

Business Process Redesign in Implementing E-Government in Ireland

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INTRODUCTION

Competitive pressures and improvements in information technology constantly force organisations to re-evaluate their business strategies (Porter, 2001; Venkatraman, 1994). Although public-sector organisations may not operate in a competitive environment, changes in management philosophies are causing public-sector organisations to think and act more like private-sector organisations (Gulledge & Sommers, 2002). Electronic government is one means by which governments can offer more effective and efficient services (Layne & Lee, 2001).

This article investigates the evolution of e-government in Ireland. A case study is presented detailing how the Irish government's e-government strategy was devised and implemented. The success of this implementation yields valuable insights into the identification and management of critical concerns during the evolution and attainment of business-process redesign in e-government. Cumulatively, these lessons provide a road map for the successful attainment of citizen-centric e-government.

ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT

Electronic government consists of using technology, particularly the Internet, as a means to deliver services to citizens, businesses, and other entities (Tambouris, 2001; Watson & Mundy, 2001). E-government has the potential to transform not only the way in which most public services are delivered, but also the fundamental relationship between government and citizen (Burn & Robbins, 2001; Watson & Mundy). Operational benefits of e-government include continuous availability of service, a reduction in response time, and a reduction in error rate (Al-Kibisi, de Boer, Mourshed, & Rea, 2001). These fac-

tors contribute to an increase in the efficiency of government (Coulthard & Castleman, 2001; Dearstyne, 2001; Lagroue, 2002).

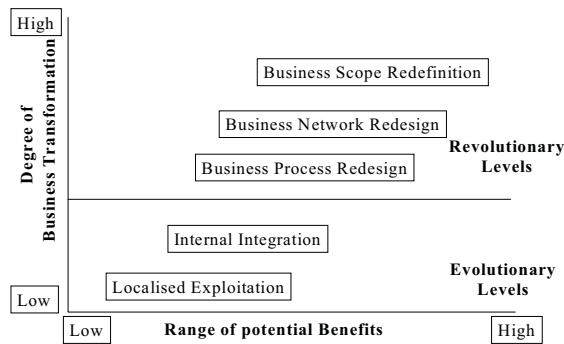
Through the use of information systems, organisations are challenged to redesign their processes in order to achieve the benefits of increased efficiency, cost reductions, and better customer service (Glassey, 2001; Warkentin, Gefen, Pavlou, & Rose, 2002). Governments can also use technology to improve core business processes (Coulthard & Castleman, 2001; McAdam & Donaghy, 1999).

Business-Process Redesign

Organisations are required to produce at a low cost, with high quality, and with fast and flexible responsiveness to customer needs (Venkatraman, 1994). This puts pressure on organisations to redesign the way in which they conduct their business and build information systems to support new processes (Venkatraman). Out of such pressures was born the idea of business-process reengineering (BPR; Davenport & Short, 1990; Hammer, 1990). The key aspect of BPR is the fundamental and radical redesign of business processes to achieve dramatic improvements (Hammer & Champy, 1993). The lessons learnt from the BPR era served to inform management that less radical, more holistic, and more incremental changes to business processes were required (Guha & Grover, 1997).

Venkatraman (1994) identified five levels of IT-enabled business transformation. The central thesis of Venkatraman's work is that only marginal benefits will accrue from superimposing IT on existing organisational conditions. This is illustrated by the first two levels of Venkatraman's model (Figure 1). These levels, according to Venkatraman, are evolutionary as they require only minimal changes to business processes.

Figure 1. Alternative Approaches to BPR (Venkatraman 1994)



The top-three levels are revolutionary as these levels require radical change to existing business processes. An organisation could redesign its processes and then go on to redesign its network, stretching beyond the organisation, and ultimately redefine the scope of the organisation.

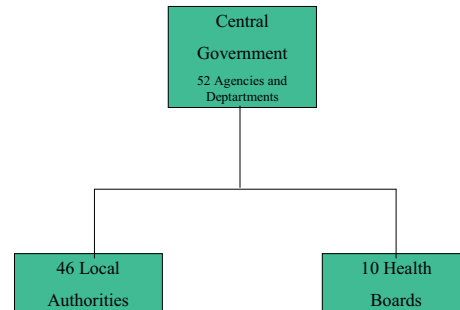
The organisation moving up the framework is seeking efficiency. Initially, this begins with localised exploitation and then moves up to internal integration. As the organisation moves up each level, the range of potential benefits increases. However, each higher stage requires a greater degree of organisational change. Eventually, in order to achieve more dramatic results, it will need to move up to the first revolutionary level and engage in business-process reengineering.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is exploratory in nature and seeks to investigate the extent to which business-process redesign was instrumental in the movement to e-government in Ireland. The Venkatraman (1994) model of IT-enabled change was adopted as a framework for the research.

Five in-depth interviews were conducted with three government agencies involved in the e-government project. An in-depth interview was conducted with one senior civil servant from the Department of An Taoiseach (prime minister), the governmental department providing strategic leadership to e-government initiatives in Ireland. Two in-depth interviews were conducted with members of REACH, the executive body created specifically to implement the e-government strategy. In addition, further interviews were conducted with two senior members of the Local Government Computer Supply Board (LGCSB),

Figure 2. Structure of government in Ireland



a public-sector company providing IS services to local government.

These interviews were conducted on-site in April 2002. All interviews were semistructured and lasted approximately 2 hours. The interviews conducted with all participants were supplemented by access to internal documentation. Records were kept of the content of all interviews. Further clarifications and updates were obtained by e-mail and telephone contact.

E-GOVERNMENT IN IRELAND

Government in Ireland is conducted at two tiers: the national and local levels as depicted in Figure 2. Central government consists of 17 government departments and 35 agencies, while local government consists of local authorities, with 46 currently in operation, who are responsible for the provision of a variety of government services at a local level, and 10 health boards who are responsible for administering health services.

IS Support for Government

IS support at both the central and local level is provided through a combination of in-house expertise, outsourcing to the private sector, and LGCSB. LGCSB is a public-sector company whose objective is to provide local authorities with IS systems and expertise on an individual basis.

In response to local-authority requests, LGCSB developed electronic forms (e-forms) for use on local-authority Web sites. These forms were Web versions of the traditional paper-based form. Users could register with their local authority, but there was no online system in place either to process the form electronically or to authenticate

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