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MIS 411   EGOVERNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

History, Developments, and Potential Paths | John A. Paez

Introduction

Currently, we live in an increasingly interconnected environment where the Internet has created tremendous modern-day improvements in customer service and efficiency.

eGovernment, according to the World Bank Group, refers to "the use by government agencies of information technologies that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government." The concept is also known as digital government, online government, and e-Gov). Through the better use of technology by government, the idea is that it will help facilitate a variety of regular governmental operations including, but not limited to: delivery of services to citizens, enhanced government-business interaction, empowerment through access of government information, and improved government management. In short, the benefits of eGov would result in less corrupt practices, transparency, convenience, and possible financial gains through increased revenues and reduced costs (The World Bank Group, 2009).

Much like eCommerce can divide its own model into three delivery styles (B2B, B2C, and C2C), activities in eGov can be defined as being one of the following types:

- **G2C (Government to Citizen)** – digital interaction between government and individuals. For example, using a city's police website to pay for a speeding ticket online or renewing your license through an online MVD portal.

- **G2B (Government to Business)** – digital interaction between government and the commercial business sector. For instance, the Department of Defense's Central Contractor Registration (CCR) site which you must register with if you plan on doing contracting work for the U.S. Federal Government.

- **G2G (Government to Government)** – digital interaction between two government entities (organizational, departmental, or authorities). It represents the backbone of eGovernment. It involves sharing data and conducting exchanges between governmental actors.

One of the aims of this paper is to show the potential of eGov to enhance government in the United States. The application of Internet-based governmental solutions will not only encourage efficiency but also promote transparency and trust in government. However, first we will analyze its roots and determine its advantages and drawbacks.

Its Beginnings

One of the earliest signs of the emergence of eGov was the Government Paperwork Elimination Act which required that, when possible, U.S. federal agencies use electronic forms, electronic filing, and electronic signatures to conduct official business by 2003. (Government Paperwork Elimination Act, 1998)

One of the first documented governmental use of the term eGovernment was conceived in July of 2001, when the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) created the eGovernment task force. Its purpose was to identify priority actions that achieve improvements in government. The group developed its *eGovernment Strategy* which included an implementation roadmap that described its findings. That year, federal IT spending increased by 10% and according to the task force, the money should be spent in order to achieve each of the following:

1. Make it easy for citizens to obtain service and interact with the federal government

2. Improve government efficiency and effectiveness

3. Improve government's responsiveness to citizens

Some of their recommendations included online eligibility assistance, online access for loans, EZ-tax filing, online rulemaking management, e-Grants, and disaster assistance. All of their research and conclusions set into action what needed to be done in the field. In October 2001, at the meeting of the President's Management Council, the task force's recommendations were presented and approved. (Office of Management and Budget)

On December 17, 2002, the E-Government Act of 2002 was enacted. The statutes stated purpose was to improve the management and promotion of electronic government services and processes by establishing a Federal Chief Information Officer within the OMB, and by establishing measures that require using Internet-based information technology to improve citizen access to government information and services. Provisions included:

- To provide effective leadership of Federal Government efforts to develop and promote electronic Government services and processes

- To promote use of the Internet and other information technologies to provide increased opportunity for citizen participation in government

- To improve the ability of the Government to achieve agency missions and program performance goals

In 2004, the Haworth Press, Inc. published its inaugural issue of the Journal of e-Government which focuses on the application and practice of e-Government in its broadest sense. Also in 2004, the OMB's e-Government and Information technology office, along with the help of the General Services Administration and the Federal CIO Coucil, established the Federal Enterprise Architecture (FEA) program which built a comprehensive business-driven blueprint of the entire federal government. The FEA framework had five reference models that

were used by agencies in developing budgets and goals. The following figure lists the benefits of the model (Evans, 2004):

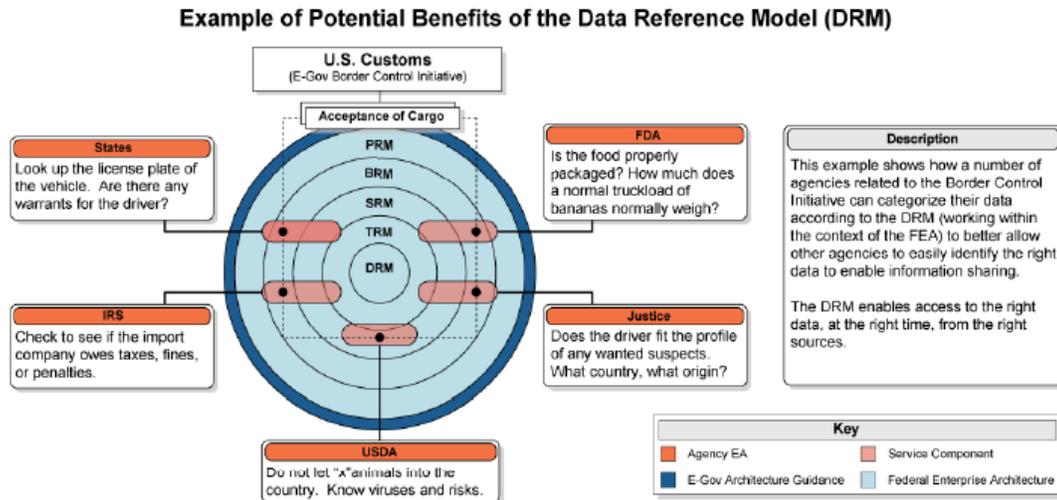**Example of Potential Benefits of the Data Reference Model (DRM)**

Photo from Expanding E-Government Results Report (Evans, 2004)

Since 2004, we've witnessed increased privacy protections for individuals, strengthened security of government facilities' information technology systems, multi-language governmental site accessibility, and improved citizen participation and legislation visibility with sites like regulation.gov. As citizens, most have experienced registering their vehicle online, requesting a new driver's license without going into the local Motor Vehicle Division, paying a traffic ticket online, and maybe even partaking in a political debate on a presidential candidates blog.

Benefits of an eGov Enhanced Society

> **Efficiency** – as with most information technology enhanced projects, one of the largest anticipated positives of taking on eGovernment strategies is improved efficiency. In some projects, eGov will try to limit errors and increase consistency of outcomes by automating repetitive tasks.

Citizen Participation – eGov can develop increased participation in a number of different ways. One way is by connecting individuals who live in non-urban areas of the country so they can send and receive information easily. Another way is through participation by younger adults who are more attracted to the digital revolution and its products. eGov can also, by extension, enhance citizen to citizen (C2C) interaction by providing people the opportunity to interact and share information with those who may have similar interests, opinions, and/or concerns.

Improved Services – adopting eGov means an improvement in the quality, accessibility, and range of services provided by the government. This is achieved by faster transactions, improved accountability, and enhanced processes.

Government Transparency – recent advances in IT enable citizens to hold government officials more accountable for fraud, waste, and abuse. Before the Internet, citizens didn't have many resources to learn about agencies and the services available to them. Also, the effectiveness of certain programs and initiatives were rarely published or talked about. Government's are taking a positive stance on this, however, by publishing a lot of information themselves. The U.S. Government Printing Office, for instance, provides online access to databases produced by all three government branches.

Environmental – for instance, with the Government Paperwork Elimination Act, there are environmental benefits to taking on eGovernment practices. Online services would eliminate the need to retain old paperwork (especially signed forms that may be required in the future).

Risks Associated with eGov

> **Surveillance** – some believe that eGov can be used as a tool of control by individuals in power. Advancing technology allows for better and more surveillance. eGov is an extreme example because government is a required part of living in a country and if everyone is forced to use a system, it will result in hyper-surveillance.

> **Cost** – the cost of developing, publishing, and maintaining these websites can be enormous and some believe the yielded result is not worth tax-payers' dollars.

> **Digital Divide** – mass implementation could leave those who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with technology stranded. Especially in the case of supposed democratization, many groups are being left out (individuals who live in remote areas without Internet access, individuals with low English proficiency, those who can't afford Internet access and older adults who never participated in the digital age).

Interview: Motivating Change through Bits

I spoke with James Dennany, a student at the University of Arizona who currently works at the Tucson District Office for Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. I asked James if he had noticed any change that can be attributed to the digital revolution. After some thought, James recalled an event where his office had become over-burdened with calls from citizens who were members of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). (Dennany, 2009)

James directs everyone who answers the phone at the District Office to query the caller for what prompted their strong feeling towards that particular issue and what the motivation was behind the action. In a more recent case, the Matthew Shepard Act (H.R. 1913) was under deliberation in the House of Representatives. It finally came to James's attention that the HRC administration sent e-mails to HRC members asking them to contact their local representative to

vote in favor or against certain policies that are relevant to their mission. This is done now by a large number of agencies that maintain a specific stance on certain social issues. (Dennany, 2009)

James mentioned that he had received so many calls about the issue that it was a topic of debate within the office. On a side note, Giffords voted for passage on the Act. According to James, the decision was based on all things considered, not just the calls. (Dennany, 2009)

What's to Come

The Digital Government Society of North America is a non-profit society who work to advance digital government through research and policy. They have representatives from Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Founded in 2005, every year they hold a conference to discuss possible advances in eGovernment. Four ideas were presented at the 2008 conference:

1. **Online Consultation and Public Policy Making** – using the Internet and creating a governmental website that will help develop discussion about new or current policy that all citizens can participate in would foster better decision-making for officials and give a feeling for overall acceptance of such a policy. Currently, news organization take polls to do this, however, creating a consistent, easy-to-access government site would show a positive governmental stance on retrieving the public's opinion.

2. **Open Platform for Urban Simulation** – this would help assist governments in making informed decision of land use and transportation policy. Currently, no open platform exists and much of the simulating that's performed is done by large

government entities. Meanwhile, smaller, local government's who are given similar tasks are left unequipped to make critical decisions.

3. **Transnational Research Agenda in North America –** this initiative would help government understand the role of technology in the ability of nations to respond to public problems. It would also assist in the collaboration of the nations in responding to larger, transnational issues.

4. **Digital Governance and Hotspot Geoinformatics for Monitoring, Etiology, Early Warning, and Management –** this project will determine where the government should be focusing their resources by using advanced statistical methods and deciding which areas are of critical importance. Areas would include, for example, public health, poverty, and security.

The society brings together researchers and professionals and divides them into groups who will focus on an individual topic and attempt to publish a book with the resulting conclusions. Personally, all of these ideas seem feasible and if realized could have an positive (or perhaps, negative) effect on every single individual living in North America. (Digital Government Society of North America, 2008)

Conclusion

Developing technologies and especially the Internet has in recent decades become a natural part of everyday life for an increasing number of American citizens. eGov gives government the opportunity to provide a constant free-flow of information that improves knowledge, relationships, opportunity, and time efficiency. The idea is still young and consistently undergoing changes and development. One important factor to consider in future

development is an over-reliance on technology could lead to a very bad outcome. In the meantime, however, we can enjoy the benefits that eGov has thus far given the populace.

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