CHAPTER 2

Best Practices in E-governance

Methodology

To be effective and useful, best practices must include two techniques, namely:

- **Benchmarking cases:** comparing similar kinds of projects in terms of a common characteristic or feature that is relevant to the performance or configuration that is of concern.
- **Choosing exemplars:** identifying which of the cases compared exhibits examples of what was done and what should be done to achieve similar results in the same kind of situation.

It is therefore important to compare e-government practices and pick out which ones are best. These techniques represent part of a more general endeavour to find and catalogue lessons that can be learned from various organisational processes. Both the techniques of **benchmarking cases** and **choosing exemplars** were developed in business before being applied to governance. Similarly, the application of electronic infrastructure and processing to operations was also developed for business, and only subsequently applied to governance. In terms of using electronic technologies in other social processes, it is important to keep this critique in mind: '… the Internet … doesn't create the ability to communicate or discover or shop, but rather you do those things better'.[5] The same disclaimer applies to electronic governance as to communications, science or business – electronic infrastructure can only enhance what is already there.

Therefore the basic issues involved in finding best practices are threefold:

- Agreeing upon the purposes or functions of the operation;
- Deciding on what basis to compare cases embodying those purposes or functions;
- Choosing which cases best illustrate the performance of the purposes or functions.

The problem with many technological applications, especially those that are driving current economic processes, is that the prospective benefits can be over-hyped and the potential detriments ignored or denied.[6] How that manifests itself is that the first stage in the best practices process is *assumed* rather than *agreed upon*; the second stage receives minimal rather than adequate attention; and the choices in the third stage are biased to confirm the preferences of project sponsors or managers.

One of the most important lessons learned from systems analysis is that doing the *wrong thing* in a proficient manner still does not make it the *right thing*. The best practices process only works properly when the three basic issues are addressed.

Objectives and benchmarking

Like the technique of choosing exemplars (best practices), benchmarking was initially developed as a business tool and later transferred to political and non-profit organisations. One of the most extensively researched of the benchmarking ventures was that by the American Productivity and Quality Center in Houston, Texas. Their Open Standards Benchmarking Collaborative (OSBC) has done comparative studies of dozens of American and global firms.[7]

As Steve Wright, APQC's benchmarking guru, says, 'It's all about the business case'. What a business case provides is a rationale for adopting (or rejecting) procedures or proposals. Governments must develop an analogous rationale for their prospective procedures or proposals, namely a 'service case'. When responsible executive officers are asked to judge the merits of a prospective procedure or proposal, the classic question they pose, in one form or another, is 'Tell me why we should do this'. The answer to this question requires a presentation of the business case. Decision-makers in government will be asking an analogous question regarding the service case. Unless the reasons for e-governance are clear, investing in it could end up being a waste of time and resources. What kind and level of government service provisions are agreed upon? There will never be enough resources or personnel to do everything, so priorities must be set: document distribution, workflow co-ordination, public participation or whatever else is considered important.

Once these objectives are agreed upon, benchmarking will show how others are doing. Professor Richard Heeks of the Institute for Development Policy and Management at the University of Manchester released an i-government working paper on benchmarking in 2006; the first section in his checklist of questions concerns the purpose of benchmarking e-government.[8] The paper explains that a comparative study will have both an internal and an external purpose. Heeks proposes two sets of questions: one for planning a benchmarking study and the other for evaluating the results.

Planning questions

1. What is the internal purpose of this benchmarking study?
2. What is the external purpose of this benchmarking study?
3. Who is the intended audience? Are other potential audiences likely to use the study?
4. What evidence of demand can be obtained from these audiences to feed back into its objectives?
5. What evidence of use can be obtained to feed back into subsequent studies? Could and should a user panel be created? (A user panel could keep track of the process and provide continuity of implementation.)

Evaluation questions

1. Is there any sense of the internal purpose of this benchmarking study?
2. Is there any sense of the external purpose of this benchmarking study?
3. Is the audience for the study clear?
4. Is there any evidence of demand for this study? Did the study provide what was wanted?
5. Is there any evidence of use of this study (i.e. were the results used)?

The content of a benchmarking study

The second group of questions in Heeks's paper concerns what to benchmark. This is where the paper touches most directly on the first stage of the best practices requirements, namely 'agreeing upon what purposes or functions need to be implemented' to provide better e-governance. Again there are two sets of questions, one for planning and one for evaluation.

Planning what to benchmark

1. Which components of e-government – government-to-government (G2G), government-to-business (G2B), government-to-citizen (G2C), government-to-non-profit organisations (G2N) – will you cover? Does this coverage reflect actual e-government usage, priorities and benefits? Will biases arise if some components are omitted?
2. Which levels of e-government (local, state/provincial, regional, national or international) will you cover? Does this coverage reflect actual e-government usage, priorities and benefits? Will biases arise if some levels are omitted?
3. Which channels of e-government (including m-government) will you cover? Does this coverage reflect actual e-government usage, priorities and benefits? Will biases arise if some channels are omitted?
4. Which value chain indicators of e-government will you cover? Does this coverage reflect actual e-government priorities and goals? Will biases arise if some indicators are omitted?
5. Will you undertake any correlations between your core e-government indicators and other indicators of demand or impact?
6. Will you use any composite indicators? If so, how will you ensure their rigour and transparency?
7. Will you use any calculated indicators? If so, how will you ensure their rigour and transparency?
8. Will you use any standard public sector indicators? If so, how will you ensure their rigour and transparency?

9. Will you use any indicators of change over time? If so, how will you ensure their rigour and transparency?
10. Will you measure e-government value-chain change processes (e.g. strategy, development, adoption)? If so, how will you ensure that they are measured rigorously and transparently?
11. Will you measure e-government's public value? If so, how will you ensure that this is measured rigorously and transparently?
12. Will you measure political legitimacy and support related to e-government? If so, how will you ensure that this is measured rigorously and transparently?[9]

Evaluating what was benchmarked

1. Which components of e-government (G2G, G2B, G2C, G2N) are covered? Does this coverage reflect actual e-government usage, priorities and benefits? Do biases arise because some components have been omitted?
2. Which levels of e-government (local, state/provincial, regional, national or international) are covered? Does this coverage reflect actual e-government usage, priorities and benefits? Do biases arise because some levels have been omitted?
3. Which channels of e-government (including m-government) are covered? Does this coverage reflect actual e-government usage, priorities and benefits? Do biases arise because some channels have been omitted?
4. Which value chain indicators of e-government are covered? Does this coverage reflect actual e-government priorities and goals? Do biases arise because some indicators have been omitted?
5. Have any correlations been undertaken between core e-government indicators and other indicators of demand or impact? Are these causally and statistically credible?
6. Are any composite indicators used? Are they rigorous and transparent?
7. Are any calculated indicators used? Are they rigorous and transparent?
8. Are any standard public sector indicators used? Are they rigorous and transparent?
9. Are any indicators of change over time used? Are they rigorous and transparent?
10. Is there any measurement of e-government value-chain change processes (e.g. strategy, development and adoption)? If so, are the measures used rigorous and transparent?
11. Is there any measurement of e-government's public value? If so, are the measures used rigorous and transparent?

12. Is there any measurement of political legitimacy and support related to e-government? If so, are the measures used rigorous and transparent?

The point of these questions is to ensure that the benchmarking is properly and usefully interpreted.

A third group of questions in Heeks's paper focuses on how to conduct the benchmarking process. If the study is to be conducted in a timely and cost-effective manner, a proficient methodology must be adopted for eliciting, storing and analysing the data.

Planning how to conduct benchmarking

1. How will the data gathering methods you use rate in terms of cost, value, comparability and quality?
2. How transparent and objective should your data gathering methods be?
3. Should survey methods be adopted in order to measure outputs and/or impacts and/or non-user groups?
4. Are there any opportunities for partnerships with other data gatherers?
5. Has the full potential of all different data gathering methods, including methods which are used less frequently, been considered?
6. Will all data gathering methods be used for appropriate purposes?
7. How will specific issues within the study (such as e-government components, levels, channels, benefits, inclusion and public value) be benchmarked, using appropriate methods?

Evaluating how the benchmarking was conducted

1. How do the data gathering methods used rate in terms of cost, value, comparability and quality?
2. How transparent and objective are the data gathering methods used?
3. Is output and/or impact measurement undertaken effectively, e.g. via a survey?
4. Are there other data gathering methods, including methods which are used less frequently, that could be used but have not been?
5. Have all data gathering methods been used for appropriate purposes?
6. Are specific issues within the study (such as e-government components, levels, channels, benefits, inclusion and public value) benchmarked using appropriate methods?

By using these groups of questions to plan, conduct and evaluate benchmarking studies, those who are considering either a major new initiative or an upgrade of existing service infrastructure will know who uses what methods, when and where they use them, and for how big an expenditure of resources. Since each benchmarking study will have followed the guidelines established by the objectives agreed upon among those who are proposing or sponsoring an initiative, they will be in a position to make informed decisions about what is feasible.

What benchmarking has revealed

The purpose of benchmarking appears to evolve, together with the changing nature of e-governance itself, as experience is accumulated.[10] Among early adopters, the issue of primary importance is whether the organisation is in a state of readiness to handle an e-governance initiative. Benchmarking can be used to see how other early adopters assessed their own readiness, in terms of:

- **Awareness** of what e-governance will involve (changes of procedures, responsibilities, etc.)
- An inventory of existing **infrastructure** (what computers and cables already exist)
- The extent of the **digital divide** (who is computer and network literate and who is not)

For those organisations that achieve or already possess 'readiness', the next issue that benchmarking can help resolve is the availability of the technology and training necessary to implement e-governance. The availability issue has two aspects:

- Measuring the **maturity stage** of the organisation (to determine what infrastructure is actually needed); and
- Contracting with **suppliers** to acquire proper technology, at the right price and with adequate training, timely upgrades, etc.

After organisations have availed themselves of the infrastructure of e-governance, the next issue of concern is the rate and extent of uptake of the capabilities provided. Benchmarking can reveal how quickly or slowly other organisations have phased in the use of the new infrastructure, once it is installed. There are three dimensions of this issue:

- What is the organisational **demand** (what kind of work requires the new capabilities)?
- What is the group and individual **usage** (who are the leaders, and who the laggards)?
- What is the extent of the **use divide** (are there persistent patterns of use and non-use)?

The next major issue in e-governance adoption and use is that of impact – what are the outputs, outcomes and results of utilising e-governance infrastructure? Benchmarking

will show the effects that other adopters have had in relation to use of resources, accomplishment of goals and user satisfaction. Impact has the following indicators:

- **Efficiency** – is there a reduction of inputs for the same outputs and/or an increase of outputs for the same inputs?
- **Effectiveness** – does e-governance infrastructure deliver on its promises of cost-reduction and productivity improvement?
- **Equity** – do knowledge workers and service recipients experience acceptable outcomes and results from using e-governance infrastructure?

According to UNESCO, comparative studies in developing countries indicate that even the seven core elements of readiness for e-government are still under discussion.[11] These elements are as follows:

- data system infrastructure
- legal infrastructure
- institutional infrastructure
- human infrastructure
- technological infrastructure
- leadership and strategic thinking
- e-government drivers

In benchmarking studies by the European Commission (EC), however, governments were making readiness assessments by 2000, had moved into availability after 2001, were grappling with uptake by 2003 and were measuring impacts by 2004.[12]

UNESCO also refers enquiries to the ongoing studies of Professor Darrell M. West of the Center for Public Policy at Brown University, Rhode Island.[13] Professor West has developed an index of e-government performance that blends a variety of service delivery measures. He applies the index to a long list of countries around the globe and updates the study yearly. He also clusters performance by region, thereby providing a very thorough review of e-government trends. In some cases, data from two consecutive years are listed so that changes can be compared.

All the above benchmarking studies can show decision-makers the extent of e-governance.

Identifying exemplary cases

When the spectrum of e-governance practice is examined, it is possible to identify exemplary cases in the various areas of electronic infrastructure that are typically involved in providing better service delivery. We will look at a sample of these cases in

this section. Because the concept of best practice originated in business circles, and because business models are now widely advocated and adopted to solve a variety of social problems, most governments rhetorically subscribe to the idea of using whatever practices in e-governance have been judged to be 'best' by some measure. However, an internet search of governments that list their best practices shows a wide variety of arrangements. The two most frequently used criteria were 'cost-effectiveness' and 'service-expansiveness'. Rarely, if ever, were standards set in order to provide a guide as to how to identify best practices. Occasionally, however, such standards were proposed.

The website of the US **General Services Administration (GSA)** has an e-government best practices webpage that contains a list of substantive objectives.[14] It suggests that a baseline e-government initiative should have:

- A clear mandate
- Budget and resource allocation
- Committed project management
- Sound planning and clear goals
- External validation
- A guaranteed customer base

The **European Commission** prefers the term 'good practices' to distinguish its approach from both the business perspective and its American counterparts. However, the EC has a list of guidelines, which are procedural objectives.[15] Its Good Practice Framework proposes to:

- Collect examples of well-defined e-government cases;
- Make these examples available for those involved in e-government by means of an intelligent knowledge database;
- Offer expert know-how on general or special e-government features and provide easy access to existing communities and centres of expertise;
- Support the sustainable transfer of good practices and learning experiences in an easy and helpful way.

The **Commonwealth Centre for e-Governance** has developed a set of best practices on e-governance, and workshops have been conducted throughout the Commonwealth to assist nations, states and local governments in formulating effective strategies.[16]

The CCEG lists best practices as follows:

1. The application of e-governance best practices involves developing a workable template to determine requirements for successful e-governance, including:
   (a) Assessment of what is needed for a particular situation;

(b) Principles and characteristics of strong leadership to make e-governance programmes go forward in any jurisdiction;

(c) Assessment of the financial requirements for the initiation and completion of projects;

(d) Determining sources of funding for projects from international organisations such as the World Bank;

(e) Assessment of the technical and policy expertise needed to evolve an e-governance strategy;

(f) State of the technology available or not available in a specific jurisdiction;

(g) Assessment of what technologies can be used in different jurisdictions;

(h) The availability of the personnel needed to fulfil an e-governance programme;

(i) Training of officials to apply best practices for information and communication technology (ICT) development and delivery.

2. The formulation of an overall strategy and appropriate policies in relation to ICT in an organisation, i.e. taking into account what type of organisation it is – public or private sector, small, medium or large – or whether it is a developed, medium developed or developing country.

3. Asking what governance issues, policy and training are needed to effectively move forward in an ICT environment.

4. The development of specific policies and approaches to utilise the disciplines of records, information, change and knowledge management.

5. Engaging the top echelons of political and public service and private sector organisations, whether they are commercial, not-for-profit, civil society, non-governmental or religious bodies.

6. Recognition of the fact that leadership skills are paramount.

7. The provision of the specific personnel and financial resources necessary to achieve success.

The overlap in these sets of best practices demonstrates a global conceptual convergence.

Soros Foundation best practices

There is another aspect of e-governance to which best practices can apply, namely the way that public users of e-governance should be treated. In the first book to lay out a process re-engineering agenda for government, Osborne and Gaebler (1993: 187) assess public administrative reforms in this way: '*Traditional public systems – even those that put resources in people's hands – are designed for the convenience of administrators and service providers, not customers*'.

This raises two issues: who should administrative arrangements serve and what is the best framework for service to the public?

The implication is that the needs of the general public should be the primary focus of service, and that the way to ensure that this happens is to think of the public as customers.

For a number of years now, the **Soros Foundation** has been assisting developing countries to acquire and make use of various aspects of e-governance, particularly through the Soros Internet Program. Those who designed and implemented this programme developed a set of best practices based on prioritising public responsiveness and customer service (Peizer, 2006). The best practices identified by the programme are:

1. Treat your ICT users like customers.
2. Pay attention to who the real ICT users are and what they need, not what you think they need.
3. Understand the context in which ICT users operate, as well as why and how they make their decisions. Always see things from their perspective.
4. Listen to what ICT users want and give them everything that is realistically possible. Provide an alternative solution for what is not possible.
5. Explain technology and problem resolutions in non-technical language; a simple explanation goes a long way towards creating trust.
6. For users interested in learning more about what is going on behind the technology, rather than just fixing their problem, provide more background knowledge and enlist them in helping you to achieve your objectives.
7. Never promise what you cannot reasonably deliver, and always deliver what you promise within deadlines. If delivery is delayed for any reason, be sure you inform your customers beforehand (delays are often foreseeable).
8. Plan, plan, and plan again; assume the worst and plan accordingly and you will not come up short if disaster does strike. You should always have an alternative plan.
9. Do not be afraid to make decisions – you can fix them if they are wrong. If you have established credibility by following the other steps, the ICT users you support will be understanding and allow for a limited number of errors. If you have planned well, you will always have alternatives at hand to correct the mistakes quickly.
10. Always be as straightforward and transparent as possible with your ICT users.
11. You can catch more flies with honey than with salt. Be outgoing, pleasant, forthcoming and transparent with the users you serve.
12. When it comes to software, the basic rule for software development is that if you can buy and customise it, do not build it from scratch. This is particularly true in the non-profit environment where programme talent may be limited by salary issues.

Examples of best practices

The **Florida Department of Health** successfully designed and implemented a better performance management system for making use of new health research findings to develop better public health policies.[17] This is an example of e-governance/e-government in the e-administration area. The lessons learned from this project were eventually reported as best practices as follows:

Keys to success

1. Utilise partnerships in the planning, development and implementation processes.
2. Recognise that education and training are critical in developing equal levels of sophistication throughout the organisation.
3. Clearly identify which measures are used at what level of the organisation to track performance.

Keys to sustainability

1. Leadership support.
2. Recognise it takes time and it evolves.
3. Performance improvement needs to be part of everyday life, not an occasional activity.
4. Create a balance of measures (outputs, inputs and processes).

These points are all consistent with the major lesson learned: the value of collaboration.

The **Institute for Citizen-Centered Service** in Toronto, Canada has conducted a series of surveys of the extent to which the public and business are satisfied with the quality and quantity of government services.[18] The best practices it has identified refer to the conditions that produce user satisfaction. The Institute found that the drivers of satisfaction vary between channels of delivery.

Drivers of satisfaction by channel

Face-to-face	Telephone	Internet
Timeliness	Timeliness	Ease of navigation
Courtesy/extra mile*	Knowledge/competence	Outcome
Knowledge/competence	Extra mile*	Visual appeal
Fairness	Outcome	Informative
Outcome	Fast	

*Going the extra mile refers to providing maximum helpfulness

Conclusion

There are a number of aspects of best practices for e-governance/e-government. In terms of the projects for designing and implementing e-governance, best practices cover both the planning of the project and the operation of the installed system. In relation to planning, the many best practices from a wide range of experiences recommend that the first steps are to develop a clear sense of purpose and clearly delineate objectives. The next steps include involving all the stakeholders and establishing good relations with suppliers. The final steps involve realistic budgeting and a willingness to enter into partnerships to reduce costs and improve reliability.

Implementation best practices consist of:

- Collaborative procedures; and
- Flexible tactics.

Many of the original proposals for implementation will need to be modified in the light of experience in particular circumstances. Costs or resistance may increase beyond expectations; technologies may produce savings or sponsors may provide additional funding. Usually there are a number of changes, and they vary to such an extent that they are not always anticipated in advance. When this happens, the best plan is to fall back on the original objectives and purposes and be willing to adopt whatever operational options are feasible.

When it comes to operating e-governance/e-government, best practices identify two sets of users, both of whom can be thought of as customers: internal customers (officials and staff) and external customers (the general public and businesses). E-governance project sponsors must collaborate with internal customers to ensure that they are fully motivated and to inspire service leadership. In turn, internal customers must collaborate with external customers to ensure that they choose to take up the available services and that they are satisfied with the services they use.