Chapter 4
E–Government Implementation in Belgium and its Link with the European Dimension

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ABSTRACT
Information and communication technologies have become the core element of managerial reform, and electronic government (e-government) has played an extremely important part in public governance. With respect to availability of e-services for businesses and citizens, Belgium has considerably improved its position in international benchmarks. Belgium has increasingly focused on reducing administrative burden, developing cross-boundary collaboration, and achieving many important user-related goals. This chapter describes the development of The Federal Public Service for ICT (FEDICT), and its various modules and functions in details. In addition, it discusses how FEDICT helps to reach the goal of a user-centric and cross-boundary e-government in Belgium, and its relationship with other European countries.

INTRODUCTION
With the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs), customer service delivery is being confronted with a radical transformation in the public sectors. ICTs have become the core element of managerial reform, and electronic government (e-government) will play an extremely important part in future governance. Indeed, ICTs have not only opened up many possibilities for improving internal managerial transparency and efficiency and the quality of public service delivery to industries and citizens, but also contributed to dramatic changes in re-
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E-government, in response to the rapid development of the Internet and increased use of ICTs, is one of the most interesting concepts introduced in the field of public governance in the twentieth century. E-Government development has been dispersed throughout various countries, with significant differences in approach, scope and speed due to considerable variations in size of administrations and resources dedicated to e-government. In Belgium, E-Government development began to take off at the end of the 1990s. With respect to availability of e-services for businesses and citizens, Belgium has considerably improved its position in international benchmarks since then. According to the European Commission Benchmark of European Online Public services, Belgium evolved from a fully online availability of 50% in 2006 to 60% in 2007. Belgium ranks among the leader in a wider European Union comparison of online sophistication of basic public services for businesses (OECD, 2008).

There are various stages of e-government, each of which reflects the degree of technical sophistication or maturity: (1) simple information dissemination (one-way communication); (2) two-way communication (request and response); (3) service and financial transactions; (4) integration (horizontal and vertical integration); and (5) political participation (Moon, 2002: 426). In order to move to the next stage of e-government, developing a user-centric and cross-boundary e-government in Belgium is an essential challenge, as in other European countries. On the one hand, developing a user-centric e-government depends heavily on being aware of the different needs people have when interacting with public authorities and institutions. That is, it is crucial to focus on the interests of demand side rather than on supply side and on technological capabilities. On the other hand, developing a cross boundary e-government depends heavily on horizontal and vertical integration of public services and simplification of users’ interactions with public authorities.

Belgium is aiming to pursue e-government not as an end in itself, but rather as an enabler for wider public sector development. Belgium has increasingly focused on enabling administrative burden reduction, developing cross-boundary collaboration, and many important user-related goals. This paper describes the development of The Federal Public Service (FEDICT), and its various modules and functions in details. We also discuss how FEDICT helps to reach the goal of a user-centric and cross-boundary e-government in Belgium, and its relationship with other European countries.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE IN BELGIUM

Belgium is a kingdom situated in the heart of Europe in between France, The Netherlands, Luxembourg and Germany. The country has about 10.6 million citizens on a rather small area of 30,528 km². 60% speak Dutch, 40% French and less than 1% German. Flanders is relatively flat and has a coastline, while the Walloon Region has a much more accentuated landscape especially in the southeast of the country where the Ardennes is situated.

Belgium became independent in 1830. Between 1970 and 1993, the country evolved into a more efficient federal structure. This occurred through five state reforms (in 1970, 1980, 1988-89, 1993 and 2001). As a result, the first Article of the Belgian constitution reads today: “Belgium is a federal state, composed of communities and regions”. The power to make decisions is no longer the exclusive preserve of the federal government and the federal parliament. The leadership of the country is now in the hands of various partners, who independently exercise their authority within their domains.
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