

Sent: 27 November 2005 08:41
To: IT Strategy Project Team
Subject: Comments on Transformational Government

Hi,

My comments on this strategy are available on my blog Informatiocopia
<http://www.rodspac.co.uk/blog/blogger.html>
Dated 26th Nov

Rod

Rod Ward

Comments on Transformational Government

Comments on Transformational Government : Enabled by Technology

This document was published by the Cabinet Office in November 2005 based on research undertaken for the Chief Information Officers (CIO) Council, drawing on the experiences of CIOs and IT professionals in central and local government; Industry and technology specialists.

Comments are requested by Friday 3rd Feb 2006

My comments are based largely on my experience of IT in the NHS as this is the area I am most familiar with, however I think some of the principles apply across the public sector. Initially I give some general comments and then comment in more detail on a selection of paragraphs (paragraph numbering is taken from the original document which is available from

http://www.cio.gov.uk/transformational_government/strategy/

A typo on the contents page:

http://www.cio.gov.uk/transformational_government/strategy/contents/ which misses out the "S" from Transformational doesn't help confidence in the technical accuracy.

The document sets out a vision for the future of public sector services which has a lot to recommend it, however it also raised some worries in my mind about the potential risks.

In my opinion the changes which are occurring, and will be increased by this strategy, in the relationship between the state and the citizen (or customer as

members of the general public are largely called in this document). In addition I believe the strategy will change the balance of power between the CIO Council and ministers and departments with increasing power being vested in No 10 Downing Street and unelected officers.

The document rightly emphasises the potential benefits for individuals interacting with government at all levels eg less duplication, however this must be balanced with the risk of loss of control over personal information – highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of information sharing. A less explicit risk is the potential to increase the divide between the “information haves” and the “information have not’s”, which closely resembles the divisions within society between those with least money, the elderly and those for whom English is not their first language receiving the poorest services.

The vision set out includes collaboration between central and local government and a range of public sector bodies, however the recent announcement that no agreement could be reached, between the Ordnance Survey, Post Office and local Government about a standardised way of identifying each building (see <http://society.guardian.co.uk/e-public/story/0,13927,1648128,00.html>) what hope is there for the much more complex agenda set out in this document?

Current IT spend is described as £14 billion per annum and it is claimed that savings will be made on this budget – but no timescale for these is given.

The attempts to systematically engage with citizens... to understand and then specify the changes needed and appoint “customer group directors” to lead the design of these services – however it appears that this consultation will be an extension of the already criticised “focus group culture”.

Some of the issues which appear from reading between the lines include:

- The removal of the human face of government
- Contracting out of large parts of the civil service
- Political advisers rather than permanent secretaries

Some comments on language

I am always interested in the language used in these sorts of documents and the

changes in the way in which issues are discussed. I particularly spotted a few phrases;

"Technology for government".

"Doing IT better" moving to "doing IT differently" which I found reminiscent of an advert "work smarter not harder".

CHOICE (The C word) – finding out what the "customer" wants – however many of them may not be able to define this.

"Co-branded solutions with major search engines" – are we moving to

"Google.gov"?

Detailed comments (paragraphs numbers from original document & text in italics)

Vision

1. *So this strategy's vision is about better using technology to deliver public services and policy outcomes that have an impact on citizens' daily lives: through greater choice and personalisation, delivering better public services, such as health, education and pensions; benefiting communities by reducing burdens on front line staff and giving them the tools to help break cycles of crime and deprivation; and improving the economy through better regulation and leaner government.*

Surely better regulation is not achieved through technology, although it may assist regulation is a function of government and depends on social and moral principles.

1. *The specific opportunities lie in improving transactional services (eg tax and benefits), in helping front line public servants to be more effective (eg doctors, nurses, police and teachers), in supporting effective policy outcomes (eg in joined-up, multi-agency approaches to offender management and domestic violence), in reforming the corporate services and infrastructure which government uses behind the scenes, and in taking swifter advantage of the latest technologies developed for the wider market.*

Uptake is by no means guaranteed, and adoption of services can prove to be a major hurdle in technology implementation as has been seen in the NHS National Programme for IT. There is a potential to increase rather than reduce social

divisions.

8. *Overall this technology-enabled transformation will help ensure that:*

1. *Citizens and businesses have choice and personalisation in their interactions with government. Choice will come through new channels and more fundamentally through new opportunities for service competition.*

I wonder what "service competition" means in this context?

1. *Citizens feel more engaged with the processes of democratic government.*

Is there any evidence that increased use of technology make citizens "feel more engaged with the processes of democratic government."

Current Position

1. *Modern government - both in policy making and in service delivery - relies on accurate and timely information about citizens, businesses, animals and assets. Information sharing, management of identity and of geographical information, and information assurance are therefore crucial.*

The information sharing is notoriously difficult to achieve and where errors do occur, their effects can be magnified where that information is widely shared.

1. *Yet many of these systems are also old and custom-built, use obsolete technologies, are relatively costly to maintain by modern standards, and hence stretch the capability of the whole technology industry when it comes to amending or replacing them.*

However the used of "standard/off the shelf" software solutions can increase the power of a limited number of small players in the market and stifle innovation and the opportunities for SME's to get a foothold.

14. *Moreover they increasingly fail to meet the needs of modern government and the rising expectations of customers:*

1. *Many systems and processes are still paper-based and staff-intensive. The underlying assumption is that customers will fill in forms and that staff will process them by routine rather than by risk-managed exception. Telephone access, customer access over the web and other improvements have sometimes been grafted onto this base. This locks in high costs and difficulty in meeting changing customer or policy requirements. Choice is costly and slow to implement.*

The identification and scoping of risk is complex and greater emphasis seems to be placed on financial risk than human risk. EG in the NHS what level of saving balances the risk of death?

1. *Many systems are structured around the "product" or the underlying legislation rather than the customer (sometimes because, at the time, each system was big or difficult enough to do by itself). Often the customer experience is not joined up, especially when it crosses organisational boundaries.*

Is choice necessarily what the population wants? Examples of the changes to the specification of an electronic booking service to "Choose & Book" in the NHS to provide choice which most patients don't want doesn't bode well.

1. *Many systems were designed as islands, with their own data, infrastructure and security and identity procedures. This means that it is difficult to work with other parts of government or the voluntary and community sector to leverage each other's capabilities and delivery channels. It also leads to customer frustration, duplication of effort (for instance on customer change of address) and failure to make timely interventions, as the Bichard Inquiry showed. Choice requires services to be able to talk to each other.*

But may provide protection against inappropriate use of personal information and systems failures.

18. *Since then the Government has taken a consistent approach to improving performance in such projects. In the last five years progress has been made towards addressing some of these issues:*

1. ..
2. *Use of the internet: Responding to the Prime Minister's challenge, over 96% of government services will be "e-enabled" by the end of 2005. Over half of households have the internet at home, and broadband is available to almost all homes and businesses. There are also 6000 UK Online centres in place, providing internet access and free assistance to those who do not wish to go online at home.*

Despite these impressive sounding figures, uptake and use by the general population has been much more limited.

Citizen and Business Centred Services

(a) Systematically engage with citizens, business and front-line public

servants to understand and then specify the transformational changes which service providers need to meet - learning from the best practice already within the public sector, from other governments and from the private sector.

23. *For public services the Prime Minister has set out clear principles of reform - national standards, devolution of delivery, flexibility in service provision and greater customer choice. Basing services on what the customer wants and needs is crucial to technology-enabled public service transformation. Some parts of the public sector have developed mechanisms for measuring customer response to particular services. However customer insight and market intelligence is not shared systematically across government. Unlike some other national governments, the UK has no regular, holistic and publicised assessment of customers and their experience of public services. To modernise services government needs a systematic view of what citizens, businesses and front line staff want and need.*

I'm not sure what this means, I feel that greater clarity is needed about "wants" and "needs" and how these are to be ascertained. Do "customers" know what they want – despite rhetoric about a patient led NHS few are actively involved in this process. It is likely that advantaged articulate groups will participate in consultations and express their wants, however the needs of disadvantaged groups are much more difficult to collect.

25. *The needs of key groups - such as older people - are best viewed in the round rather than service by service. So part of this work will be to help define the customer groups. These are where citizens or businesses expect, or where social and policy outcomes require, joined-up and consistent presentation, access to and delivery of all relevant government services. This will be a complex picture: people rarely fall neatly into categories, so services need to be responsive enough to deal with the fact that individuals often associate themselves with different groups at different times depending on their particular need.*

This is an extremely complex process as has already been seen in trying to safely share information at the boundaries between health and social care. No mention is made of how the conflicting needs of different groups eg the elderly and new mums will be prioritised.

(b) Appoint "Customer Group Directors" for particular groups of the citizen/business population to lead the design of services, working to Ministerial leadership.

28. *These appointments should normally be people already leading a major*

service line, and each Customer Group Director would create a "Customer Group Team" from the key public and voluntary sector bodies which serve the customer group and from the relevant marketing, research and communication groups.

This strikes me as moving the deckchairs, with new titles and badges – although relevant experience and qualifications and experience are important some in key positions may provide barriers rather than drivers for change.

(c) Create a Service Transformation Board whose role is to set overarching service design principles, promote best practice, signpost the potential from technology futures and challenge inconsistency with agreed standards

29. *In order to steer and co-ordinate the work of Customer Group Directors and others, the Government will set up a Service Transformation Board of officials from the wider public sector who run major services and have operational delivery responsibility. The Cabinet Office will provide the secretariat and design authority for the Board under a Service Transformation Director.*

It is unclear where the power and responsibility will lie. Will the Customer Group Directors and Service Transformation Board finally get us to the **Ministry of Administrative Affairs** envisaged in Yes Minister many years ago?

33. *To improve efficiency, effectiveness and customer value, action is required to improve government's use of these channels, including:*

- *There are currently over 2500 government websites. To ensure that overall the government uses the web most effectively to support its service delivery and communications strategies, the web presence of government will be rationalised. For each government organisation the number of different web sites it uses will be reduced and consistency introduced in line with its overall communications strategy. For customer information, self-service transactions and campaign support, services will converge on DirectGov and Business Link as the primary on-line entry points; service-specific or stand-alone solutions will be phased out.*

The menu, search and navigation will be vital if people are to identify the information and "transactional services" they need

1. *Improvement in the use of search to access the government's web information, including exploring the potential for co-branded solutions with major search providers. This will learn from the way people now use the wider internet.*

Google.gov !!!

7 Giving citizens online access to their records and data held by government, mirroring existing rights and reducing the cost of handling simple enquiries.

If NHS Connecting for Health has been unable to provide the "sealed envelope" for sensitive and personal health information in the initial release of the National Care Records System (NCRS), then I hope other areas will have more success.

39. *A new Shared Services approach is needed to release efficiencies across the system and support delivery more focussed on customer needs. Technology now makes this far easier than ever before. Shared services provide public service organisations with the opportunity to reduce waste and inefficiency by re-using assets and sharing investments with others. Tackling this will be a major challenge as government prepares for the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review. Particular attention should be paid to the following areas:*

- **Data Sharing:** *data sharing is integral to transforming services and reducing administrative burdens on citizens and businesses. But privacy rights and public trust must be retained. There will be a new Ministerial focus on finding and communicating a balance between maintaining the privacy of the individual and delivering more efficient, higher quality services with minimal bureaucracy.*

Previous government approaches appear to have been towards minimal bureaucracy rather than privacy and public trust.

5. Information Management: *to facilitate the move towards more collaborative working on issues that involve a range of government organisations, common standards and practices for information management will be developed, with an effective range of tools to allow the most efficient use and sharing of information to all those across government that have a legitimate need to see and use it.*

Surely the big question is who decides what is a "legitimate need"?

6) Information Assurance: *despite the difficulties of a fast moving and hostile world, underpinning IT systems must be secure and convenient for those intended to use them. The Government will further develop its risk management model to provide guidance on this, approved by the Central Sponsor for Information Assurance. And it will develop a simple, tiered architecture for its own networks to support this model in practice, with an updated application of the protective marking scheme for electronically held information. Government*

will also play its part to promote public confidence by leading a public/private campaign on internet safety and by a new scheme to deliver a wider availability of assured products and services.

I wonder how the role of "Central Sponsor for Information Assurance" links to the Information Commissioner and the like. Will Shibbolith provide this functionality?

7) Identity Management: *Government will create an holistic approach to identity management, based on a suite of identity management solutions that enable the public and private sectors to manage risk and provide cost-effective services trusted by customers and stakeholders. These will rationalise electronic gateways and citizen and business record numbers. They will converge towards biometric identity cards and the National Identity Register. This approach will also consider the practical and legal issues of making wider use of the national insurance number to index citizen records as a transition path towards an identity card.*

This is another minefield. The National Insurance Number is only issued to 16 year olds therefore excluding children. Where does the new format NHS number which has been issued over the last few years fit into this picture?

Professionalism

1. *Government's ambition for technology enabled change is challenging but achievable provided it is accompanied by a step-change in the professionalism with which it is delivered. This requires: coherent, joined up leadership and governance; portfolio management of the technology programmes; development of IT professionalism and skills; strengthening of the controls and support to ensure reliable project delivery; improvements in supplier management; and a systematic focus on innovation.*

I would welcome moves to increase professionalism within the IT industry and would suggest that education and regulation are both important here. Within the health informatics field UKCHIP (<http://www.ukchip.org/>) is leading the way.

Leadership and Governance

1. *Coherent, joined-up leadership and governance across government are essential to ensure the vision and programmes set out in this strategy are achieved and that the opportunities for technology to enable change*

continue to be identified, communicated, managed and delivered effectively. Complex reform requires consistent pressure to be applied across the whole system for a number of years. Leadership needs to be provided at several levels - by Ministers and Councillors; by Heads of Department and equivalents; by business leaders across the public sector; by CIOs; and by industry leaders - and aligned with the wider governance of the public services. An open and transparent approach to plans and performance is essential.

The open and transparent approach has not been a feature of the NPfIT, in which the barriers of commercial confidentiality has been one of the major criticisms by those who need to use the systems and carry through the change management envisaged.

It would be interesting to see an attempt at a mapping of the information needs by sector, citizen groups, business groups etc.

I found the statement on the final page when asking for comments indicative of the direction of travel.:

An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.