**Public Sector Future WWPS Podcast Series**

**Episode 63**

**Olivia Neal [host], Mary Odile Lognard [guest]**

**Running time: 17:20**

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  Hello and welcome to Public Sector Future. This is a show for anyone who cares about using digital approaches in the public sector to deliver better outcomes. I’m your host, Olivia Neal, and together we explore stories from around the world, where public servants have been successful at delivering change. Throughout the series we discuss technology and trends, as well as the culture aspects of how to make change happen.

I'm joined today by Marie Odile Lognard. Marie Odile is the CEO of i-CITY, which is the IT solutions and services provider for the City of Brussels. We going to be discussing the work that she and her team have done to drive digital transformation, for the benefit of all. Through implementing a new approach - informed by the insights of front line employees, and supported by a new omni-channel platform, they're transforming the way that people can get services from their city.

Marie Odile, thank you so much for joining us.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Mary Odile, thanks so much for joining us and for giving us your time today. So, could you just share a little bit about the City of Brussels, your size, the number of staff you have and who the people are that you serve?

**MARY ODILE LOGNARD:** Well, the City of Brussels – well, first of all, is the capital city. And it’s one of the 19 municipalities of the region. It’s the largest with almost 200,000 people of – of about 180 nationalities. And we provide IT solutions and services to the City of Brussels.

Our mission is to support the city in its transition to being a smart city, while maintaining existing services and solutions. We deliver up to 70 IT different services to the city, and its general administration. We have 4,000 employees. We have 5,000 teachers and about 40,000 students.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** So, you’re dealing with a very international and diverse city by the sounds of it. And you’re managing a transition where the city is continuing to deliver existing services, and transition to a new way of working as well.

 And thinking about how that transition started and the role of digital and the role of technology, how did developing a digital approach become a priority for you and for the city?

**MARY ODILE LOGNARD:** Yes, indeed, making a technological jump and implementing a digital approach became a priority about five years ago, for different and various reasons.

First of all, Brussels was facing significant population growth since the early 2000s, creating a high pressure on its administration services, with long queues, long waiting times, creating frustrations for the citizens, and at the end, a kind of disconnection between citizens and its administration.

At the same time, the phasing out of the older technology required smart solutions. The administration was old-fashioned, paper-based, not very accessible for its citizens. And as a part of that, the world has been changing, people have been changing, people have been evolving, they want everything anywhere, anytime, any devices.

And what we thought we wanted yesterday, we no longer one today, like smoking, diesel cars, and things like that.

Finally, the city had to move, and we had a hard deadline on that, because there was a fixed deadline for this move, and this move was not possible without some kind of disrupting modernization of the IT structure.

[03:10]

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Okay, so you had a combination of imperatives to help start this transition. You had the desires of citizens who wanted to connect with government in a different way, frustration from long waiting times, and then also a physical move of the city, which was going to require technological change, as well.

So, a lot of pressures behind you as you started on this journey, and was moving towards a more digital approach, something that had broad support across the organization, something that people agreed was the right direction, or was it something that you had to build support for?

**MARY ODILE LOGNARD:** Well, we had some support. We had some design criteria, and those criteria remain valid and still applied today. We wanted a connected and citizen-centered city, accessible for all, bridging the digital divide, participative and accessible. That’s why we started this huge digitalization process.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** And so, at the heart of the digital transformation, and this process, I believe is your platform called the BRUCE platform. And I wonder if you could explain for people a little bit about what the BRUCE platform is, and it’s an interesting name as well. What does this platform deliver?

**MARY ODILE LOGNARD:** Well, BRUCE, is an omni-channel citizen platform with the aim of managing products and services for all Brussels citizens, individual businesses, and also visitors, commuters.

The platform is a stable set of various components, and Microsoft building blocks. It’s stable, it can evolve. And at its core, there is a citizen relation management tool called a CRM that provides a 360-degree view on the citizens and employees.

And at the periphery, we have various components, enabling digitalization, citizen-secure identification, and links to incoming and outcoming mail, electronic signature, electronic payments that are linked, document generation, et cetera.

And all this is complemented by a knowledge database that contains all relevant information for both the citizens and the employees. This integration platform is open, secured, it’s in the cloud, and it’s adaptable.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** So, there’s so much there that’s contained within this platform approach. So, you have all these different building blocks from identity authentication to a 360-degree view of the citizen that both assistant and employees can use.

And I also find what you said very interesting that this is not just something that citizens of Brussels might use, but visitors might use or commuters, and so you’re dealing with people with all sorts of different relationships in the city, so you have a very wide user base.

And just thinking about this platform and these building blocks that you have, you mentioned an omnichannel approach here. I’m interested in knowing a little bit more about how this platform impacts the way that people can interact with the city and what the benefits are for them.

**MARY ODILE LOGNARD:** Yes. Well, BRUCE optimizes the relationship between the citizens and the administration. We deliver the same experience, regardless of the channel chosen by the citizen or service. It can be by phone, by mail, by visiting us, by various ways. We have now up to 20, services, digitalized and made accessible online for the citizens.

Imagine, for instance, your students, you have to fill in administration papers for your university. Before, you had to take a day off in order to collect all the relevant information and documents.

Now, you can get everything online in a few minutes. You don’t have to come to the city center anymore. It saves you time, but also you improve the waiting time for others. Since fewer people need to travel there is also less pollution.

Most of the services are free, and if not, there is a secure online payment facility, but you can go yourself to our platform and see for yourself what the possibilities are and what is offered.

The address is mybxl.be but really, this project has changed the relationship between the citizens and their local administration, the municipality. We experience up to 40% fewer visits than before.

[08:21]

**OLIVIA NEAL:** That’s a really interesting statistic so that people are still able to access the services that they need, without having to go in person.

When you were talking earlier, you mentioned the 360-degree view of a citizen, which is available for employees as well.

So, I’m interested. This change must have positive impacts on the public, but also it sounds like it impacts the way that employees work, and that the city operates. Are there benefits that this offers to the operations of the city?

**MARY ODILE LOGNARD:** Yes, sure they are. For the employees, the work environment has changed and drastically improved. The quality of their work is being improved as well. It’s becoming more interesting as they can now focus on tasks that cannot be done by your machine, avoiding menial tasks. It’s also allowing them to work in a more flexible way.

For instance, remote work was made available for all employees. It was not the case before for the front desk employees. It’s also more efficient for the organization as well.

Machines are secure, security issues are avoided by multiple checks at different stages of all the procedures, but let me come back again, one second, on the benefits for the organization.

As I told you, we experienced 40% fewer visits than before. We have also 50% of the transactions taking place outside the traditional working hours. And that shows the need, and with all the processes that will all be digitalized in the near future, we hope to reach 75% fewer visits, which will be surely a huge reduction.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Absolutely. And it’s very clear from what you’ve said that you are really serving a very wide range of people, and people who have different levels of comfort with technology, different levels of digital skills. Is there anything that you’re thinking about as the city to make sure that everybody’s has access to these services, and people aren’t excluded by technology?

**MARY ODILE LOGNARD:** Of course, well, using the online system is not compulsory, of course, and the physical experience remains possible and available for all.

So, if preferred, people can still come to the front desk, and the services will be exactly the same, but we have also self-service computers available for the public in the municipal office and at various locations in the city.

And people can get any needed assistance. We have digital stewards to help the people there also. We also have training courses for people with IT challenges or digitally less-connected citizens.

And there is a chatbot planned in the very near future, available in different languages, and it will help the citizens as well to find their way in the IT world.

[11:45]

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Fantastic. Thank you for sharing that. And I think that that chatbot, which can offer support in a wide range of languages sounds very interesting as well. Because you mentioned earlier, you’re dealing with a very diverse range of nationalities, people with lots of different backgrounds.

And it sounds like this is something which has had very positive results for citizens and for businesses and people dealing with the city.

How have staff within the City of Brussels responded to these changes because I think it sounds now maybe you’re five or six years down the line, that their jobs have become more interesting, and they’re able to focus on more interesting aspects, but in any and any transition in any change there’s always concern, new skills to learn, people have to leave their comfort zone sometimes. How have staff found this transition?

**MARY ODILE LOGNARD:** Well, honestly speaking, it has been a very challenging point. Change management is really important in all IT projects. The staff has to be involved from the very beginning. They have to be part of the team. There must be an awareness about the need to change otherwise the changes are likely to be rejected.

The front desk employees have been involved in the change process, and in the design of the digital system. They were part of the process analysis. They were trained in the new tools and processes in order to become efficient in the new work environment, but also, the accuracy of the analysis was a very, very important stage.

As we all know and have experienced, technology alone is not the solution. If the analysis done at the beginning of a project is not accurate, you have a lot of last-minute changes to deal with.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** I really like that emphasis on involving the frontline staff in the process, in the design, because those are the people who have all of the contact with the people that the city serves, so they know very well, what things are being offered and what needs to change.

And so, if somebody’s in another city or another country was listening to this podcast and thinks what the City of Brussels has done is so impressive, joining up this data, going on this digital transformation journey, and they were looking to replicate what you’ve been doing, how would you recommend they get started?

**MARY ODILE LOGNARD:** Well, if I had only one piece of advice to provide to another city, it would be building a team is essential, finding the right people, motivating them retaining them in a world with serious IT staff shortages. Technology is not the key. It’s not everything. A lot has to be done to adapt the technology to the specific reality of the citizens, and of the specific reality of the staff of the of the city.

You need to invest in your people. Our team and a deep knowledge of the city processes and practices. This takes time to build and requires very sharp analytical skills.

Yes, making BRUCE like a real person, speaking with an interface of other government ministries, speaking to the public, to the employees, was really a huge job. And it could be done only thanks to the team, in fact, so building the team would – would be definitely my advice.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** And you’ve talked a little bit about some ways in which you’re looking into the future, but you and your team have been advancing continually for the last five or six years, and I think you’re always looking for new opportunities.

And I wonder, is there anything that you’re looking at where technology can continue to support operations in the future?

[16:00]

**MARY ODILE LOGNARD:** Well, the future is always under construction. There, there’s still a lot to be done, for instance, to see if and how AI could be more integrated, more part of the process. IoT will likely be used more as well, and we will probably also strengthen the links between the city and the different public and government agencies and authorities in different domains.

For instance, in the future, you probably won’t have to go to the administration to declare your move, because your administration would know about your move at the same time of this move.

And naturally, we will also continue to perfect our present systems, but it is a second chapter is still to be written in the coming months and years.

Yes, I think the future is still under construction.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** I think so. And it’s a very exciting time to be working in this space and have these opportunities because all the time, there’s new technology opportunities, I think, which provide different ways where the future can be constructed.

So, I think that sounds very exciting. Thank you so much. We’re very grateful for your time.

**MARY ODILE LOGNARD:** Okay. Thank you. Thank you for your time as well.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Thank you to our guest, Marie Odile Lognard, and thank you to you for joining me today on Public Sector Future. Visit us at wwps.microsoft.com to find more insights and material to help you on your digital transformation journey. Our goal is for you to learn something new and to be inspired to think differently. Please do send us your questions and feedback, you can find me on LinkedIn, or email us at ask-ps@microsoft.com. Thank you and see you next time.

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