



ukgovcamp

Session: 3

Room: Banqueting Suit 1

Session title : Defence against the dark arts - don't let them announce the solution

Session leader : Oli

Volunteer to continue conversation after :

Notes taken by : David Durant

Notes

Scenarios you've experienced or fear where stakeholders have arrived with a terrible idea

- A university which wanted to replace their welfare service with a chatbot
- We need to replace the thing we have with something else that does the same thing - no challenged if it's meeting a set of valid needs
- Only procure things when "the situation is on fire" - no time to find a proper solution
- Only get the budget for the MVP and then move onto the next thing on fire
- 240 requirements from managers upfront and none from users
- Procurement of a critical Probation system decided by senior management with the vendor during a golf game
- Ask to discuss using predictive AI to generate court judgements as part of reducing need for juries
- Migrate the organisation from Google to Microsoft and define the benefits **while doing it**
- Hiring suppliers that use AI to produce excellent bids but have no ability to deliver
- Let's build an ID bid writing tool
- We're not sure the alpha delivered any value but we're committed to build the beta
- The Minister says it has to be a separate app

- Welsh Gov announcement on introducing “smart treatment” without speaking to any clinicians
- Okay, we’ve developed this AI model - now lets find a user for it
- Being told to develop features based on anecdotal user feedback
- We have to stop sending physical letters and email PDFs instead
- Build an “ombudsman service” - no outcomes defined, no user needs, nothing to work on
- Combine these 23 tax regimes into one dashboard
- Implement this highly complex service using low code / no-code systems
- Build a virtual hub for this EIP project
- **Just do something with AI to show that we’re doing something with AI**
- Agencies getting tenders which include discovery but also the requirements for the final system
- Please add this feature that I vibe-coded for you over the weekend
- Please do a discovery but make sure (1) it has this outcome and (2) includes AI somehow
- We know our users so we don’t need any more research
- Our senior manager saw this tool on a video conference and now we have to procure it
- Procurement at the last possible moment

Small teams : Discuss what you have done or might do to get out of these kind of issues

- Have an official suggestion system and process
- Create a “front door” team to ask for value and evidence for suggestions (user needs)
 - Still overridden by Ministers
- Be able to create rapid prototypes to get quick user feedback
- **Point people at the Service Standard and the Technology Code of Practice**
- **Build what they want and let it fail (depressing waste of time and money)**
- Build in research and specific tasks to cover the wider culture and people change required
- Constantly refer back to the original outcomes
- Understand why their “stupid” ideas / opinions make sense to them. Treat them with respect. Have open and honest dialogue
- Always take new people through the value of doing a full discovery - not just digital, what are the wider implications
- How could the value for money / improvement for citizens (or civil servants) be measured
- Do constant feature prioritization
- Failure case studies (if you can find them!)
 - If they get published these days
 - People obviously afraid of showing failure
- The “really slow no” - route them into paperwork hell... (Not recommended)
- Spend significant effort building strong relationships with senior decision makers
 - Show and tells
 - Other working in the open
- **Treat senior stakeholders as people with their own separate user needs**
- Negative case studies (showing where things went wrong)

- **Storytelling is very important**
- **Pick your battles**
- See things from their perspective
- Make sure you have joint measures of success with senior leaders (get their name on it)
- **Eliminate “I told you so”**
- Discuss the options for addressing the underlying user needs
- Always push back on doing things for the sake of doing something
- Ask “what will we learn from doing this?”
- Focus strongly on user research
 - Test senior stakeholder assumptions
 - Show what “bubbles up” from research
- Recognise that almost every project also involves culture change and be specific about what that looks like
- Be prepared to counter “snake oil” claims from providers (AI especially but not only)
- Play back requests phrased slightly differently to highlight potential issues
- Frame discussions around increasing and reducing risk
- Whenever possible have frontline staff and users talk directly to decision makers
- Connect user needs to specific anonymised stories from real people
- Find ways to phrase your words in their language
- Practice storytelling - find relatable analogies
- Highlight potential risks - add them to the official Risk Log
- Understand your stakeholder's stakeholder's
- Use the Service Standard and the Technology Code of Practice
- User failure case studies - we no longer see any published Service Standard Failures
 - This isn't true but the number of published Service Standard reviews has plummeted
- Use the Five Whys method
- **Understand your stakeholder's needs as user needs**
- **How do we know we've succeeded when this thing you've suggested is done?**
- Move conversations upstream - avoid people arriving with specifically appointed money for a bad idea
- **What do we need to deprioritise in order to do the newly suggested thing**
- **Shared success makers - get their names on it so if it fails...**
- Coach stakeholders to talk positively about your work
- **Don't be scared of conflict**
- **Keep discussing the issues**
- **Get comfortable saying NO! Walk away if you need to.**