SmartGov

Expanding Electronic Government for Improved Service Delivery

Definition

- iSociety published *SmartGov: Expanding Electronic Government for Improved Service Delivery* in July 2003. It examines new ways to use electronic methods to reform public services.
- E-Government (or electronic government) is the provision and organisation of public services through new electronic channels.
- It encourages the use of technology, particularly computer and communications developments such as the internet, digital TV and mobile phones, to modernise and improve government services throughout central and local government.
- E-Government involves both Electronic Service Delivery, and re-organisation of public bodies.

Background

- Originally developed as 'Digital Government' in the US government by the National Science Foundation (NSF) in 1997.
- Re-branded as 'e-Government' during the dot-com boom years, especially following the introduction of e-Business and e-Commerce methods.
- First major 'e-Government' was through basic portals in the UK, Australia, Singapore and Canada.
- From 1999 onwards, e-Government became linked to a series of targets for online service delivery, most famously for 100% of UK government services by 2005.
- A second wave of portals re-built much of the e-Government provision, with FirstGov in North America, SingaporeONE in Asia, and UKOnline in Europe being heavily promoted.
- Most recently, e-Government has led to some Business Process Re-engineering and organisational change to marry new channels to better ways of working.

Key facts

- The first UK government websites came online in 1995/1996, with between 5% and 10% of Whitehall having a go.
- According to a November 2002 report from Booz Allen Hamilton, usage of e-Government was 11% for the UK, 18% in France and Germany, and 40% in Canada.
- 63% of UK government services were e-enabled by the end of 2002.
- 100% of services are currently targeted for online delivery by 2005.
- Between 1999 and 2004, it is expected that the UK will have spent approximately £1 billion on e-Government.

Where is e-Government going?

- One model (Bastow, Dunleavy & Margetts) suggests an evolution from basic website, to e-Publishing, to interactive content, to transactional services, to holistic government.
- Increasing use of 'change-agents' to promote organisational reform, most notable with the CIO council in the US and the e-Champions in British local and central governments.
- Without considerable refocusing of the 100% online target to accommodate usage patterns, there is a risk that all services will be available on the web and there will have been no changes in culture or working practices.
- Possible mandatory channel use - compelling online tax returns for example, or adding costs to non-internet access methods.
- Selective targeting of user groups most likely to respond to e-Government, rather than universal provision of online services.

SmartGov

Expanding Electronic Government for Improved Service Delivery

e-Government problems

- **Usage Segments:** those most likely to use public services are also the least likely to use, or be comfortable using, the internet.
- **Channel Habits:** the more complicated an interaction with the state, the less the average citizen wants to do it on the internet. Telephones, rather than the web, remain the overwhelming favourite way to communicate with the state.
- **Delivery Levels:** Local Government provides most public services, but has least money and ability to provide e-Government. Greater decentralisation of funding and initiative is a priority.
- **Spend to Spend:** e-Government is not always about "spending to save", and doesn't always save public money in the short-term.
- **Problem Visibility.** e-Government makes the public sector appear worse rather than better because projects result in a dip in performance as problems are worked out. In effect things sometimes get worse before they get better, and initially expose flaws in public sector practice.

Best practice guidelines

- **Organisational change, not electronic change.** The best e-Government should genuinely reform working practices, not just re-wire the technology.
- **E-Government is joined-up government.** There is no distinction between the two, and to succeed at one, government has to include the other.
- **Provide popular services, with targeted use.** E-Government needs to be used, but there is little point in blanket online availability that gets only 5% support.
- **Re-brand, but drop the 'e'.** Whitehall needs the single voice of e-Government. However, a flexible, intelligent government includes IT automatically, it does not prefix it to every working practice.
- **Build up to Success.** E-Government needs to be achieved piece by piece, not as a 'big-bang'.

About iSociety

- The relationship between information technology and how it affects our behaviour in the way we live and work is the single most critical social and economic issue of our time.
- The Work Foundation's iSociety project is an independent investigation of the impact of Information and Communication Technology in the UK, with special emphasis on technology in everyday life, at home, in communities and at work.
- Run within The Work Foundation's research department, and with generous support from Microsoft and PricewaterhouseCoopers, iSociety continues to identify 'deep impact' changes brought about by the wide spread diffusion of the ICT into our lives.
- Launched in April 2001, iSociety remains the largest non-Government funded research project on Information Technology in the UK.

---

iSociety Contact Details

Email: jcrabtree@theworkfoundation.com

Telephone: 020 7004 7100

Address: iSociety, Research Department, The Work Foundation, Peter Runge House, 3 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5DG

Follow current discussions informing our projects and debates at our weblog: www.theisociety.net

---