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EXECUTIVE SUMMERY

This is an eGISE network article which aims to justify the need for a holistic approach (the CARE framework) to the evaluation of e-government projects and to outline a programme of research for its delivery. It is argued that existing methods of evaluation are too limited in terms of scope, perspective, and application and do not offer the necessary potential for learning in an environment characterised by enormous change and considerable investment. Developing the CARE framework addresses these limitations by providing a method of collaborative inquiry which involves relevant stakeholders in the appraisal of both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ aspects of an e-government system. It is also intended that the research project also produces supporting software tools for the framework. The proposed project is based on previous work in the construction industry that developed a cross organisational learning approach (COLA). Developing a similar strategy for Knowledge Management is likely to be effective because the ‘silo’ culture of local government organisations has parallels with the segmented organisational structures within the construction industry.

Keywords: e-government; knowledge management; institutional learning; is evaluation, silo structure

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

The case for developing a better approach to evaluating e-government projects so that the resultant learning can be applied to both the enhancement of existing systems and improving the execution of future projects is a strong one. The field of evaluation is dominated by the application of techniques developed to serve the needs of a particular perspective, whether that is technical, financial, or social. Such approaches to evaluation have led to a somewhat blinkered reductionist stance, which has limited the possibilities for learning. Consequently, it is the purpose of this article to set out the justification
for a holistic evaluative approach (CARE) and to outline the form of research leading to its delivery.

Developing CARE is essentially a knowledge management (KM) project that aims to develop, implement, and evaluate a rigorous, holistic yet flexible framework for e-government systems evaluation. The framework is supported by the development of a Web-based information system to support users of CARE with appropriate tools, support materials, and facilities for knowledge creation, capture, and dissemination of the products of evaluation.

The Network for eGovernment Integration and Systems Evaluation (eGISE) has identified knowledge management and organisational learning (OL) as of particular interest within its area because the evaluation of information systems (IS)—including e-government systems—is a knowledge intensive task (Irani et al., 2005b). In this context, KM aims to provide decision makers with the opportunity for reflective learning rather than a process that stigmatises individuals in the search for the causes of failure (Irani & Love, 2001a). Such an approach to reflective learning may well entail a culture change, which requires openness, a willingness to learn from mistakes, and good practice on the part of individuals and groups. Furthermore, it is important that the culture is conducive to promoting learning between groups and that the necessary support is in place to facilitate this. It is in the ambit of the research to address these softer cultural issues as well as the more practical needs for appropriate tools, techniques, and information systems.

“E-government is the use of technology to enhance the access to and delivery of government services to benefit citizens, business partners, and employees. It has the power to create a new mode of public service where all public organisations deliver a modernised, integrated, and seamless service for their citizens (Silcock, 2001).” In order to reap the full benefits of this innovation, profound changes have to be made to transform and modernise the business of the government (HM Government, 2005). However, such a level of change cannot be achieved by technology alone viewing the fact that technology has to be developed and operate within an environmental context that clearly has tremendous impact on it (Avison & Fitzgerald, 2003). Inevitably, such a profound change is always going to be difficult to evaluate due to its increasingly dynamic and complex multidimensions involving the organisational, social, political, cultural, and technical factors. Undeniably, local authorities and government agencies need to evaluate the effects or the success of this newly implemented technology due to the hefty investment the government has put into it.

Based on the Kable report (EC, 2005), the UK per capita investment on public sector ICT is EUR 336 per head and according to the eGovernment News release (EC, 2005) and Kable (2005), it is forecasted that by the year 2007, the UK expenditure on ICT will reach EUR 21 billion, which is about 40% more than its German and French counterparts. Such a high level of spending is primarily due to huge investments made in e-government which aim to provide high quality and full range public services for all; shaped by individuals and communities to meet their needs, delivering value for money, and visible results (ODPM, 2006). Also, it is intended to enable departments to improve their operational efficiency by replacing labour intensive processes with