

ZOMG! Yet another Govt IT Action Plan....

When I read that Cabinet Office is about to publish yet another action plan I find myself wondering if I either fail to understand the meaning of the word "action" or there is a joke I am missing.

Possibly this plan is the output of Cabinet Office work: "to horizon scan and improve capability to identify risks and exploit new technologies" whatever that means.

Perhaps the need for so many action plans has been explained:

a friend [...] who was in the Cabinet Office [...] worked on a small piece of policy and had the Minister's say-so to implement it. Even with this behind him, he had to go back and forth between departments, getting an agreement in one place, only to see it unpicked in another department, forcing him to start the process all over again.

His rule of thumb is that you need six iterations before yes means yes. He also says that this took up months, working full time. And he was inside the system.

However even if this plan were the best plan ever, if previous plans are anything to go by there's another problem:

There are any number of reasons why Transformational Government could never work. One of them is that the big departments of state have no intention of sharing their data. Ian Watmore could call all the meetings he liked at which the Home Office was meant to lie down with DWP and HMRC and the Department for Children Schools and Families and the Department of Health but, as the BBC's File on 4 told us, they simply didn't turn up. The writ of the Cabinet Office does not run wide.

And indeed if we turn to the Public Sector Group, much vaunted successor to the stillborn Open Source Advisory Panel we can see from the 16th Meeting 140911, full draft minutes v1.32 that they either are not members or couldn't even be bothered to send their apologies.

All of this is taking place while Cabinet Office continues to prevaricate over the government definition of an open standard. Which is a bit tricky as they are an essential prerequisite for open data as acknowledged in the government consultation.

No doubt all will be revealed in the eventual response to the Select Committee report on government IT published in May 2011.

-- Gerry Gavigan, Chair, 21 October 2011

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