

INVITED VIEWPOINT

Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy

Transformational Government: What is the shape of things to come?

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The formation and introduction of the UK government's Transformational Government policy over the last two years has heralded the introduction of a new facet within the eGovernment space. A focus towards transforming central and local government is now seen to be at the heart of this important and developing area of interest within the public (as well as private) sector. Indeed, this forms a useful and pertinent expansion of the concept of eGovernment, beyond the singular view of IT/IS implementation. Transformational Government is therefore concerned with a step change in providing effective citizen-centric services through an improvement to internal process and procedures, and a greater involvement of individuals and communities in political and policy making processes. This is of course recognizing the need to look at internal as well as external aspects of electronic government, as part of an extended ecological system of service providers and consumers.

However, are the aims and objectives of viewing eGovernment beyond a series of IT/IS projects justified – and is the notion of transformational government being met? Furthermore, are geographically-centric views of eGovernment or t-Government realistic and are such views convergent and / or divergent based upon the identified barriers within the research literature?

If we take a look to the European Commission's view on the development of eGovernment in 2005, there were clear concerns that future eGovernment issues should centre around participation, integrated information systems, citizen identification and stakeholder integration and involvement, via i2010 and EUPAN initiatives (European Commission, 2005). There were also clear indications that eGovernment solutions which tend to be predominantly based upon state-centric policy, should be

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geared towards becoming more pan-state centric, and should progress towards developing a European market of electronic government services. This would be via eParticipation (using ICT for better participation in democratic debate and better decision-making); networked governance (tapping into the potential within administrations, expertise of civil servants, personalizing interaction with all citizens, integrating information systems into new citizen-centred services); and electronic trusted identification. One final caveat from the EU was that a measure of success of these aims would be to gauge citizen satisfaction and the associated economic impact of such a wide scale market in the given services. In parallel with this during 2005, the UK launched its own 7 year, Transformational Government strategy, focusing on the 3 key strands of improving (customer-facing) Citizen Services, internal agency Shared Services and the promotion and expansion of the IT Profession within government departments and bodies (HM Government, 2005a). This has been based upon a desire to systematically change public services via a series of radical transformations within and across central government. The aim being to ensure that the machinery of government is leaner and more transparent as a result. At the same time, the UK government has also provided examples of how such a strategy would manifest itself across public service and agency touch points – revenue and customs, health, education, social welfare and local government (available via http://www.cio.gov.uk/transformational_government/examples.asp). These examples were highlighted and presented as the "shape of things to come", from the standpoint of either members of the public (in the case of reporting a crime to the local police station or searching for an appropriate local school), through to the definition of defined IT professional roles within local government.

The government also published initial feedback received on the t-Government strategy from four quarters of the wider eGovernment community (public sector, private sector, service providers and the public themselves). The response was primarily positive and noted that some change had already occurred (for example, online tax returns) but did question the tactical and operational approach to be used. Some key concerns raised were directly related to the level of change and risk management required; indication of costs to be incurred and on-going funding; the level of involvement with the private sector to deliver a successful outcome; the level of bias towards central government; how citizen services would be perceived rather than how they would be designed; clarity on service governance, responsibility and delivery to communities as opposed to individuals; and how the balance between convenience and access with security and privacy needs would be addressed (HM Government, 2005b). A request was made by all respondents to address citizen (business) needs as opposed to providing technology solutions. It was also noted that improvements to shared services and internal (IT) professionalism would require significant cultural and administrative changes to be made first. A subsequent implementation plan document was then released which outlined how each of the three t-Government themes would be addressed. The implementation goals were to be realized in the short to medium term via the appointment of Customer Group Directors (CGDs) and the design of Citizen services; the alignment and creation of resources for developing an internal market for shared services; and the implementation of a portfolio management approach to competency and skill development for IT professionals (HM Government, 2006a).

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An IBM report on emerging trends within eGovernment in 2006 (Abramson *et al.*, 2006), also outlined key areas of concern for the continuing success of such initiatives, although seen through the eyes of key US federal government themes (lack of policy formation, political accountability, and strong political leadership and participation). This report identified those foci which were not addressed by the UK government, around greater transparency of administrative and human resource management procedures; using performance management to link strategic goals to output; increasing competition via public-private partnerships (market-based government); engaging citizens more in policy-making processes and services; and developing internal and external networks of expertise and competence (public and private partnership governance) for delivering government programmes. In contrast, the UK government's annual report on Transformational Government for 2006, outlined a string of successes, which ultimately centered around an audit and decommissioning of approximately 500+ websites, and the improvement and streamlining of data sharing across 100+ government services (HM Government, 2007). Still, it is not clear from this review if the level of citizen uptake occurring is in sufficient numbers to warrant the level of success that has been mentioned. More importantly, these efforts still very much centre around IT/IS-driven change, as opposed to the wider remit suggested by IBM, the European Commission and other research which suggests cultural and managerial perceptions of information sharing are also at play (Gil-Garcia *et al.*, 2007).

However, the scale of the UK t-Government programme should be put into context. This is a phased 7 (and possibly 10) year plan to change the operation and perception of central and local government. The first phase, between November 2005 and July 2007 was focused on developing a strategy and implementation plan, for which the resulting output was a comprehensive spending review and auditing to highlight discrete, quick-win micro-programmes. This has largely been successful, as noted above. Beyond 2011, the aim is to implement additional radical change within government via advanced information technologies. The idea being that citizens, public servants and policy makers should be using technology to fulfill personal, role and service design requirements, in a seamless manner – without even being totally cogniscent of the underlying IT/IS (HM Government, 2006b).

But what of the interim phase, from August 2007 to August 2011? This is the journey that will be the most challenging and provides the most opportunities for success or failure. This second phase of t-Government now seeks to realize the delivery, support, and benefits associated with embedding the transformational changes required across all departments and agency services, to communities and individuals. Nevertheless the approach defined here, is still very much driven by technological change as opposed to root and branch cultural change as may have been expected. So are the aims of the UK t-Government strategy working and do they relate to the reality of the additional risks and issues that have been raised from the aforementioned quarters? Will we be finally able to truly transform citizen and government services beyond all recognition or forever be condemned to implementing electronic government as a series of discrete IT/IS projects?

Taking a look at each of the t-Government strands in turn, the customer / citizen-centric services theme is very reminiscent of dot-com era startups: digitizing real-world services, will not necessarily increase and improve uptake of services further. Although

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it is true that online tax returns, parking permits, building applications and the like have made local government processes more transparent there does not appear to be any evidence to suggest that this has increased citizen uptake and involvement in services any further. Secondly, the second theme of shared services provision has been a holy grail within the public sector for at least the last 20 years. Many professional services firms have attempted to address this, with partial success over this time (the Accenture / iSoft £1 billion NHS IT services debacle within the last 2 years being a case in point – see Sauer and Willcocks, 2007).

Thirdly, the definition of a career plan and path for IT professionals within central and local government is something novel and does highlight a commitment to developing a more rigorous approach to services design and provision. However, it is really just an internalized career development plan. Interestingly, the importance of managing and developing management talent is evident in the growing interest in postgraduate education in terms of specialist Masters programmes relating to the public sector in the UK (including themed MBA programmes in Healthcare and Public sector management). However, this level of professional development aims to address leadership challenges associated with large scale change management programmes. Again, the overall t-Government initiative underway cannot be underestimated here and there is a strong case for starting in any way possible on this. But reviewing all the given progress and the schedule updates on this so far, five key questions still arise:

- Where and when will all the feedback on the initial t-Government strategy be addressed in the 3 year phased approach?
- Where and when will the 6 risks identified by HM Cabinet Office in the Implementation plan in 2006, be addressed also (resourcing, supplier capacity, public trust, leadership, pace of technological change, management of project failure)?
- Services take-up and citizen participation in policy making processes are still "grand challenges" which need to be addressed – and are clearly beyond the remit of the current set of programmes proposed by HM government.
- Beyond third party vendors and consultants, there is little mentioned about how the private-public sector relationship can be improved and can be leveraged, to deliver effective services and participation outwards to communities and individuals.
- A lack of nexus between all of these key areas highlights a gap between the expected benefits of IT/IS-based solutions and the social and cultural components required to effectively transform government in the intended fashion.

In these terms, the current t-Government approach simply may not be sustainable in its present form as it only concentrates on the IT/IS component. I believe that we are at a tipping point with regards to this areas, and need to very quickly look beyond current implementations strategies, being much bolder in addressing stakeholder risks and participation concerns, as identified by Tan and Pan (2003). Thus, I believe a sustainable strategy for t-Government would be to look at addressing how to implement a truly joined-up government, using technology to underpin the transformational changes required. In doing so, this would therefore aim to address economic

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sustainability at the local community level as well (job and wealth creation, education, welfare, health and housing).

The EPSRC funded VIEGO project (Irani *et al.*, 2007; Elliman *et al.*, 2007), identified and classified 28 research issues distilled from consultation with the public sector stakeholder community, within the same time period as the above UK government initiatives were running. Three key areas which were highlighted as a result of this consultative process included the requirement to integrate horizontal and vertical stakeholder communities; a need to improve participation and engagement by the citizen with Government; and a need to provide systems and processes that adapt to change within the public sector at large. Subsequently it was also noted that there was a need to build and maintain a body of knowledge within and across stakeholder communities, as well as providing shared access to common resources via an integrated ICT infrastructure. In parallel with these factors, understanding the diversity of citizen demographics and combating the digital divide through effective security and authentication measures, were also identified as linked areas of concern. Hence, the future of t-Government should well include an integrated approach to developing an ecology of services and strategies, underpinned by an eGovernment infrastructure. This could be achieved by taking the aforementioned successes and failures of existing eGovernment initiatives into account, classifying those barriers to sustainable joined up Government. Evaluating these factors through a series of performance metrics that relate to not only IT/IS but also participation in policy making and service uptake, would also help to achieve transformational aims cited previously. Subsequently, the construction of a repository of stakeholder service-based scenarios, would also assist in the understanding and future improvement of private-public sector partnerships and networks.

Hence, if we are really looking to transform services, then we must look at how we can transform the way those services are designed and shared. If we are looking to transform government, then we must look at how we can transform the way that government operates, and not just how the roles of managers and their responsibilities are developed. Only by considering the wider involvement of individuals, communities, policy makers and service providers can transformational government be delivered in its fullest form.

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