



ICT Top 10 considerations for Shared Services

Foresight Consulting has provided shared service consultancy to a number of local authorities and one of our main areas of expertise is ICT Services. In our work to date we have discovered the importance of a joined up infrastructure to underpin the shared service. In some authorities where departments have gone ahead of ICT and tried to merge their services, issues have been experienced because the basic services on which they rely are just not there – two separate sets of applications and discrete data, no access to “home” services from alternate sites, different desktop interfaces (Operating Systems, Office Versions, Desktop policies etc.) making it difficult to cross train and authentication difficulties making access to “on the move” resources difficult or impossible. This can all lead to frustration and ultimately the shared service initiative will flounder and fail. We have therefore found that the best model is for ICT to go first and be ahead of the game – yes, there are some difficulties with this as there is no way of telling what the requirement will be for processing power, bandwidth or storage, for example, before the requirements of the departments are fully assessed and known; but it is better to provide 80% of the requirement when required and develop the other 20% during service take-up than trying to play catch up with the departments requirements from the bottom up.

Short term investment will be needed to effectively join up two infrastructures and the Return on Investment (ROI) will only be realised once the organisation begins to use common applications and merge their departments. At best, the investment in the infrastructure might break even given that savings in Disaster Recovery agreements, multiple data centre provision and network connectivity are quickly realised. However, it is important that the organisations quickly recognise that expenditure is required in the short term if the full long-term (probably 3 to 5 years) savings are to be fully realised - this is the bigger picture that shared services offer and a well-constructed business case is certainly required. Our experience is that there is a good level of understanding within the organisations that we have dealt with around this concept and that ICT Managers have generally found Chief Executives to be supportive but it is worth investing in a detailed business case and initial infrastructure assessments to ensure ROI exists particularly in on-going (revenue) savings.

The table below is designed to highlight the top 10 infrastructure topics that will need in-depth assessment and consideration if the shared service is to deliver early savings and operational efficiencies.



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1. Connectivity (Bandwidth)	<p>The means by which the two services are connected (Wide Area Networks WAN)</p>	<p>Bandwidth has reduced considerably in price over the last couple of years and it is important that the shared service does not compromise the whole operation by underspecifying in this area. Too little bandwidth will limit what can be achieved by the shared service in the long-term. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are our arrangements for future PSN connection? • What does the inter-site traffic model look like? • Where are the shared services going to be hosted?
2. Data Replication	<p>The process of copying data between the two shared services. (Storage Area Network SAN)</p>	<p>Modern storage systems or Storage Area Networks (SAN) are capable of replicating data. This means that when a user writes data in one location it is automatically copied to a second location. This model enables shared services to create a Disaster Recovery (DR) model using alternate main offices, reducing the cost of DR and keeping the provision in-house. Bandwidth is a key consideration when it comes to data replication. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can existing SANs be utilised? • What are the requirements of DR? • What will the inter-site bandwidth support?
3. Domain & Authentication Services	<p>Providing an effective logon and administrative model for the shared service</p>	<p>Most shared services want to retain separate domain names for local identity reasons. However, the Active Directory design has to allow users to logon at any site, access shared resources such as printers and to effectively shared applications and workflow. Also, from a support perspective, one administrative domain is important to the success of the shared service. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joining together the Active Directories in a hierarchical model. • Centralised access to all resource and administrative detail. • Use the information as the directory for the organisation.
4. Data Centre strategy	<p>Where will the shared services servers and data be</p>	<p>There may be an obvious answer to this – one organisation has an outstanding facility that could become the primary site</p>



	hosted?	<p>and host the others servers or, a dual site model may be applicable with equal hosting partners and services split across both facilities. This decision and the long-term goal for data centres has an effect on items 1 & 2 in particular and is the main strategy decision to take regarding ICT provision. There are savings to be made here too, as with server virtualisation the overall data centre footprint and power consumption can be dramatically reduced through sharing services.</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the current strengths and weaknesses. • Look at user access and traffic models. • How will telecoms be provided in the long-term?
5. Disaster Recovery	How will the services be recovered and where will the users gain access following a major disaster	<p>Generally, most shared services consist of two head offices and a number of satellite offices. The head offices house the majority of the staff and commonly the data centres or computer rooms. The shared service with data replication between the two main sites offers a natural DR capability at alternate sites. This can save investment in external DR services and give full control to local management at the point that a recovery is required.</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the requirements of the users? • Do we make sufficient use of server virtualisation? • Do we have a plan that will offer a recovery within the SLA we offer?
6. Internet Access	Bandwidth provision to an ISP for Internet Access including external mail, browsing, Remote Access and Web Services.	<p>Along with Wide Area connectivity, Internet Access has reduced considerably in price over the last couple of years. The days of suffering a 2Mbps pipe to the Internet that ground to a standstill over the lunch hour are behind us. This in-turn has allowed shared services to do far more with their internet connections, allowing more users to work from home, begin the transition to cloud services and offered cost effective ways of connecting to third parties and remote sites. Part of the Internet provision is the Corporate Firewalls, Web & Mail filters, Remote Access & Authentication services and ISP</p>



		<p>services. Therefore we should look for savings through the use of a single provider and entity for each component. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can a single Internet bearer be shared? • Does the design have sufficient resilience? • Can all other peripheral services be streamlines?
7. Hosting Web Services	The organisations Web Site and other web transaction services	<p>Treating both web sites are a single entity reduces support and management costs. The use of a common application for the web site and transactional services can also reduce the maintenance costs for these services and focus the development of staff skills on a single product. If Internet capability is focussed on one site then all externally facing services can be hosted in the same location with fail-over in line with an Internet access failure to the secondary site.</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current strengths and weaknesses of web delivery. • How administration could be reduced. • Bringing two externally hosted services in-house as one.
8. Desktop Services	The device and software used by users within the organisation	<p>The shared service could be the opportunity that the organisations have been looking for to consider the future of the desktop. With XP heading for end of life and the costs associated with a Windows 7 roll-out, it could be time to undertake a review which leads to the delivery of a Thin Desktop, at least in part. Thin Computing lends itself to cloud delivery mechanisms and where the data centre or service is being delivered remotely within the organisation. A virtualised desktop stored in a data centre can also be accessed securely and in a consistent way from anywhere within the estate or from the Internet making it the ideal model for future flexible working and the effectiveness of the shared service.</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the desktop being delivered in the most optimum way for shared services? • Is there a business case through reduced support, maintenance,



		<p>power consumption, flexibility and the break/fix model for the introduction of a thin desktop?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can new ways of working be introduced to support the shared service, increase flexible working methods and reduce the overall requirement for accommodation?
9. Remote Access (Home & Mobile Access)	How users access central services from the Internet	<p>With home working, hot desking and the 70/30 model being driven by cost reduction and flexible ways of working initiatives the provision of a slick, common and effect remote access method is critical to the shared service.</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the design cope with increased mobile access and regular home working? • Can a streamlined approach be designed to meet all the requirements of the shared service? • Does the service look & feel the same from wherever accessed and whatever device is used?
10. Applications Sharing	A single application per department or service.	<p>It is generally considered that this is the area where the most significant cost savings can be made. By having a single application the cost of licensing, maintenance and internal support can be substantially reduced. All the benefits of a single application joined up workflow and accessibility from anywhere can only be achieved if the initial stages and investment in the underlying infrastructure services are not targeted effectively.</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which are the two organisations preferred applications? • Where are applications in their lifecycle and what platforms are they supported on? • Where can the most significant savings be made?

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