undermined.

It is tempting to see a conflict between those who champion privacy at the expense of service improvement, and 'service improvement champions' with no regard for privacy. This is disingenuous and unhelpful. A good foundation of trust in e-enabled services has to draw on many disciplines – not just technical and policy people, but service designers, psychologists and sociologists. But these groups don't yet have an effective dialogue.

14. The specific question of identity management for e-enabled services is an issue which people now face all around the world. The principles and the technologies are global and the solutions will have to work in a local culture. Britain needs its own culturally and constitutionally appropriate solution on which to base transformational government. But the identity management needed to increase social justice with easy-to-use public services may be quite different from the identity requirement identified to fight terrorism, fraud, and illegal immigration.

It is not clear that *Transformational Government* satisfactorily addresses the question of the role of identity management. The UK is not alone: this is globally recognized as a crucial and pressing issue holding up progress towards successful e-enabled services. But it is essential the UK should be clear and confident that it has an identity management approach that will maximize and not fatally undermine the potential to transform government services.

15. In Kable's view this still requires a debate and statement about identity requirement for e-enabled public services. Without any preconception or implied criticism of the Home Office's ID plans (which appear to us conceived for a different purpose) it seems to us that Britain's public services transformation has to be based on an identity scheme which is customer-friendly, low cost, standards based and as resilient online as it is in face-to face transactions. It must not be "monolithic" and "one-size-fits-all". It should be context-sensitive, user controlled and consistent with the letter and spirit of data protection and human rights law. We want to avoid an over-powerful monolithic central service which concentrates all the risks. And it's not citizen-centric to force people to participate in an expensive and physically intrusive process which creates risks over which they have no control and offers them no visible immediate benefit.
16. It is quite clear that better technical alternatives for the identity question are fast emerging. Also that industry, NGOs and indeed many government CIOs have reservations about the longer term identity management path endorsed in *Transformational Government*.

It's a matter of fundamental importance for transformational government and of integrity for the government IT profession that the identity strategy be credibly resolved.

One way forward might be formation of an independent Identity Foundation dedicated initially to defining the ideal requirement, then the necessary standards, and in due course to delivering an outsourced identity management service. Such an institution would need to be trusted, independent, and sustainable - supported by government (which holds this problem in a deadly embrace) and by industry (which on present

plans faces bid costs in the tens of millions, along with the reputational risk of a large scale project failure for one identity project, with little prospect of progress on the public service identity front).

17. Kable can identify an NGO where such an initiative could be incubated, along with a hard core of early supporters for such an initiative, and is happy to play any constructive role if it helps the emerging reputation of the government IT community, public servants and suppliers alike.

Co-creation: make government navigable

18. Given the language of customer focus and flexibility of design, it is unfortunate that the document does seem to dictate what it is the public wants and needs. Whether intentionally or not, it implies a vertically imposed solution to the challenges of delivering services in the 21st century.

Offering opportunities for citizen led engagement in service design and delivery offers a clear path to much more exciting, flexible and user-friendly services for the e-Bay/Google generation. This is simply expressed as "Make government navigable". The contemporary Internet invites new entrepreneurs and do-it-yourself creativity or "democratised innovation". It would be unfortunate to see the energies of these low cost innovators wasted by central design and procurement of costly bespoke systems that effectively preclude the transformation government is seeking.

Learning the lessons:

19. We don't condone demoralising carping on about past mistakes. But honest acknowledgement of what we can learn from previous attempts to bring about transformational change in public service delivery is essential. The UK isn't in the global vanguard of e-enabled government (as everyone agrees and the document itself suggests) and we need to recognize and address our shortcomings.

Is technology the biggest obstacle? What does it take to make this happen?

20. The document focuses almost entirely on the technical issues. But there are issues beyond technical capability that will be absolutely crucial to ensuring success. These are not in our view given enough weight. Delivery plans must include:
 - Relentless application of political and managerial energy to make this happen, and a willingness to halt all other new changes for the duration of development and implementation;
 - Paramount importance of the Prime Minister, Chancellor and Civil Service leadership to drive this through, ensuring appropriate performance management and incentives for ministers and civil servants;
 - Repair of the fault line between 'policy people' and 'IT people'. All policy makers and ministers have to understand the potential of technology. CIOs must be

effective in strategy formation and not just a professional solvers of perennial IT problems;

- Effective governance - precisely whose head rolls when something goes wrong? This is especially important as boundaries between services are broken down;
- Leverage: how will CIOs and the Service Transformation Board bring about necessary cultural and behavioural change in Whitehall, when others before have failed to do just that? What power, influence and resources do they need and will they have it?
- Would it be transformational just to stop using systems that duplicate or bring no worth? (cf GSK's experience of 75% savings reported at the EGU's EU summit in Manchester);
- What specific mechanism will ensure that feasibility and risks are fully assessed before major delivery projects are publicly announced in the future?

No doubt others will share Kable's experience of finding much to agree with in *Transformational Government* yet still finding more to add. It's a reflection of the enormous potential of the transformational agenda as we apply e-enabled change to public services.

Kable looks forward to deepening and broadening the many debates and discussions the government IT community will need on the road to professionalisation and delivery.

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