



Chapter XI

**E-Government
Scottish Style:
Recent Developments and
Some Emerging Issues**

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses issues involved in the development of e-government, using recent empirical evidence gathered in Scotland. The research suggests that public sector organisations in Scotland recognise the importance of e-government, but there is a gap between the rhetoric about the potential of e-government and the reality on the ground. In particular, most public sector organisations appear to be more sceptical about the ability of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to break down barriers within and between organisations than those who advocate e-government as a solution to this problem. The current development and some emerging issues will be explored in the Scottish context, and some generic lessons will be highlighted. Finally, a number of themes for future research will be highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

The current UK Government has set out an ambitious agenda for modernising public services. The '*Modernising Government*' strategy can be seen as a continuation of efforts to reform government that have been ongoing since the 1970s, but the development of 'information age government' and the delivery of integrated services across organisational boundaries are now at the heart of the strategy for modernising public services (Cabinet Office, 1999; UK Online, 2002). In particular, as part of a much wider effort to make UK 'the best place for E-Commerce in the world', the UK government has undertaken to make all government services available electronically by 2005 with key services achieving high levels of use.

The result so far has been moderately encouraging despite a range of emerging issues. The Booz Allen Hamilton (2002) report commissioned by the British Government's Office of the E-Envoy and the Department of Trade and Industry concluded that the UK now has the second best environment for e-commerce among the benchmark group of nine countries (the G7 countries plus Australia and Sweden). The UK has several environmental strengths, although these have yet to be translated into high levels of uptake and use of the Internet. The UK's relative strengths are in its market and political environments, business and government readiness for e-commerce. Its relative weaknesses are in citizen uptake, government uptake, and to a lesser extent in infrastructure. This chapter explores issues involved in the government uptake of the Internet and related technologies, and highlights key issues that need to be addressed if e-government is to achieve its full potential.

The devolution of power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a central element of the UK government's modernisation agenda. As a result of devolution the Scottish Executive is responsible for the delivery of a wide range of public services in Scotland, and it has generally endorsed the UK government's modernisation agenda. Scotland is an interesting example, a small country of 5 million people within the UK. It embodies many characteristics that need to be addressed in the development of e-government in many other countries. For example, it has a high concentration of population in the central belt with big cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh. It also has vast rural areas with low population density in the highlands and islands of Scotland. The geographical differentiation both within regions and cities and between different regions within Scotland is also a significant social and political issue; and so are its complex relationships with other countries within the UK and with other European countries. This chapter will use the development of e-government in Scotland as an example to illustrate the current situation and some emerging issues in the development of e-government. The lessons will not only be relevant to other countries in the UK, but also to many other countries throughout the world.

The chapter is largely explorative, combining a detailed literature review with comprehensive empirical research of the public sector in Scotland. The rhetoric of the UK government's modernisation and electronic government strategies is based

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