Chapter XVI

User Involvement in E-Government Development Projects

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Abstract

User involvement in e-government projects is presented and discussed. Different methods and practices are analyzed in relation to a differentiation between traditional government participatory practices and human-computer interaction (HCI). Some of the user involvement practices are exemplified through two Norwegian case studies: (1) An electronic patient journal for hospital based health care and (2) an electronic mail journal, where the Norwegian public (via the Norwegian press) is provided insight in public sector correspondence. User involvement methods and practices are in particular discussed with regard to the challenges of the wide range of users and stakeholders, legal limitations, and evolving goal hierarchies of e-government projects. Future trends and research opportunities within the field of user involvement in e-government development are identified.
Introduction

The development of e-government systems and services is highly prioritized in governments all over the world. Electronic service provision shall enable the governments to reach a number of ambitious goals, typically including citizen-centric service provision, increased service quality, increased efficiency of government service provision, lowered cost of government service provision, and improved democratic processes through improved dialogue between the government and its citizens, for example, European Commission’s i2010 (2005) and eNorge2009 of the Norwegian Department of Modernization (Moderniseringsdepartementet, 2005).

Successful implementation of e-government depends on the ability to develop services that match the goals and requirements of users and stakeholders. Also, the democratic involvement of the end users and stakeholders in the decision-making process is important due to the nature of the services provided through e-government. User involvement throughout the development process is a major vehicle to ensure both democratic participation and adequate consideration to user and stakeholder goals and requirements.

In the present chapter, different user involvement practices will be discussed with regard to the degree which makes it possible to meet core challenges of user involvement in the e-government development project. Some of the practices will be exemplified by two case studies from Norwegian e-government development. One of the case studies is from the health sector. The other is related to public insight in government administration. The cases will serve to exemplify different aspects of the general results and discussions presented in the chapter, as well as providing interesting insights in their own right.

Background

Definitions

In order to present and discuss methods and practices of user involvement in e-government service development, broad definitions of users, user involvement, and e-government services are provided.

Users are understood as comprising end users (primary users), secondary users, and stakeholders (Maguire, 1998). End users include internal and external users of a service or system. External users typically include citizens, private enterprises, and organizations as well as other government bodies. Internal end users include employees of the government bodies owning or in other ways responsible for the service or system in question. Secondary users include personnel responsible for installation and maintenance of the system. Stakeholders include persons or bodies directly or indirectly responsible or affected by the system or service. Examples of e-government stakeholders may include different levels of management in the government bodies owning the system, interest organizations, and political actors.