Editorial Preface

Special Issue on Realising Public Sector Transformation through E-Government

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It gives us a great pleasure to welcome you to the 4th issue in volume 7 of the International Journal of Electronic Government Research. The articles presented in this special issue deal with contemporary electronic government (e-Government) and transforming government (t-Government) themes from a multiplicity of angles, providing a mixture of conjectural and prudent contributions. The papers in this special issue are selected from the 2nd Transforming Government Workshop (http://www.tgovworkshops.org) which was held in London in March 2011. This workshop is organised and hosted by Brunel University Business School and brings together both local and international researchers and practitioners to participate in sharing ideas for the transformation of government through enabling electronic systems and processes. The workshop includes a full program of papers, presentations and keynote speakers. Contributions are double blind peer reviewed for refereed proceedings.

Before proceeding with the papers presented in this special issue, we would like to briefly outline the history of the transforming government workshop. The transforming government workshop (tGov) was initiated in 2004 by the Information Systems Evaluation and Integration Network (ISEing) at Brunel University in response to the UK government’s directive at that time to have all government services online by the end of 2005. Initially named eGovernment Workshop, the event offered both practitioners and the academic community an opportunity to share ideas in the application of Information Systems (IS) practices to e-Government implementation. The workshop offered participants the opportunity to address a number of problems faced by public sector ICT managers of all kinds, and all levels, ranging from the technical to the organisational, from social to political, incorporating concerns about the environment, society, information management and the motivation of individuals in the implementation and diffusion of e-Government.
From 2004 to 2009 the focus of the workshop remained very much on e-Government and attracted many prominent scholars and distinguished public sector workers from Europe, the United States and Canada. However, with the pivotal shift in direction to achieve significant and transformational impacts on the efficiency and effectiveness of government through ICT and e-Government, the theme of the workshop was re-aligned to reflect the new focus in 2010 and was re-introduced as the Transforming Government workshop. The aim of the t-Government workshops is to provide a common platform for academics and practitioners to discuss and present original research highlighting issues related with technical, organisational, managerial and socioeconomic aspects of both (e) and (t)-Government implementation and adoption. As well as focusing on research and practitioner accounts of how ICT enabled e-Government can facilitate public sector transformation, the workshop encourages papers that tackle theoretical issues and empirical research that help provide deeper insights into issues surrounding the use of ICT to achieve better government.

While the focus of the workshop continues to remain very much on Europe, since 2010 the workshop has attracted keynote speakers, contributions and participation from a wider global audience.

This special issue of IJEGR consists of five diverse articles that examine the impact of ICT and e-Government on public sector transformation from a conceptual as well as practical perspective. The research presented in these articles includes real-life descriptions of cases of ICT adoption and exploitation in public sector organisations to facilitate transformational government particularly from a European perspective.

The first paper in this special issue is titled “Are you being Served: Transforming E-Government through Service Personalisation.” This paper is by Jeremy Millard of the Danish Technological Institute. In this paper Jeremy argues that most governments do not yet know how to treat users as different and unique individuals. He goes on to suggest that the benefits of universal personalisation in public services are within reach technologically through e-government developments, although organisational inertia will always lag what could otherwise be accomplished. Three drivers are presented that are technological, organisational and societal in context. The paper argues that universal personalisation will involve achieving a balance between top-down government and data-driven services, on the one hand, and bottom-up self-directed and user-driven services on the other. This paper is a ‘think piece’ aimed at both practitioners and researchers which attempts to describe and model current trends based on secondary research and literature review.

The second paper is by Maddalena Sorrentino of the University of Milano and Alessandro Spano and Benedetta Bellò of the University of Cagliari in Italy. This paper is titled “Evaluating Local Partnership Incentive Policies: A Realist Approach.” In this paper the authors examine the public incentive policies that are currently used to persuade local governments to setting up partnerships. The paper is based on an ongoing research study that aims to illustrate an evaluation method based on the ‘realist approach’, the tenets of which assign a key role to the context in which the mechanisms of a public programme work (or not). The evaluation framework presented in the study is intended to be a tool to assist and inform future policymaking and practice. The paper depicts the current scientific debate by exploring the relevant literature and presenting a research path aimed at building an empirically-based model for assessing public policies to promote and support local partnerships in the Italian Region of Sardinia.

The third paper is by Niels de Winne, Marijn Janssen, Nitesh Bharosa, Remco van Wijk, and Joris Hulstijn from Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands. This paper is titled “Transforming Public-Private Networks: An XBRL-based Infrastructure for Transforming Business-to-Government Information Exchange.” In this paper the authors discuss the environment where companies are required by law to report information to various public agencies. The paper looks at how
governments are initiating programs that aim to transform business-to-government information exchange to reduce the administrative burden for companies and improve the accountability at the same time. Drawing on a case study, the authors investigate the interplay between technical infrastructure and transformation. Using the case study, the authors discuss how an information brokerage infrastructure based on the Extensible Business Reporting Language (XBRL) is developed providing a one stop shop for companies and public agencies. The case study shows that the infrastructure should be flexible enough to accommodate changes over time while also being stable enough to attract a large user-base. The paper discusses how the increase in efficiency and effectiveness of the information exchange processes requires extensive transformation from both public and private parties.

The fourth paper in this special issue is titled “What Drives a Successful Technology Implementation? Exploring Drivers and Challenges of RFID Systems Implementation in a Public Sector Organisation.” This paper is by Kawal Kapoor, Yogesh Dwivedi, Michael Williams, and Mohini Singh of RMIT in Melbourne, Australia and Mark J. Hughes of Swansea University in the UK. The aim of this paper revolves around exploring the extent of RFID implementation at the Swansea University Library, whilst trying to examine the Social, Technological, Economic, and Managerial (STEM) aspects directly associated with the implementation. The authors use a focused interview approach with the core implementation team for RFID at Swansea University interviewed to gain insights into how the technology is adopted within the university. The empirical analysis indicates that self service is the most sought after benefit from RFID implementations. Furthermore, the paper discusses how RFID helps simplify stock management and enhances security at libraries. The empirical evidence shows, how, while cost of the system still remains to be a concern to a certain extent varying on the basis of the scale of implementation, vandalism is reduced to a certain degree. These findings are relevant to the public sector as university libraries are public organisations, consequently such findings have an insinuation for RFID implementations in other public sector organisations.

The final paper in this IJEGR special issue is by Nripendra Rana, Michael Williams, and Yogesh Dwivedi of Swansea University, UK, and Janet Williams of University of Glamorgan, UK. This paper is titled “Reflecting on E-Government Research: Toward a Taxonomy of Theories and Theoretical Constructs.” The purpose of this paper is to explore research progress to date by systematically analysing the existing body of knowledge on e-Government related issues, and reveal any lack of theoretical development and rigor in the area. The authors collected usable data relating to e-Government research currently available from 779 research articles identified from the ISI Web of Knowledge database, and by manually identifying relevant articles from dedicated journals on electronic government such as Transforming Government: People, Process, and Policy (TGPPP), Electronic Government, an International Journal (EGIJ), and International Journal of Electronic Government Research (IJEGR). Based on the investigation of various studies, the authors reveal that generic e-Government applications are explored more than any specific applications, and that the technology acceptance model (TAM) is the most utilised theory to explain research models. The authors report that although a large number of theories and theoretical constructs are borrowed from the reference disciplines, their utilisation by e-Government researchers appears largely random in approach.

As outlined, the first four articles presented in this IJEGR special issue illustrate the potential of ICT in transforming government operations and functions. These articles showcase a breadth of knowledge from different regions in Europe and confirm that indeed the focus of e-Government is now moving towards exploiting its ability to ‘transform’ public organisations and their services. The final article is more conceptual and highlights a fundamental concern which the e-Government research community has been debating around recently. This debate
revolves around the theoretical rigor in which e-Government research is being conducted. The findings in this paper reveal that although a large number of theories have been used in the study of e-Government, these are largely borrowed from reference disciplines such as Information Systems. In this respect, through the statistical analysis that is performed in the paper, the authors add valuable insights into the debate showing that a strong conceptual foundation that is synonymous with e-Government is yet to be established. From a transformational government perspective, these findings may offer some lessons to the research community in that such a theoretical gap might be bridged by adopting organisational change theories which are more closely integrated with public sector transformation.

We hope you will find this special issue of IJEGR interesting and though provoking. We also hope that our readers will be inspired to participate in the third transforming government workshop (http://www.tgovworkshops.org) which will be held in London, UK, in March 2012.

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