

*The A – Z of transformation and channel shift
for UK Local Authorities*

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A is for automation

When you're moving transactions and processes to digital (and other self service channels) you almost always have the opportunity to build in automated steps and process.

- Don't miss the opportunity to build in automated workflow
- Automating a workflow process should be straightforward not a complex coding exercise. Look for tools that allow your subject matter experts to develop appropriate rules.
- Don't try and automate everything in one step but rather design a process and implement incrementally. The end result should be radical but the implementation can be a step at a time.
- Maintain in-house control of changes to automation rules. Contemporary technology means that rules creation and management should be a simple configuration exercise.

B is for business process re-engineering

Business process re-engineering focuses on integrating both business process redesign whilst deploying IT to support the reengineering work that will deliver smarter working – meaning you get more efficient and effective working practices.

BPR involves a thorough review of all business processes, job definitions, management systems, organisational structures, work flows and underlying assumptions and beliefs. Your aim should be to move away from old ways of working and effect radical (not incremental) redesign of processes in order to achieve dramatic improvements in critical areas (such as cost, quality, service, and response time) through the in-depth use of information technology.

Bear in mind that radical does not mean untested or out of control. You must be able to continually manage and evolve BPR-led innovations.

C is for channel of choice

How many channels can your customers use to interact with you? On the phone, by letter, face to face, via your organisation's website? Probably yes to all of those.

Oh and then there's Twitter, Facebook, Instagram...

What about LinkedIn, YouTube, Vine?

They could also email you directly, in the old fashioned way. The reality is that your residents and customers will contact you through a channel of their preference and choosing, which means that ignoring some channels for some of your services isn't really an option.

How will you ensure that you have governance across such a multi-channel environment?

D is for digital access

The ability to provide self service access through digital channel to popular, high demand services is a well-accepted and established element of channel shift.

Contemporary web and native mobile technology means you can make most processes and interactions self-service.

The big question now is whether self-service makes sense for *all* services, and does making a service unmediated through a digital channel create undue risk for the customer or for the council delivering the services?

Most of the time the answer is yes, it does make sense to move to self-service. However you need to be mindful of potential exceptions and ensure you have means for intervening when situations occur that are outside what might be deemed 'normal'.

E is for Ease of Access

Citizens don't want a struggle to get information and request services. As a public sector service provider you'll need to provide self-service ways to allow them to do most things for themselves. These methods should offer a user experience that's straightforward, easy-to-use and consistent regardless which service area of your Authority customers are dealing with.

Don't be scared of asking for feedback and, when in receipt of consistent feedback from customers, make sure you act on it. That means being able to reconfigure and redeploy a process quickly if it isn't working well for your customers.

F is for Failure Demand

Failure demand is one to avoid! Failure demand is an interesting and relatively recently documented concept. It was defined by Professor John Seddon in 1992 as 'demand caused by a failure to do something or do something right for the customer'.

For example a customer tries to apply for a Blue Badge via your organisation's website, the online process fails to meet expectation or simply does not work, the client then calls the customer service centre, pushing up call volumes. Worse still that first call does not resolve the customer's question and they have to call back. You get the picture...that's demand for service driven through failure. Ouch!

[Click here to get more information on Failure Demand from Wikipedia](#)

G is for Geospatial Data (actually using it!)

Local Authorities are blessed with often large volumes of interesting, service relevant and geographically referenced data. This is a potentially valuable resource and can be used in different ways.

- To understand patterns of demand, hotspots and to help support service design and business process re-engineering
- To enhance user experience, for example when a user wants to report a fault with street furniture, why not present that street furniture layer to them as part of the reporting process so that they can select exactly the asset they wish to report?

Councils that use My Council Services can present any Web Mapping Service layer showing geospatial asset data as part of any customer-facing or internally-facing process.

H is for HiPPO

Not the kind that hang around in rivers and zoos. We mean the ‘highest paid person’s opinion’ and how this can stifle debate and / or derail good practice around business process re-engineering and wider transformation activities.

The reality is that HIPPOs ultimately call the shots and are really your ally, not your enemy. There are great tactics for harnessing this and making the HIPPO your ally – but that’s for a different blog post.

I is for In House Expertise

When it comes opportunities for BPR, channel shift and broader organisation-wide transformation programmes, don't ignore the expertise and practical experience that you already have in house.

Listen to your internal experts and take their practical and pragmatic feedback into consideration when planning and executing transformation programmes – especially those members of staff that deal with customers on a day to day basis. These colleagues will have invaluable insight but you will need to listen to them to capture it.

J is for Joined Up Processes

Historically (and understandably) UK Local Authorities have evolved into quite siloed organisations. Planning deals with planning issues and Street Scene stick to their area. Makes sense right?

In the age of austerity and scarce resources it is time to question these assumptions. There will doubtless be areas and instances where some cross-functional and cross-organisational process make sense for the customer and for the organisation.

For example, when does it make sense for the local social housing landlord, the Council Street Scene and the Council's Social Care teams to be joined up? Perhaps when an elderly resident of a social housing property is becoming the persistent victim of anti social fly tipping in their front garden. A joined up approach to this type of situation could save a great deal of upset for the resident and avert significant reputational damage should risk become a reality.

K is for Keep It Simple

Sounds obvious but it is so easy to build organisational structure, approach and process to deal with the minority exception and, in doing, so make something overly complicated for the majority of 'business as usual' situations. Keeping things simple is worth bearing in mind where ever you sit in an organisational hierarchy.

It's important to consider the exception and then to find a simple way of identifying it and dealing with it. Don't engineer everything to the exception.

L is for learn from your customer

This is another ingredient for successful transformation along with the tips shared under the letter H and I.

Find effective, systematic, representative and ongoing mechanisms for hearing what your customers have to say about how your organisation is doing its job.

Capturing customer feedback and requirements and keeping them in mind will make your wider transformation programme much more likely to be successful in the long term.

M is for Make It Mobile

The lines have long since crossed over on the chart describing how the good citizens of the UK accesses the internet. Today it is all about mobile devices, and the use of such devices is only going to grow.

You must cater effectively for mobile access – for all service areas – let the customer figure out their preferred means of contact. Increasingly that's going to be mobile.

N is for Negativity

No place for negativity. Times are tough for sure, resources are scarce and our collective future may be less certain than it used to seem. Remember 'tougher times' is probably the reality for council employees and the wider population, including your customers.

That said, there's a job to be done and we must find ways to get that job done, to the best of our ability with the resources we have available. Negativity can't help with that and if you allow negative attitudes to get a grip in your organisation then you're going to find your channel shift and transformation programme hard to implement effectively.

0 is for Open Data

Data is the raw material of information, insight and understanding.

Local government organisations are significant custodians of a large amount of potentially extremely helpful data – much of which it's OK to share. Local government must embrace the opportunity to collaborate with their residents and customers to capture and develop data that will help improve service provision and neighbourhoods for all. See what Glasgow City Council are up to:

<https://data.glasgow.gov.uk/>

And watch a specific example regarding sustainable transport here:

<https://youtu.be/NDg5-vHH3es>

P is for People

In the urgent rush towards transformation, channel shift and efficiency gains let's not forget that our public service infrastructure and its institutions are there for us. They were created by us and that means that elected members and leaders are accountable to all of us.

Local Government, in all its facets, is there for people.

Q is for Quality of Service

Doing things with greater efficiency does not mean a lesser service.

The opportunities presented by technology make things possible today that even 10 or 15 years ago would have been the realm of science fiction.

The combination of well planned process, careful consideration of what customers really need and want, coupled with innovative use of technology with smart humans in the mix can create exciting outcomes in terms of quality of service for public service delivery.

R is for Remote Working

We sometimes talk about this as mobile working.

A huge amount of focus, in the context of transformation and channel shift, is given to the customer experience at point of contact. In our experience the ability to deliver digital transformation on internal processes can be an even greater catalyst for change (and savings) and also contributes to improved customer experience because things get done faster and better.

[See what Stafford Borough Council have been able to achieve using My Council Services for Mobile Working](#)

S Software as a Service (SaaS)

Software as a Service is the delivery model for enabling cloud-based, on-demand access to a scalable set of configurable user-facing applications.

In the context of local government channel shift and transformation, the delivery of technology through SaaS applications typically reduces costs and speeds up implementation time – when done properly.

You need to be aware of data processing legislation, security and application integrity though – not all SaaS based applications are born equally well engineered and some have been clumsily migrated to pass themselves off as SaaS applications!

T is for Transaction Costs

The current prevailing conditions of budget restriction and general austerity have brought about the urgent need for channel shift and transformation in local government. Channel shift specifically is very focused on removing high transaction costs and shifting appropriate services to channels that offer a lower transaction cost.

According to research by SOCITM from 2012 cost per transaction by channel look something like this:

- Face-to-face £8.62 per transaction
- Phone £2.83 per transaction
- Web £0.15 per transaction

The key is to have some reliable benchmark data for your own organisation around both cost, service demand by channel and patterns of demand.

U is for 'Up For Review'

By this I mean that everything should be up for review including but not limited to:

- How customers engage with and use public service
- How technology can be used to deliver services and support effective local governance
- How public servants will be expected to use technology in the execution of their duties
- How technology vendors are expected to deliver their products and services if they expect to remain competitive and relevant – we have to become more flexible, more agile and prove our ability to deliver

V is for Value Demand

This is defined as the opposite of failure demand.

It's what happens when you make the customer digital experience so efficient that customers prefer to use these self service digital channels in favour of their traditional access points.

You'll see demand increase through these digital channels and, crucially, because you have designed processes so well and invested in the right scalable technology to support them, the increased demand will be accommodated and saving will be realised because you are placing volume transactions through low cost channels of contact.

W is for worldwide web

Without the worldwide web channel shift would have been concerned with switching over the telly from BBC1 to ITV.

We should pause to thank Sir Tim Berners Lee for his work on the hypertext link in the 1980s to create a workable system of using the web, with a nod also in the direction of the US Defence Department in the 1960s for its commissioning of packet switching networks making the first use of internet protocol.

Today we have a content rich, highly interactive online world with all of the opportunities this offers.

[Read more internet history by clicking here](#)

X is for Generation X

Generation X is those people born between 1961 and 1981, stereotyped in young adulthood as slackers and the disenfranchised - associated with youth in the 1970s and 1980s (your author is in this demographic I should add).

Things have changed however - in the preface to *Generation X Goes Global: Mapping a Youth Culture in Motion*, a collection of global essays, Professor Christine Henseler summarizes it as "a generation whose worldview is based on change, on the need to combat corruption, dictatorships, abuse, AIDS, a generation in search of human dignity and individual freedom, the need for stability, love, tolerance, and human rights for all"

Given that Gen X is now of an age to be taking on roles as public service and commercial leadership beacons – I'd suggest Gen Xers, with their positive attitudes, arrived in the nick of time to deliver organisational transformation for UK Local Government.

Y is for 'YATWL'

Compiling this A – Z of channel shift, the most 21st Century of topics, would not be complete without a sprinkling of text speak. Ahem. Sorry. That should've been 'txt spk'.

YATWL is txt spk for 'you are the weakest link'. One to avoid, this one. Delivering comprehensive channel shift means that processes have to be redesigned from beginning to end, removing inefficiency whilst maintaining focus on quality of service. Having a great customer experience in a digital channel that then falls down because your internal processes are outmoded and inefficient will take us back to F for 'failure demand'.

There is no room for weak links when implementing effective channel shift.

Z is for Zebras not Horses...

There is a folklore phrase that goes 'If you hear hoof beats, think horses not zebras.'

It basically means that of two competing theories or explanations, all other things being equal, the simpler one is to be preferred (also known as Occam's Razor).

This general approach will serve you well when analysing, planning, deploying and monitoring the effectiveness of your organisation's ongoing transformation programme.

Remember what we discussed earlier? Keep it simple.

Good luck!