

Chapter III

Innovation and Citizen–Centric Local E–Government

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes a journey through e-enabled local public services. We start with the familiar local government Web site and contact centre channels to the citizen. We then move on to stage 2; how leading local governments are now mining the flow of data through these channels to develop “insight” into citizens’ service use and future needs. Next, we explore stage 3 and the role of performance measurement systems and virtual online communities in raising the citizen’s voice. Finally, stage 4 combines the parallel journeys of e-government and e-citizen and describes a co-produced future that may at last put the citizen centre-stage in the design and delivery of local public services. We use innovation theory to identify characteristics of an innovative local government and identify a need to extend this theory to accommodate the key themes of citizen-centric e-government: transparency, trust, rights, and obligations.

INTRODUCTION

Citizen-centric eGovernment services are designed to deliver increasingly cost-effective, personalised and relevant services to citizens, but also serve to enhance the democratic relationship, and build better democratic dialogue, between citizens and their government, which then enhances the practice of citizenship within society. (CCEGOV, 2007, pp.2)

This is the aspiration of the European Union as articulated by the recent EU-funded Citizen-centric eGovernment study (cc:egov). Here, the two hitherto separate strands of e-government, e-services and e-democracy, are woven together. The message being that it is not enough to use ICT to make public services more efficient, or indeed more effective from the provider’s point of view, if the outcomes do not increase public value (Moore, 1995). At the very least this implies that the voice

of the citizen should be heard loud and clear in service design and delivery, and, more ambitiously that, where appropriate, the citizen should co-produce the public services they consume. This is particularly relevant for “emotional services” such as healthcare and social services. Whilst the citizen-centric agenda is laudable, the reality is one of declining public participation in voting and the democratic process in most countries, increasing cost pressures on public sector organisations, a deficit of trust in politicians, and the rise of the consumer society with citizens focusing increasingly on their rights to use public services without recognising the associated obligations. The trust issue looms particularly large due to the benefits to be gained from sharing citizen data within and between services in order to provide a personalised, appropriate service to the citizen. This is most evident in healthcare, where information on a person’s health history can enable faster and more accurate diagnosis and treatment. And more generally, access to service user demographics and service use can enable greater “customer insight” into what further services would be of most benefit to the user (e.g. the provision of benefits payments where appropriate). In some European countries, such as Finland, personal data is freely shared between citizens and service providers to enable this to happen; in others, such as the UK, citizens are far less trusting of government, particularly central government, as evidenced by the outcry at the recent loss of child benefit data including the bank account details of millions of recipients.

This chapter explores the emerging concept of Citizen-centric eGovernment (cc:egov). What benefits can be expected? How might cc:egov evolve? And what are the barriers to uptake? The focus here is on local government, and the theoretical perspective is that of innovation theory. A four-stage model of cc:egov evolution is proposed as a useful device for identifying some different manifestations of the phenomenon. Whilst the four stages will not necessarily follow chronologi-

cally in any one local government area, they do represent an evolution of ICT in local governance that presents increasing opportunities to governments and their citizens to draw on the expertise and resources of both parties in pursuit of better services and greater democratic engagement.

CITIZEN-CENTRIC ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT

Citizen-centricity is a complex area – with many possible dimensions. It is a “motherhood” statement that few local authorities or central governments would argue with. But on closer inspection it is also a chimera – a phrase that could describe almost any aspect of the interaction between government and the citizen. Therefore the recent EU report on citizen-centric electronic government, which they term cc:egov, is a valuable and unique point of reference (CCEGOV, 2007). Whilst the report found no single model of cc:egov across Europe there are a number of elements that stand out. Essentially the concept embraces efficient, low waste, public services targeted at citizens according to their needs. In order to do this, information has to be collected from citizens and used with their permission to enable personalised service delivery. But the concept goes beyond efficient service delivery to embrace design – citizens should have a voice in the design of public services as well as their delivery. This implies a two-way exchange of information with citizens needs and usage information flowing one way and service performance and constraints information flowing the other way. But information exchange is not enough, both parties must be willing and able to act on the information in order to generate public value. Public value, originally proposed by Moore (1995), encompasses three dimensions (Hartley, 2006, pp.47):

- **Economic value**
- **Social value** (strengthening social capital,

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