Chapter 13
Developing a Multi-Agency E-Participation Strategy for Disadvantaged City Communities:
A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this chapter is to present a case study of the development of a strategy to increase eParticipation among a number of disadvantaged communities in the city of Limerick in Ireland. The chapter's authors' acted as facilitators for the strategy development process. The strategy group consisted of multiple educational, developmental and community and local government representatives. Given the participants' differing perspectives and interpretations the strategy development attempted to be as inclusive and transparent as possible and information technology was used that provided shared spaces using a wiki and allowing the sharing of the information (strategy document) as it emerged through various iterations.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this chapter is to present a case study of the development of a strategy to increase e-Participation among a number of disadvantaged communities in the city of Limerick, Ireland. The chapter's authors' acted as facilitators for the strategy development process. The strategy group consisted of multiple educational, developmental and community and local government representatives. Given the participants' differing perspectives and interpretations the strategy development attempted to be as inclusive and transparent as possible and information technology

(IT) was used that provided shared spaces using a wiki and allowing the sharing of the information (strategy document) as it emerged through various iterations.

The chapter begins by examining the development of the literature from that of a digital divide to eParticipation. The perspectives outlined in previous research were found to be mirrored in the views of the strategy groups members. Next the case study will be presented as a series of stages that were used to develop the Limerick Community Connect (LCC) e-Participation Strategy. Where appropriate at each stage key issues and lessons learned will be highlighted. Finally the implications of the findings for both management and information management practice are identified along with the limitations and directions for future research.

BACKGROUND

While eParticipation is emerging as a research area it is lacking a clear research approach or literature base (Sandford & Rose, 2007). Therefore this chapter also considers the wider and longer established literature on the digital divide because this literature strongly influenced research addressing broader issues (Meneses & Momino, 2010). As will be highlighted in this chapter the development of the digital divide and changes in emphasis to eParticipation had parallels in the strategy development process itself.

Similarly the digital divide concept is elusive so that even after a decade of research there was no consensus on its definition, extent or impact (Dewan & Riggins, 2005). This may be because it is difficult to define its boundaries because it is a dynamic phenomenon that evolves and interacts with other social changes (Salvador et al., 2010). In a similar vein eInclusion is different from other types of policy making because of the speed of changes in the 'state of the art' of the digital activities from which people are excluded

(Guyader, 2009). Nonetheless how these terms are defined are important because (1) how they are used has implications for the rationale for investment as well as the outcomes expected by funding organisations (Graham, 2011) and (2) the way the problem is defined affects the policy solutions that are developed (Servon, 2002).

The divides and exclusions examined by various authors are examined at a number of different levels. Concentration is often on national comparisons to identify leader/follower countries etc. (Ayanso et al., 2010). It may also occur at a sub-national level considering particular regions, rural versus urban areas, businesses, households or at the individual level in terms of income, ethnicity or education (Graham, 2011; Borgida et al., 2002; Srinuan & Bohlin, 2011;OECD, 2001; Attewell, 2001).

Initially solutions to the digital divide, once established at a particular level, related to access (Attewell, 2001) terming this the 'first' digital divide. Garcia-Jimenez and Gomez-Barroso (2009) view this in terms of haves and have-nots and the factors that distinguish these two groups. This view leads to the separation of people into 'haves' and 'have-nots' making access to technology the problem (Ferro et al., 2011; Dewan & Riggins, 2005). The term also divides people into what Belanger & Carter (2009) refer to the information have and have-nots: those who are computer literate or illiterate. Ferro et al. (2011) argues that the conceptualisation of the digital divide has moved on from a dichotomous model based on access to a multidimensional model that considers various characteristics. Warschauer (2003a) goes on to argue that underlying the digital divide terminology is 'technological determinism' that suggests that the availability, or indeed lack of availability, of technology determines effects on behaviour and social development.

The digital divide concept has been criticised as a poor framework for policy development and social analysis: one criticism is that it created a 'pi-polar' division rather than a continuum

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