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Comparative Plans for e-Government from Small States

The following chapter looks at how the plans for e-government from the participating countries at the Commonwealth Secretariat workshop compare with one another. It also addresses how the prospects for implementing e-government compare to the 'standards' that have been suggested by experts from various international organisations and university business schools.

Comparative analysis of country plans

There were eight country plans (from Barbados, Belize, Cayman Islands, Cyprus, Grenada, Guyana, Mauritius, and Trinidad and Tobago) presented at the workshop.

In terms of **background information** on the history of e-government in the respective countries, a number of themes emerged regarding objectives. These goals were (in no particular order):

- to increase the efficiency of operations;
- to extend ministerial control;
- to reduce costs;
- to centralise accounting procedures;
- to improve the working environment;
- to enhance collegial communications;
- to provide a better service;
- to enable legal and regulatory rationalisation;
- to ensure interoperability;
- to facilitate effective information management;
- to give easier public access to government; and
- to give easier business access to government.

To accomplish these objectives, use was made of: vision statements and mandates; planning committees; new laws and regulations; re-organised departments and branches; additional hardware, software and databases; training of government personnel; various government websites and kiosks; and promotion of these efforts to the public. Not every government had all of these objectives, or used all of these methods, nor did all countries give the same priority to the items they did share – each country assessed its own needs in its own way, and responded with efforts towards e-government that suited their situations.

During the process of building e-government, both past and present, the countries identified a number of **challenges** and **issues**. Given their histories with e-government, and the challenges and issues they face, governments also proposed various **actions**. These, along with e-government background objectives, are summarised in the table below (table 71.). Not all of the actions were proposed by every government, nor did they equally prioritise the actions they did share in common – it all depends on the stage of development, the needs of constituents and the resources available.

Table 7.1 Summarising country plans from the Commonwealth Secretariat Workshop

<i>e-government background: objectives</i>	<i>Challenges and issues</i>	<i>Actions proposed</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased efficiency • ministerial control • reduced costs • centralised accounting • improved working environment • collegial communications • better service provision • legal and regulatory rationalisation • interoperability • effective information management • easier public access to government • easier business access to government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • resistance to change • who has rights to and who can access information • incompatibility between technologies • insufficient technology for the purposes proposed • policies and standards • training/skilled personnel • properly licensed equipment • better website design • better service design • organisational co-ordination • predictable budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mobilise support at all levels • provide adequate training • ensure co-ordination • reduce internal conflicts • involve stakeholders • communicate intentions • increase service delivery channels • partner with suppliers • co-operate between gov't departments and branches • expand service offerings • market e-government to ALL users (both within government and in the wider public)

Comparative analysis of e-government prospects: World Bank requirements

Because Dr Albert Tan of Singapore was a major presenter at the Commonwealth Secretariat workshop, and because his materials reflect the World Bank perspective on e-government, it is useful to review the guidelines that the World Bank advocates regarding the building and operation of e-government and e-governance. The World Bank is particularly interested in the integrity of financial transactions and the transparency of government decision-making (because good governance sets the stage for viable commerce)¹.

In keeping with its focus on commerce, the World Bank emphasises outcomes rather than inputs, throughputs or even outputs. In collaboration with other interested parties, the World Bank has therefore proposed a list of ten requirements for successful electronic governance. The first nine requirements represent the infrastructure that can support the tenth requirement, namely accountability mechanisms (tracking activity electronically so as to provide a 'forensic trail' that can be the basis for assigning responsibility and ensuring accountability).

Table 7.2 World Bank et al's requirements for electronic governance

Vision	Purpose, goals, objectives
Strategic plan	Timetable, resources, personnel
Leadership	Champion, authorisation, publicity
Information sharing	Vertically, horizontally, between project partners
Feedback mechanisms	Contact channels, message recipients, helpful responses
Realistic budgets	Long-term commitment, equipment and training
Cross-government co-operation	Within dept's, between dept's, between gov'ts
Appropriate technologies	Implement on the basis of availability and cost
Information management	Formatting, storage, retrieval, sharing
Accountability mechanisms	Who is responsible for what, when, where and why?

As can be seen from the table above, The World Bank advocates strategic planning, due diligence, leadership support and adequate funding to make e-governance a success. This is exactly how Singapore managed its transition to e-government, and how it continues to manage its ongoing e-governance. Furthermore the results have placed Singapore at the very top of e-government best practices. However, the Singapore approach is: (a) very costly (no expense was spared to source and use the best electronic infrastructure available); and (b) the mandate and direction was 'top-down' in the planning, implementation and operation. Many other countries do not have the luxury of a large budget or the history of centralisation necessary to support such an approach.

The second part of this chapter considers how the country plans (and more specifically their action proposals) compare with the World Bank's list of requirements (see table below).

Table 7.3 World Bank requirements versus workshop action proposals

<i>World Bank requirements</i>	<i>Action proposals from country plans</i>
Vision	Mobilise support at all levels
Strategic plan	Provide adequate training
Leadership	Ensure co-ordination
Information sharing	Reduce internal conflicts
Feedback mechanisms	Involve stakeholders
Realistic budgets	Communicate intentions
Cross-government co-operation	Increase service delivery channels
Appropriate technologies	Partner with suppliers
Information management	Co-operate between gov't departments and branches
Accountability mechanisms	Expand service offerings
	Market e-government to ALL users (in and out of gov't)

There is actually a high degree of overlap, either explicitly or implicitly, between these two lists. The two primary differences appear to be questions of emphasis: in the country plans the 'bottom line' was a **better service to the public** rather than **accountability mechanisms**. Additionally, in the case of the governments involved in the workshop, they did not have the budgets necessary to support all of the elaborate strategic planning of the World Bank approach – therefore planning is likely to be more pragmatic and implementation more ad hoc (as availability of funds and skilled staff permit).

What then will be the kind of impact the extension of e-government and e-governance will have on the countries that participated in the workshop? In another source² the World Bank does give an indication of what can be expected from the better public service delivery that e-governance can provide. In their chapter on 'A Simple Measure of Good Governance', Jeff Hunter, Director of the Office of Debt Management at the U.S. Treasury, and Anwar Shah, a Senior Economist and Project Leader for Public Sector Governance at the World Bank, perform a comparative analysis of the quality of governance amongst 80 countries³. What they found were significant statistical relationships between good governance and (a) citizen participation; (b) government orientation; (c) social development; and (d) economic management. In the table that follows the authors consolidate e-governance requirements and the e-governance correlates from the World Bank.

Table 7.4 E-governance requirements and good governance correlates

<i>Requirements</i>	<i>Correlates</i>
Vision	Political freedom
Strategic plan	Political stability
Leadership	Judicial efficiency
Information sharing	Bureaucratic efficiency
Feedback mechanisms	Absence of corruption
Realistic budgets	Human Development Index
Cross-government co-operation	Income distribution (inverse of Gini coefficient)
Appropriate technologies	Central bank independence
Information management	Inverse of debt to GDP ratio
Accountability mechanisms	Outward orientation

According to The World Bank findings there is a very clear relationship between good governance and electronic governance on the one hand, and good governance and quality of life (as shown by the above correlations) on the other.

Comparative Analysis of e-Government Prospects: Icfai Business School Guidelines

In 2007, the Icfai University Press of Hyderabad, India, published a book entitled *E-governance in Developing Countries* edited by Santap Sanhari Mishra and Amrita Mukherjee, both of the Icfai Business School Research Centre⁴. The book consists of two sections, one on **Issues and Challenges** the other on **Country Experiences**. It therefore provides a highly appropriate set of guidelines for what to expect from e-governance, which can also be compared to the country plans presented to the Commonwealth Secretariat Workshop.

In their chapter on ‘**E-Governance in Developed Nations: Lessons for Developing Nations**’, Dr Niranjana Pani of the Public Administration Directorate of Distance and Continuing Education at Utkal University, and Santap Sanhari Mishra examine many of the same issues and challenges as dealt with at the workshop. In the section of their chapter on lessons from developed countries the authors are particularly impressed by the example of electronic governance in the United Kingdom. They recommend three characteristics of the UK experience:

- E-governance can be felt even at the local level;
- Development of e-government has been started from below; and
- All e-governance initiatives aim towards satisfying principles of a citizen’s charter (the government’s accountability to the public).

In this respect, the authors of this chapter, and indeed the authors throughout the book, agree on the priority that the workshop countries gave to **a better service to the public** rather than the World Bank’s priority of **accountability mechanisms**.

After reviewing e-governance experience in the US, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, the chapter concludes that **eight factors – four ‘Ds’ and four ‘Ts’ – in combination contribute to the success of e-governance**⁵. These factors are listed in the table below.

Table 7.5 Factors for success in e-governance

<i>The ‘Ts’</i>	<i>The ‘Ds’</i>
Transparency	Democratisation
Training	Decentralisation
Technology upgradation	Delegation
Techniques of management	De-bureaucratisation

Once again, these factors seem to concur with the outlook of the participants in the Commonwealth Secretariat workshop. In the section of their chapter on model recommendations for developing nations, Pani and Mishra propose a set of ten principles that can be applied so that they reinforce each other⁶.

This time these recommendations concur with both the World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat's workshop participants, with the only major difference being the priority of **better service to the public** rather than **accountability mechanisms**. Below, the authors compare all of the proposals mentioned above with respect to e-governance.

Table 7.6 Model recommendations to be applied in a mutually reinforcing manner

Proper infrastructure	Adequate funding
Clarity in policy-making	Benchmarking
Training to manpower	Public-private participation
Management of change	Education
Strong leadership	Attitude reform

Table 7.7 Proposed recommendations and actions for e-government

<i>The World Bank</i>	<i>Icfai Business School</i>	<i>Workshop country plans</i>
Vision	Proper infrastructure	Mobilise support
Strategic plan	Clarify in policy-making	Provide training
Leadership	Training to manpower	Ensure co-ordination
Information sharing	Management of change	Reduce internal conflicts
Feedback mechanisms	Strong leadership	Involve stakeholders
Realistic budgets	Adequate funding	Communicate intentions
Cross-government co-operation	Benchmarking	Increase service channels
Appropriate technologies	Public-private participation	Partner with suppliers
Information management	Education	Co-operate across government
Accountability mechanisms	Attitude reform	Expand service offerings
		Market e-gov to all users

The World Bank recommendations are broad principles, but they assume ‘deep pockets’ and ‘top-down’ control. The recommendations from the Icfai Business School publication are ‘theories of the middle range’ – wide enough to be generally applicable, yet focused enough to apply particularly to developing nations. The workshop country plans are ‘must-do’ precepts from practitioners – they must keep the support of both their political masters and public opinion. In each case, each set of recommendations are about what one would expect from each source.

Notes

1. World Bank website, available at: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPUBLICSECTORANDGOVERNANCE/0,,menuPK:286310~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:286305,00.html> [accessed 5 February 2008]
2. Shah (ed.) (2005).
3. Ibid, pp. 39-61.
4. Mishra & Mukherjee (eds.) (2007).
5. Ibid, pp. 27-28.
6. Ibid, p. 30.