Chapter XVI

Semiotic Analysis of E-Policing Strategies in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

Technological infrastructure must satisfy business requirements, and more importantly, it must be able to evolve to meet the new requirements. This requires not only a good understanding of business strategies, visions and functions, but also the evolvability built into the architecture. This chapter first presents a semiotic approach to the business and information technology (hereafter IT) systems. This approach treats the IT system as an integral part of the business organisation. The chapter then discusses the applicability of a semiotic framework in the e-government in the UK, particularly in an evolvable architecture for e-policing. The semiotic framework is applied in the assessment of the e-government strategies and systems requirements, and in the analysis of these requirements to the e-architecture. A case study demonstrating the applicability of the framework is conducted to evaluate the implementation of the national Information Systems Strategy for the Police Service (ISS4PS) and the Crime Justice Information Technology community (CJIT) in the UK.
Introduction

Three categories of e-government applications can be identified (Marchionini et al., 2003): access to information, transaction services and citizen participation, each of which represents a stage of the development history of e-government.

In the United Kingdom, the e-government initiative is underpinned by the UK government appointing in 2001 its e-envoy, who reports directly to the Prime Minister. The e-envoy’s office has three core objectives: 1) to make all government services available electronically by 2005, with key services achieving high levels of use; 2) to ensure that everyone who wants Internet access has it by 2005; and 3) to develop the UK as a world leader for business. As the first step, the most popular government services will be made available online as soon as possible, to allow more efficient access through the Internet to the information available in different statutory bodies and ministries, as well as different government agencies/organisations. This will be followed by transaction services and citizen participation including services to business, benefits and personal taxation, transport information and booking, education, health, citizen interactions with the justice system, land and property, agriculture, and e-democracy (BCS, 2003).

Drawing experience from e-commerce and e-business from industry, the advocates of e-government agree that the aims of e-government should not be cost saving, but other more profound benefits. PCIP (2002) has suggested a list of possible reasons and goals for e-government:

- Improving services to citizens;
- Improving the productivity (and efficiency) of government agencies;
- Strengthening the legal system and law enforcement;
- Promoting priority economic sectors;
- Improving the quality of life for disadvantaged communities; and
- Strengthening good governance and broadening public participation.

This list represents the vision of most governments and organisations in most countries. In a study by SOCITM (2003a) conducted in the 441 local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland (over 230 councils took part and responded to the survey), it shows that is an optimism within councils about e-government to deliver better services to citizens, with service improvements forecast at 100% in some areas and an average of 20% across all services. Local authority spending on information and communication technology is forecast to rise by 25% to almost £2.5 billion this fiscal year. However, the success of e-government will rely on multiple factors: appropriate telecommunication infrastructure, business process re-engineering, integration of IT and business processes, citizen participation, readiness of government staff, officials’ readiness for change, and many more. Amongst all these, human and organisational factors are more crucial than technological aspects. Successful examples of e-government, experience and best practice, particularly in small councils, are disseminated by SOCITM (2003b) for others to share.
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