Chapter 103

A Comparative Study of Governmental One-Stop Portals for Public Service Delivery

Thomas Kohlborn
Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Christoph Peters
Kassel University, Germany

Axel Korthaus
Victoria University, Australia

Erwin Fielt
Queensland University of Technology, Australia

ABSTRACT

The continuing need for governments to radically improve the delivery of public services has led to a new, holistic government reform strategy labeled "Transformational Government" that strongly emphasizes customer-centricity. Attention has turned to online portals as a cost effective front-end to deliver services and engage customers as well as to the corresponding organizational approaches for the back-end to decouple the service interface from the departmental structures. The research presented in this paper makes three contributions: Firstly, a systematic literature review of approaches to the evaluation of online portal models in the public sector is presented. Secondly, the findings of a usability study comparing the online presences of the Queensland Government, the UK Government and the South Australian Government are reported and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches are discussed. And thirdly, the limitations of the usability study in the context of a broader "Transformational Government" approach are identified and service bundling is suggested as an innovative solution to further improve online service delivery.

1. INTRODUCTION

Governments are under continual pressure to improve the delivery of public services. Instead of focussing on a specific set of services for targeted customer segments, as is common for organisations in the private sector, the public sector has to deal with a large, heterogeneous portfolio of different services to be offered to *all* citizens (Wang et al., 2005). Although different groups of citizens will have different characteristics and demands, accessibility to government services and information has to be ensured (Gouscos et al., 2002), while at the same time cost efficiency

and effectiveness of the service delivery needs to be maintained or achieved.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been introduced to offer an increasing number of services electronically, in order to provide the citizens with an online access channel and to decrease the cost of service delivery. These activities can be subsumed under the term e-government, which aims to "*enable and improve the efficiency with which government services and information are provided to citizens, employees, businesses and government agencies*" (Carter & Belanger, 2004, p. 5 f.). With regard to communication channels for delivery of government services, the online channel has probably become the priority for governments, particularly due to its cost efficiency (Ebbers et al., 2008). Thus, governments have an inherent interest in the adoption of the online service delivery channel by their citizens. Consequently, content and structure of government portals need to focus on those varying needs and aim at the "customers'" (= citizens', residents' and businesses') satisfaction (Kubicek & Hagen, 2000). In light of these requirements, governments have to decide on a specific online service delivery model, which includes both structure and content.

Since the early days of e-government, jurisdictions from an internal managerial perspective have been focusing on standardisation, departmentalisation and operational cost-efficiency, which Ho (2002) has labelled as the traditional bureaucratic paradigm. Often, the way that public services offered to citizens were grouped together was determined by the internal structure of the specific government. Each department offered their services on separate web sites independently from the online offerings of other departments.

E-government has not always delivered all the benefits that were hoped for (Dada, 2006). A more holistic view of government reform strategies has been proposed under the term "Transformational Government," which is defined as "a managed process of ICT-enabled change in the public sector,

which puts the needs of citizens and businesses at the heart of that process and which achieves significant and transformational impacts on the efficiency and effectiveness of government" (OASIS, 2012, p. 7). Proponents of the "Transformational Government" approach promote a new business model for governments that introduces "a new virtual business layer within government, focused round the needs of citizens and businesses (the "Franchise Marketplace"), which enables the existing silo-based structure of government to collaborate effectively in understanding and meeting user needs" (OASIS, 2012, p. 16). The "franchise" metaphor is used here to denote collaborative organisations for specific customer segments for government services (e.g. parents, motorists, disabled people), following the principle of "Build services around customer needs, not organisational structure" (OASIS, 2012, p. 13), which requires governments to re-think and re-design their service delivery on all levels of the organisation. At the front end, governments have started to investigate the use of one-stop online portals (OSPs) (Kohlborn et al., 2010) following the desire to further increase customer satisfaction and operational excellence. These portals commonly apply the 'single window concept', i.e. they offer a single point of access to electronic services and information provided by different public authorities or even private service providers (Wimmer & Tambouris, 2002).

While the ideas of 'one-stop portal' and 'franchise model' seem appealing, little is known about how governments are actually implementing them. This paper describes and critically examines the initiatives of one government organization, Smart Service Queensland (SSQ), in developing a one-stop portal via a usability study. The study can be positioned as practice-driven research (Zmud, 1998), where the research team collaborated with SSQ, as sponsor of the research, and a market research company (MR company), as external experts. This paper is, as far as we know, the first study reporting in detail on a usability study

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