

# The myth of silver bullets

...and why you don't need them, anyway.



Government 4.0  
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**SensibleTech**

# Hello!

I'm Dave, and this is what I looked like a little while back.

I have over 15 years experience delivering digital and technology stuff in and for local government. Right now I'm doing it through my company, [SensibleTech](#).

I like to be helpful and give loads of stuff away for free.

Also, I am the current chair of [LocalGovDigital](#), the practitioner network for... well, you work it out.

All the useful links are at: [www.davebriggs.xyz](http://www.davebriggs.xyz)



# What I am going to talk about today

Everything I have learned though makes me deeply sceptical about the ability of technology to make anything meaningfully better.

That doesn't stop me being enthusiastic or optimistic though!

I'll talk about the current AI hype to illustrate this, and what organisations really ought to be doing about it.

I'll then talk through some work that I have been doing with my chums at Epping Forest and Colchester Councils, and how the findings might help everyone out a bit.


# “AI will save the world!”

Tech

## 10 ways AI will change the world – from curing cancer to wiping out humanity

Are we on the brink of an artificial intelligence-powered utopia or dystopia?

Anthony Cutbertson • Wednesday 03 May 2023 18:06 BST • Comments



GOV.UK

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### News story

## Government to harness the power of AI to improve public project delivery under new framework

A new framework sets out how Artificial Intelligence will be harnessed to boost productivity in public project delivery.

## AI and drones in £800m Budget technology package

3 March

Budget 2024



## Why AI Will Save the World

Marc Andreessen

SHARE

Posted June 6, 2023

it better

The era of Artificial Intelligence is here, and boy are people freaking out.

Fortunately, I am here to bring the good news: AI will not destroy the world, and in fact may save it.

First, a short description of what AI is: The application of mathematics and software code to teach computers how to understand, synthesize, and generate knowledge in ways similar to how people do

## Derby council AI savings plan prompts concern

28 February



# It's impossible to avoid!

Everyone seems to be making bold claims about AI.

Technologists are being put under pressure by leaders to deliver.

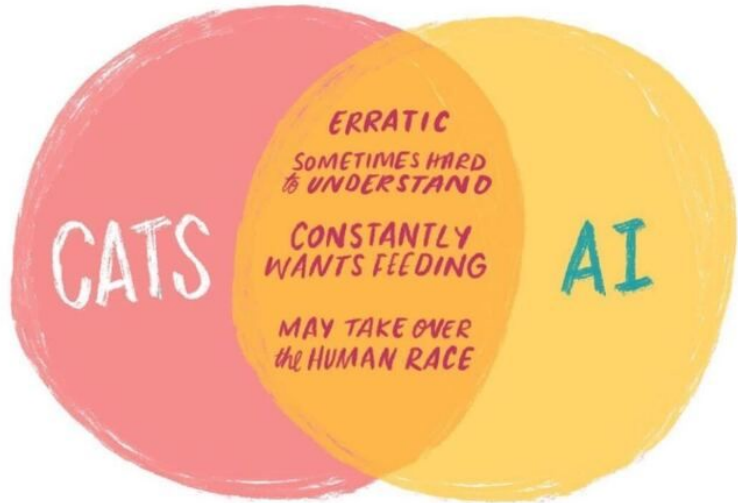
But are the claims really true? How can we tell?



# Here's what we know for definite

- The actual real-life examples of successful use of this kind of technology is mostly in the realm of helpful productivity hacks
- Use cases that genuinely generate the kind of efficiencies being bandied about are few and far between
- Nobody really know what an enterprise level approach to this stuff really looks like
- Vendors are brilliant at selling us dreams and then blaming us when it doesn't work out as planned

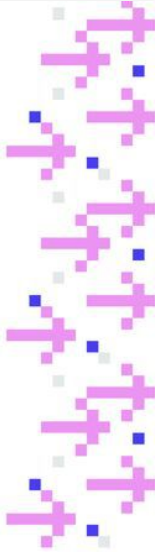
# Cats and FOMO



CATS and AI



FOMO is  
not a  
strategy



# A sensible approach to AI

- All the technology currently branded as 'AI' is genuinely exciting
- Don't sign any multi-year, multi-million pound deals just yet
- Don't promise anyone that there are significant savings to be made any time soon
- Start by innovating in controlled experiments, learning from what works and what doesn't
- Watch the market, and figure out what the long term sustainability of all this stuff is
- In about 3 years' time, we might have figured some of this out!



# Stuff that needs ironing out, before starting

- Data security concerns
- Quality concerns
- Environmental impact
- How to choose suppliers

If this sounds like a lot of difficult and probably quite boring work, you're spot on.



# Hang on... haven't we heard all this before?

5 years ago with robotic process automation?

10 years ago with digital?

15 years ago with CRM?

20 years ago with e-government?

**YES.**



# What do all those things have in common?

They are tactics, not strategies.

They are technologies, not transformation.

Solutions bolted onto structures and processes in desperate need of reform.

Examples of adding digital to broken things - you get [digital broken things](#).

If you add digital to a broken thing you just get a digital broken thing



# My 5 statements of the bleedin' obvious

1. If something sounds like a silver bullet, it probably isn't one
2. You can't build good things on shaky, or non-existent, foundations
3. There are no shortcuts through taking the time to properly learn, understand and plan
4. There's no such thing as a free lunch – investment is always necessary at some point and it's always best to spend sooner, thoughtfully, rather than later, in a panic
5. Don't go big early in terms of your expectations: start small, learn what works and scale up from that

**Thanks for depressing us, Dave.**

What can we actually do about this?

# Assessing Epping Forest and Colchester Councils



I've been working with these two lovely councils to see how they are getting on, using the a framework I have made.

# What is the local government digital quality model?

An openly-licensed, community-maintained framework by which councils can measure how well they are using digital design, data and technology. They can then use it to decide where they want to get to next, and how.

It sets out five levels of quality, applied across 10 dimensions.

Not every council can, or should, aim to rate at the highest level on every dimension. They need to be realistic, based on their context.

It is freely available for use by councils and organisations working with councils, if used in accordance with the [license](#).

# How does the model help?

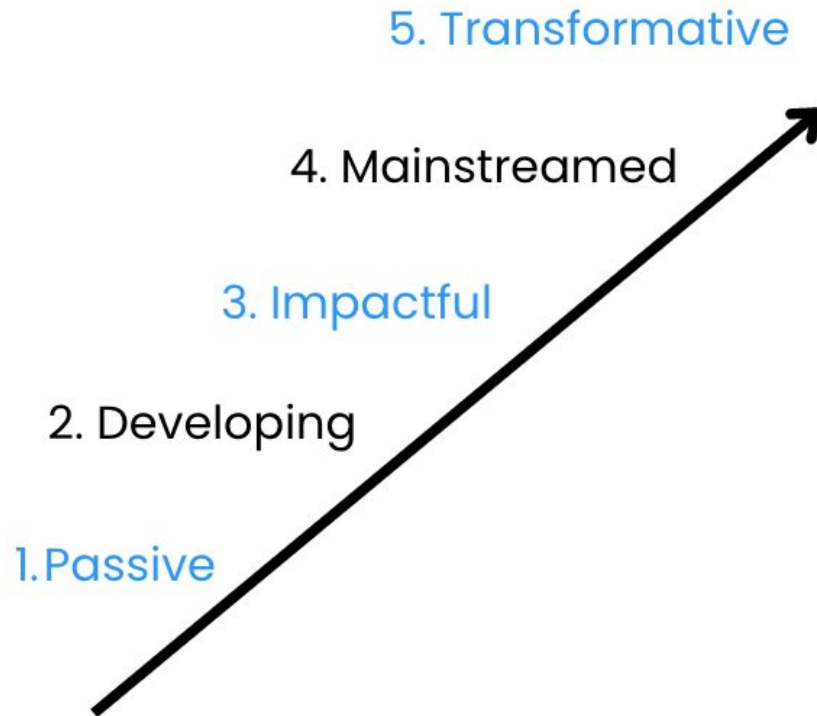
The model is designed to:

- Help councils figure out what good looks like in the world of digital design, data and technology within their context
- Gives them a way of planning improvement with a sense of direction and ideas for steps to make progress
- Create opportunities for benchmarking of progress with other, similar councils
- Create opportunities for collaboration between councils to share ideas and work to progress

The whole process is less about achieving high score and more about facilitating good conversations.



# The 5 levels



# The 10 dimensions

Leadership

Strategy

Culture

Decision-making

Capacity

Technology

Data

Experience

Design

Delivery

# How it works

I spoke with the senior leadership teams at both councils to understand their perception of the current offer, and what their ambitions for the future are.

I reviewed the relevant documents and records.

I spent a day with the digital and IT folk in each council, talking them through the ten dimensions of the model.

# Findings

All councils will have specific issues with technology. Sometimes more significantly than others.

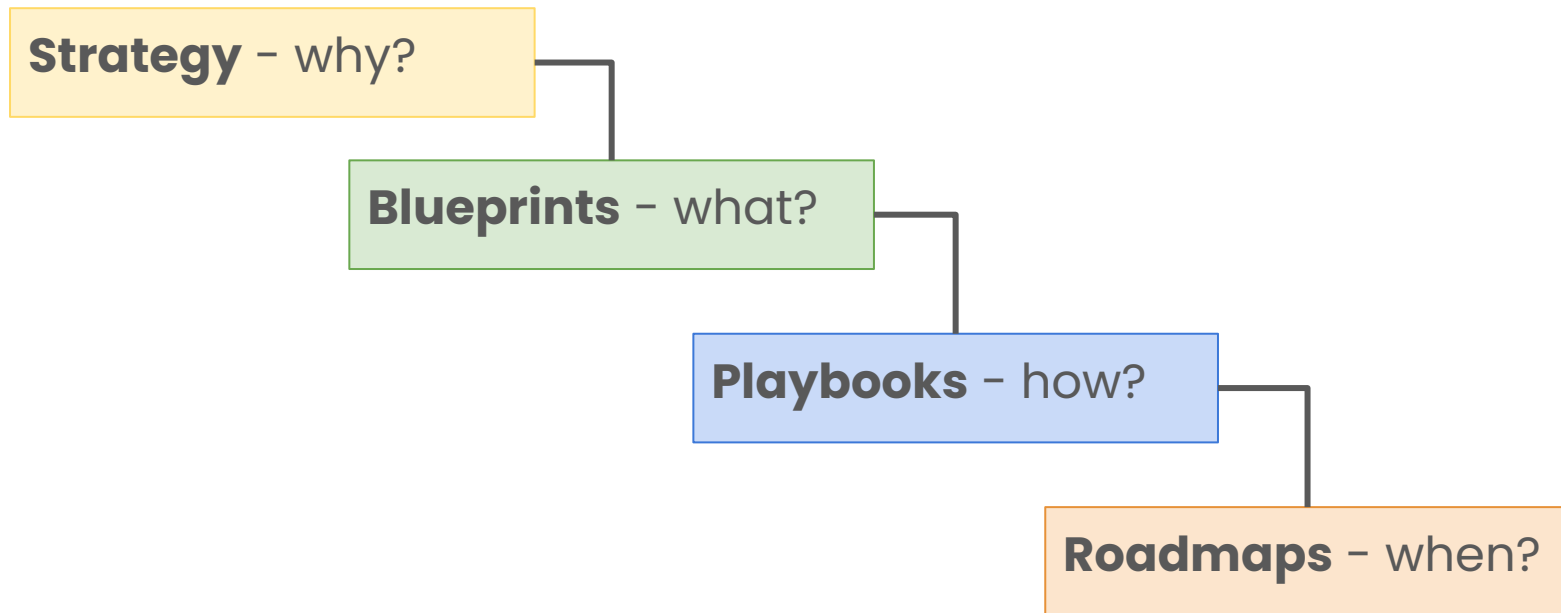
**There are reasons for everything!** Invariably dissatisfaction with technology can be traced back to issues with leadership, strategy, culture, and decision making – **often going back years.**

The answer is not to buy some different technology and cross your fingers. It's to take a deep breath and do the hard yards.

# Questions that require positive answers

- Do you have a clearly articulated strategy that helps everyone in the organisation understand why the things that are being done are being done?
- Do you have clearly understood and universally adhered-to decision making and prioritisation arrangements?
- Do you have clearly documented blueprints for your approaches to key areas like technology, data, and online experience?
- Do you have a clearly communicated and accessible list of all work in progress or on a roadmap so people know who is doing what when?

# What a decent foundation might look like



# Which means that when this guy comes calling...

You will have a clear picture of where you are going and why, and what you need to get you there - and how long it is going to take.

So you can confidently tell them exactly what you need - or to just do one.



# While on the subject of salespeople...

Feel free to send them to the unsolicited marketing service standard!

[tumss.localgov.blog](http://tumss.localgov.blog)

## The unsolicited marketing service standard

*A helpful guide to senders of unsolicited marketing for buyers of technology goods and services. [The idea and all the text](#) here are the result of a collaborative effort, stewarded by [Rob Miller](#).*

1. [What is the user need?](#)
2. [Why is the service standard important?](#)
3. [The service standard](#)
4. [Make a suggestion](#)

### What is the user need?

As a technology buyer I need to learn from suppliers and potential suppliers, so that I can consider ways that their expertise might help me achieve my



# Any questions?

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Find out more about the digital quality model:

[dq.sensibletech.co.uk](https://dq.sensibletech.co.uk)

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