Chapter II
Collaborative E–Gov Networks: The Case of the Semantic–Gov Project

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ABSTRACT

Work reported in this chapter relates with work carried out in the context of the European IST Project SemanticGov (www.semantic-gov.org). The project aims at implementing a set of advanced Semantic Web technologies for adoption in the European public sector to advance the level and expand the volume of e-government solutions in EU. In this chapter we elaborate on the need to (re)position the idea of providing an advanced solution for an ideally functioning e-gov island within a sea of non-interoperable e-gov process frameworks, to become parts of open-ended ventures to allow the creation of collaborative networks for Electronic Governance.

INTRODUCTION

What has become obvious to us as result of our exposure to several e-Gov adoption pitfalls is that we are not facing a lack on enabling technologies but on paradigms to successfully deploy them.

In this context, the main aim of our work is to provide a new open development paradigm on how user and development communities can coexist and co-work for the definition of new e-Gov mission-oriented application concepts. At a second level, what is important is to help the organization of the requirements elicitation processes, the compliance validation and quality checking processes in a synergetic way with both users from the European public sector and developers’ communities forming essential part of the intellectual service and software engineering processes.
Our vision is to understand how to capitalise on the interactions between e-Gov users and developers as part of a value chain that creates new intellectual capital for new e-Gov application types by exploring problem-solving principles in computer science and other disciplines.

This necessitates the existence and fostering of closer links between the sides of the users and the developers, both of which need to share a space for expressing as well as exploring their own modes of thought and help improve their problem-solving paradigm.

Better understanding and communication with the future users of the systems requires the software creation to be placed at the level of abstraction the users can understand. Better communication between IT- and application field-specialists will lead to avoidance of misunderstanding, loss of time and resources and in the effect to systems that better address the needs of the end users. This refers to the creation of policies, processes and practices that will enrich the people in both communities of users and developers to coexist smoothly and gain from their interactions.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of any government enterprise is to create value. Codagnone and Wimmer (2007) recognise that ‘New opportunities offered by the advent of the Information Society force not only the business sector, but also governments all over the world to improve their operations and become more efficient and effective’.

The traditional thinking about value creation is based on the industrial organisation theory and the concept of the value chain: the government enterprise belongs and operates in some part of the public sector; strategy is primarily pre-occupied with positioning the government enterprise in the right place on the value chain, so that it performs the right value-adding activities that promise to offer the biggest profit. The competitive advantage derives by disaggregating the value creation process of the enterprise into discrete activities, which create a basis for differentiation. In the marketplace, a commercial enterprise would select the products that fit better to its value-adding activities and places them in the right market segments, that correspond to large enough customer bases. Government enterprises afford – though on a heavily reduced basis now, to follow value-creating paths that don’t necessarily imply lower costs. Today, however, a variety of trends, such as globalisation, the development of the digital economy and the increased importance of information technology, services and knowledge, change dramatically the context and open up new ways of value creation. The term “new economy” launched about the end of the previous century to denote the radical change that was taking place in the business world, the economy and –more broadly- the modern society. The key point of this term is that the economy as we knew it has changed and now it operates in a new, different way (OECD, 2000).

In this modern environment, the fundamental logic of e-government strategy and value creation is changing and new models are emerging. Network structures and concepts of collaboration have been developed as effective means to cope with the needs and challenges of 21st century. The development of collaborative networks, alliances and virtual organisations question the traditional organisational and strategic business models. Value creation in not considered anymore a linear (mostly business) function, but a collaborative and co-evolutionary process. The focus of the strategic analysis is not on the government organisation itself or even on an entire segment of the public sector, but on the whole value-creating system, within which collaboration partners, allies, suppliers and customers work together to co-produce value.

According to Normann and Ramirez (1993), the key strategic task in the new business environment is the reconfiguration of roles and rela-
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