

Transformation - Playing to Win

The stakes are high, says Local t-Gov programme director, Martin Scarfe. But getting the transformation strategy right will put councils in a win-win situation to deliver better services and efficiency.

Local government has an opportunity at the moment to grasp the transformation agenda, make it its own and deliver the Holy Grail of ever better, ever more efficient public services.

But we must move forward with this agenda now. There is no longer time to 'wait and see' because – apart from a few small pieces – the policy jigsaw is pretty much in place. It is no longer a question of 'what direction are we travelling in?' but one of 'how do we translate that direction into concrete programmes and plans; and how do we make the most of these?'

The final pieces in the jigsaw will fall into place over the next few months - the White Paper's delivery plan is due this month (January), the sector plan for local government shared services is due in March, and CSR07 and the Lyons review will be revealed hot on its heels.

However, the pre budget report has been made already – and it makes clear that there will be a five percent year on year savings target ongoing. This is more aggressive than had been expected, designed perhaps to encourage new approaches and behaviours in our sector.

To deliver this, local government as a whole will need to do much more, and have a much smarter approach to working together; both across local authorities and between central government and local government.

Transformation also offers an opportunity to tackle social exclusion. It is those that use our services most that are most likely to be marginalised in our society; and it is they who have most to gain from local government's transformation. We can make their lives better. We can provide the right support in the right format, opening up new opportunities and learning.



The e-government programme has delivered much, but investing all our money in websites helps only at the margin - our elderly, our young people, and our disadvantaged don't benefit from website development. They will, however, benefit from technology-enabled access to our services, without having to be IT literate to do so.

Take, for example, the success of the eAdmissions National Project. In Hackney, 81 percent of secondary school applications were made online – advisors visited schools with laptops and helped parents to apply: technology with a human interface used out in the community to deliver an improved service.

Mobile working, as evidenced by the Nomad National Project, also has the potential to transform service delivery – taking services out to where they are needed whilst delivering back office efficiencies.

Building on the local e-gov programme, Local t-Gov is a thriving community fulfilling an obvious need to facilitate communication about transformation – communication between central and local government, communication with other councils, with suppliers, and the sharing of best practice about communication with the citizen.

Last autumn we held two t-Gov events – at one of which Sir David Varney gave the first public presentation of his review. Feedback from t-Gov Autumn and the t-Gov Procurement Conference has been outstanding and, as we go to press, we are looking forward to a vibrant, extremely well attended and content rich, shared services discussion on 30th of January at t-Gov Shared Services.

A large proportion of the feedback, however, is the same: 'Please, someone, capture good practice about transformation and disseminate it'.

t-Gov EXPO, 18-19 April at ExCeL in the Docklands, London, occurs just after the budget and is well timed to provide a



forum for discussion of Sir Michael Lyons' review – the last piece of the policy puzzle.

It will provide you with the forum to come together and talk - across sectors, across councils, across services – and to learn from the experience of those currently leading the field.

The t-Gov Programme aims to equip people with the knowledge and good practice to deliver the best in the transformation of local government. From its inception as the local e-gov Programme to today's t-Gov Programme we have demonstrated success and showcased excellence. With the strength of our editorial board we continue to collate views from those leading transformation – from the CIO council, the chief executives' and the members' perspectives.

This is an important moment in the evolution of transforming local government. Many councils are waiting for the DCLG to provide a roadmap to bring clarity to the situation or set targets to force action. But those leading the way realise that there is not time to be lost – they are already moving in that direction.

One of my major frustrations with local government is that there hasn't been any real structural change in 25 years - our citizens still have to wade into ten different offices to get ten different allowances when you know they perhaps cannot afford, or make, the journey or don't speak English.

We are in danger of drinking in the last chance saloon. The opportunity to take control of our future as a sector is open to us now. I believe there is a danger that, if we don't grasp this opportunity to transform service delivery, central government will legislate as it did with CCT.

Efficiency, shared services, transformation – yes, all represent a challenge to us, but this should be welcomed as an exciting journey to fundamentally change the way local services are delivered. We should not just be passengers on this voyage.

Martin Scarfe
Programme Director, Local t-Gov
LB Newham



Best Practice in Transformation - Does it Exist?

Jos Creese, head of IT, Hampshire County Council

It is very hard to specify exactly what best practice is and, to some extent, it would be a mistake to try to do so. If you specify best practice within a short period there will always be something better on its way - it is an evolutionary process.

We should be talking instead about the sort of outcomes we would expect to be delivered from the transformation

agenda – the business benefits in terms of efficiency savings, or measurable service improvements.

Anyone who enters into a transformational programme without taking account of the HR issues is probably doomed to failure. It is an incredibly important part of change - the communication, the changing of working practices, the ability and willingness of managers and staff to be able to make the changes to understand why it is important. These things are critical to success.

My view is that perhaps the biggest obstacles we face are the ability of managers to lead change, and the collective willingness to throw away outmoded practices that are no longer efficient or able to cope with the volumes of demand that we now have.

You need to have competent change managers involved in a transformational project, and very few of us currently have enough of those skills in house. Some will be found in IT because a lot of this change is enabled by IT - so you need IT professionals who really understand the business and process of change. But equally there will be people in the business that are competent change managers who will have a knowledge of IT.

We need to grow these change management skills internally, but these change leaders also need to have independence from the individual business streams they have come from to avoid difficulties of vested interests.

In Hampshire we are bringing change managers in from outside to work with

our own people with the intention of developing the skills and experience in house.

The basic issue is understanding what a transformation programme is really about. In my view this is one of the things that the CIO council has to work a bit harder on. Many councils still have the view that transformation is 'automation through technology' or about significant changes around an existing service practice for efficiency.



Actually, transformation is a 're-plumbing' starting from the delivery of the service - what is the service that the public wants? How would that best be joined up, for example, across some of the different related services? And then working back and saying, what structures would we want in place? What policies, what procedures, what systems will actually enable that to happen?

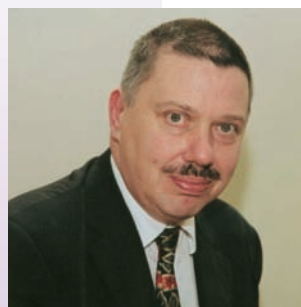
Transformation is a fundamental, not an incremental, level of change; and that requires very different skills. It requires a different approach to risk management; it requires a different approach to performance and reward systems.

We should not expect every local authority to move forward on this at the same pace. Rather, we need to make sure that the vast majority are supported and, through transparency, expose where the weak performance lies. Transparency in performance will identify both the best and the worst practices and the justification for the differences should lie with chief executives and chief officers.

Glyn Evans, assistant to the chief executive on transformation, Birmingham City Council

I do not think that there is anything recognised as best practice at the moment.

One of the challenges we have is that we don't really have anything that looks like a working definition of transformation. So how can we have best



practice in something when we don't even know what that something is?

To me transformation is about making a step change in service delivery. It is not just doing 'continuous improvement'. At the end of a transformation process the service that has been transformed will look significantly different to the service as it was previously configured. At the heart of transformation lies a complete redesign of the service.

But it is not redesigning for redesigning's sake – there must be clear outcomes and goals. In Birmingham every transformation project has to have a set of measurable outcomes. So it is not just 'we will get better'. It is 'we will get better, by this amount, in this timescale'.

We look for three types of measurable outcomes in any project:

- an improved service;
- a more efficient service;
- greater officer job satisfaction.

One of the things often missed when arguing a transformational case is that there should be something in it for all stakeholders if possible. If you are going to expect people to willingly change the way they operate then the sort of jobs provided by public service should be better than those provided now. Change management, and cultural change, are inherent parts of a successful transformation process.

I am not convinced that the emphasis on BPR – business process re-engineering – will actually deliver transformation. BPR is a different concept from service re-design – it is a process that came out of manufacturing so does not apply particularly well to service industries. If you are repetitively manufacturing widgets then BPR may well deliver efficiency savings, but you can't deliver social care as a purely repetitive set of processes. BPR may work for some council services, but does not so easily apply to the complexity of others, eg council tax benefits.

It worries me that we do not have a forum to discuss issues such as this within 'best practice' at the moment. Without an environment where we can share experience – especially what turns out to be bad practice – we will

never get to a real understanding about best practice.

Sharing experience about what doesn't work is often more valuable than sharing successes – it can illuminate the whole process. Local government is wary of admitting that something hasn't worked perhaps because of the overly critical reaction that it often gets.

Outside the work environment our lives have been transformed by technology. People are now very comfortable using technology in their private lives – from digital TV and mobile phones, to home PCs and iPods – yet they don't take account of how the way we live our lives has transformed when they look at transformation in the workplace. They ignore the potential of what that technology can deliver which is basically how you can manipulate information and deliver it to the frontline service.

I think that how we manage information is the core on transformation - but ultimately it is the information that is important not the technology.

I believe that you can look at almost any service area and say, almost instantaneously, 'we could do this differently, we could do it quicker, we could do it in a much more customer focused way, we could do it more efficiently, just by changing the way we manage and use information'.

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'To spread good practice about the transformation of local government.'

Tackling Social Exclusion

Peter Ryder, president of Socitm, working for Preston City Council

The transformation agenda gives local government a significant opportunity to address social exclusion.

Transformation is about many things: it's about joined up services; it's about the citizen; it is about efficiencies; it is about benefits and performance. But at the end of the day it boils down to finding a better way of delivering services to the citizen.

Re-designing the services, getting out there in the community and actually delivering those services into the community to those socially excluded; that is the real key to the whole transformation agenda for me.

So far we have spent a lot of time and effort producing e-services used by people who could use them anyway – people who have the nous, the ability, the PCs and the internet to do so. The real issue is actually getting a dialogue going with the socially excluded – those people who wouldn't normally have that dialogue with authorities.

We need to take services out there, get among the people who need these services and give them the tools, give them the expertise, give them the opportunity – take the technology to them and show them how to do it.

Here in Preston we have got wireless networking, free to use kiosks and a programme working with groups such as the blind, deaf, Help the Aged, women's refuges, ethnic groups, men's missions and so on. We are actually getting out there, having dialogue with these people, providing technology, showing them how to use it and trying in a limited way to support them.

One extremely popular facility is that of video email. You don't need to be able to read and write – you just need someone to set up the email for you and talk to the camera. This has been

extremely successful in engaging with our Indian and Chinese communities, providing support to communicate for free with relatives back home.

The beauty of it is its simplicity – and the fact that people really engage with what we are doing. Our 14 kiosks have had over one and three quarter million user sessions in the last year, and zero vandalism.

But the aim at the end of the day is to get people in to training. We are finding that people engage with us, and that perhaps the first qualified bit of paper they have had in their life has come from training with us via Wi Fi and a lap top. This can make a real difference in people's lives – it is not just the ability to access services but the opportunity to learn, to break the cycle and move on.

I think that social inclusion, breaking down the divides, should be built in to the transformation agenda.

We have got to look at what transformation is really all about. If we can actually do that and start looking at what transformation means to authorities, to members and to citizens, then I think we can actually start to get the message out there a bit more.

Socitm has made great inroads in transformation. It has produced a lot of good publications via the Insight service about transformation and shared services - case studies and advice to help councils. There is a lot going on but people don't know about it. Socitm's publications can go some way to showing what authorities are doing.

Sir Chris Clarke, senior advisor in the Benefits Realisation team, IDeA

What is increasingly clear is that the people who most need our help and support are the least able to get it, because they tend to be less articulate, less mobile, less self confident and less able.

When the UK is the



fourth or fifth strongest economy in the world, to still have one in four to five children and families at or near poverty is a disgrace.

If there is real ambition to deal with social exclusion and deprivation then intervention closer to families and individuals is absolutely critical.

We need to, and can, be more forensic in where the resources are focused. I am very excited about social marketing – an example of which is the recent use of a supermarket loyalty card database to analyse buying habits and identify those most likely to be suffering from diabetes, and offer them advice. Social marketing – analysing the data we hold to identify areas of need – is an interesting concept that could be applied within transformation.

Local authorities and the wider public sector have to make a decision, however, about where - or not - it oversteps the mark on data protection and privacy if it is for 'the greater good'.

The debate on this front – whether it is legal and desirable to share data across the public sector or create a 'super-database' of citizens – will no doubt rumble on for some time.

But I believe that the government must take a stance, tackle the pressure groups, and clarify the law.

If Varney's recommendation for a

'once only' change of address service for the whole public sector is ever to become reality, the issue of sharing information across the wider public sector must be dealt with.

But it is not just at this 'high level' that clarity is needed. Some councils are in absolute confusion about what they are, or are not, allowed to do when it comes to using the information they hold on their citizens to help improve their citizens' lives.

And when it comes to shared services the basic disparities in different councils' interpretation of the law is in danger of creating insurmountable barriers.

Transformation offers us the opportunity to tackle these issues, re-designing services for the citizen and targeting support where it is most needed. If done correctly, delivering efficiency savings should be an inevitable outcome - vast amounts of waste and duplicated effort can be cut from the process of simplifying service delivery.

The process of transformation will take time. But officers can start the process in their own areas today by thinking more about their citizens' needs and abilities. For example, it is an absolute scandal that so many councils create forms and documents written in



confusing language – set at a level too high and complex for most of their audience.

In the work I have undertaken recently in take up it has been disturbing to see that while the public talks about 'dustmen' or 'bin men' councils persist in referring only to 'refuse collectors'.

Likewise, real people talk about problems with rats or mice or bees – but councils talk about rodents, vermin or pest control.

The opportunities for inclusion offered by the transformation agenda should be taken on board by every officer in every council. We should all be asking ourselves, how can I best communicate with MY citizens and help them, wherever they are, to access the services that they need – and have a right to?

With its constant reviews, policy changes and audits, the climate in which national government makes local government operate can leave people frightened of their own shadow and nothing innovative emerges. It is time to have the courage to transform our sector.



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