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701 E. Chocolate Avenue, Suite 200, Hershey PA 17033-1240, USA
Tel: 717/533-8845; Fax 717/533-8661; URL-http://www.idea-group.com

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Chapter IX

Measuring and Evaluating E-Government:
Building Blocks and Recommendations for a Standardized Measuring Tool

Christiaan Holland, Dialogic Innovation and Interaction, The Netherlands

Frank Bongers, Dialogic Innovation and Interaction, The Netherlands

Rens Vandeberg, Dialogic Innovation and Interaction, The Netherlands

Wouter Keller, Argitek, VU Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Robbin te Velde, Perquirimus Ltd., The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

In this chapter we describe research we have conducted on measuring e-government in the Netherlands. This research was commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior in the Netherlands. There are many aspects and benefits of e-government which are missing in existing measuring tools and concepts. Existing benchmark studies lack a theoretical basis and merely look at the supply side of electronic government: the availability of electronic services. Actual use or the impact of electronic public services is not captured. We therefore have developed a new concept and measuring tool for e-government. This tool is being used in a benchmarking study, the results of which will be published by the end of this year. For this reason we*

have only described the methodological aspects of our approach here. We believe our experience in this research project and this measuring tool can contribute to the discussion on new ways to measure and evaluate e-government from an international perspective.

INTRODUCTION

If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. Peter Drucker

The hype about e-business may have died down (and even given way to negative hype), but the high expectations concerning e-government have certainly not diminished. Electronic government is a subject that is high on the political and administrative agenda in various countries. Expectations are high regarding the presumed effects or promises it has to offer. The quality of service provision is improving, transparent government is emerging, less business has to be conducted over the counter and the relationship between the public authorities and the citizen can be improved. Out of this transformation, it is claimed, a completely different type of government is reckoned to be finally appearing, one that is better able to perform public tasks to the satisfaction of all relevant target groups. Customer satisfaction for citizens, reduced administrative loads for businesses and efficiency gains and reduced costs for government should be some of the resultant benefits — to name only the measurable ones. However, the road to this ideal situation is strewn with obstacles (though fortunately with opportunities, too). The crucial point is that it must be possible to ascertain whether promises are really being turned into reality, and what further effects are still emerging. In short, there is a need for measurements to be performed.

Measuring tools offer an important gauge for gaining an understanding of the state of affairs and undertaking policy actions ("what gets measured, gets done"). Little by little, measurements of electronic government are beginning to take shape in various countries. These measurements sometimes consist of evaluations of programs or individual national studies, in which a country surveys its progress in the area of electronic government. One particular feature of these studies is that they are usually repeated over time. Then there are the international benchmark studies, often conducted by big consultancy firms, in which the current state of play with respect to electronic government is compared in different countries. Strikingly, these benchmarks often lack the necessary depth, have scarcely any theoretical foundation, and often confine themselves to the supply side of electronic government. Frankly speaking, most of these studies are no more than a tally of government Web sites and the content and services that the government has chosen to display "in the shop window." It is like trying to ascertain the success or added value of a company by simply looking at the breadth of its product range.

At the international level, therefore, there is a growing need to improve on the current measuring tools and then, obviously, to make regular use of them. For policymakers, this would have two significant advantages. Firstly, regular measurements can reveal the progress of electronic government in a country. Using this information (measurement is knowledge), policymakers can determine the areas in which an additional effort is