e-government
<transparency in action>

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"Broadly defined, e-government can include virtually all information and communication technology (ICT) platforms and applications used by the public sector." However, the 2001 UN report, *Benchmarking E-government: a Global Perspective--Assessing the UN Member States,* goes on to say that it defines e-government as utilizing the Internet and the world-wide-web for delivering government information and services to citizens. Two methodologies were used in the report's research. First, national government websites were analyzed for the content and services available that the average citizen would most likely use. Second, a statistical analysis was done comparing the information and communication technology infrastructure and human capital capacity for 144 UN Member States.

The executive summary states, "Full-fledged commitment to e-government implies that a country's leadership recognizes that information is a social and economic asset just as important and valuable as traditional commodities and natural resources. Information benefits the most those individuals and industries with unimpeded access to its acquisition, and the self-determination to convert essential data to knowledge."

According to the report, in 2001, of the 190 UN Member States, 169 (88.9%) of their national governments used the Internet in some capacity to deliver information and services. For 16.8% of these governments, their Internet presence was just beginning. Countries where users can access an increasing number of official websites that provide advanced features and dynamic information was 34.2%. Thirty percent of the countries offered interactive online services—users have access to regularly updated content and, among other things, can download documents and e-mail government officials. Only nine%, or 17 national governments, offered the ability to conduct transactions online; i.e. citizens can use the Internet to pay for a national government services, fee or tax obligations. (Note while estimating well over 50,000 websites globally, 22,000 sites were in the US Federal government.)

A country's social, political and economic

...people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives
—James Madison, 1822

National governments play four distinct roles in an information society

1) Determine the policies and regulatory structures
2) Deliver the programs and services of government to the citizen
3) Use the information infrastructures to enhance the internal administrative practices
4) Interface with citizens in the democratic process of government

Source: Benchmarking E-government: a Global Perspective--Assessing the UN Member States

composition most definitely correlates closely with its e-government program development. However there were exceptions, as evidenced by several developing and transitioning economies. Key factors such as the state of the country's telecommunications infrastructure, the strength of its human capital, the political will and commitment of the national leadership and shifting policy and administrative priorities play important roles. Each of these facts influence how decision makers, policy planners and public sector managers elect to approach, develop and implement e-government programs.

Online service delivery should be thought of as a complementary channel to the traditional channels for service delivery. Increased access to the world-wide-web does not automatically transform into increased use of e-government. Often, user interest has been low and indifferent. Also, media campaigns informing citizens about being able to access government services online have not been overly abundant.

Single entry portals are an accepted and important standard. However, even once inside, there exists significant digital divides among the national public administrations. What's more, national e-government management teams, at least in 2001, were the exception rather than the rule.

At the March 2001, *Third Global Forum* the following four key points were articulated.

1) E-government can consistently improve the quality of life for citizens and can create a sharp reduction of costs and time.

2) E-government will eventually transform the processes and structures of government to create a public administration less hierarchical. Thus, it will empower civil servants to serve citizens better and to be more responsive to their needs.

3) E-government must be given serious consideration also in the developing countries not only for its potential for stronger institutional capacity building, but for its better service delivery to citizens and business.

When asked to describe the ultimate benefit of e-government, the most consistent response given by decision-makers and public sector professionals interviewed for the Benchmarking report was that it transforms governance like no previous reform or reinvention imitative. E-government potentially empowers individual citizens by providing them with an alternative channel for accessing information and services and interacting with government. It also gives the individual citizen another choice: whether to become an active participant in the government process or remain a passive observer. These outcomes, however, tend to be more potential than extant according to the report.

But, states the report hopefully, perhaps what e-government is ultimately about is opportunity. The types of services that can be delivered over the Internet are still being conceived, developed and improved by both the public and private sectors. Over the next few years expect to see an increase in experimentation, innovation and organizational learning in an effort to perfect e-government.

Source: *Benchmarking E-government: a Global Perspective--Assessing the UN Member States, United Nations-Division for Public Economics and Public Administration (UNDPEPA) and American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) Section 1: The 2001 Global E-government Landscape 1.1. Executive Summary Stephen A. Ronaghan*

The stages of E-government

Emerging: An official government online presence is established
Enhanced: Government sites increase; information becomes more dynamic.
Interactive: Users can download forms, e-mail officials and interact through the web.
Transactional: Users can actually pay for services and other transactions online.
Seamless: Full integration of e-services across administrative boundaries

Source: Benchmarking E-government: a Global Perspective--Assessing the UN Member States

Reducing corruption via computer applications

"The very process of building an online delivery system requires that rules and procedures be standardized across regions and made explicit and, therefore, capable of computer coding," writes Subhash Bhatnagar ("E-government and access to information," *Global Corruption Report 2003).* According to him, "this reduces the discretion and opportunity for arbitrary action available to civil servants when dealing with applicants on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, as the possibility of exposure of wrongdoing is enhanced, the fear of consequent embarrassment can be a deterrent to corrupt practices."

No real surprise, Bhatnagar states that—based on reviewed surveys—tax collection agencies are particularly prone to corruption. As a result, a large number of documented e-government applications are created for departments dealing with tax collection. To reduce corruption effectively, features that provide transparency and accountability need to be built into the design.

More specifically, e-government applications must first increase access to information, then ensure that rules are transparent and applied in specific decisions and, finally, have built-in the ability to track decisions and actions to individual civil servants. "If all these objectives are pursued, corruption can be reduced significantly. Ignoring some of them can defeat the whole purpose," Bhatnagar writes.

The difference

The term *e-government* is sometimes confused with *e-governance* states Bhatnagar. E-governance is a broader concept that includes the use of information and communication technologies by government and civil society to promote greater citizen participation. For example, it covers the use of the Internet by politicians and political parties to get views from their constituencies, or to publicize views by civil society organizations that are in conflict with the ruling powers. E-government, by contrast, is concerned specifically with improving access to government functions, whether information or services.

Many government websites just seem to worry about providing electronic access to information. Often, Bhatnagar writes, they are little more than electronic copies of printed brochures. However, they can be used for much more.

For instance, electronic procurement increases transparency and, more importantly, honesty by keeping a traceable record of all the government transactions online. A comprehensive e-procurement system includes information and registration, e-purchasing and e-tendering.

Supervising and monitoring government employees using newly installed e-government systems is important. An often unforseen risk is that the impact of "more transparent" systems can weaken as corrupt employees learn ways to beat the new system. According to Bhatnagar, the publication of budgetary allocations and expenditures on the web, systems for tracking the status of license applications and sharing performance data are known to increase accountability.

But increasing the availability of Internet-based information and services does not necessarily mean that citizens using it will demand greater accountability. Monitoring is tedious, tiresome mundane work. The number of citizens willing to be consistently vigilant and engaged in the government process is relatively small.

Also, "E-government can lead to transparency only if there is a legal framework that supports free access to information. National secrecy laws must be replaced by freedom of information legislation. At the same time, governments need to address the risks of increased use of Internet applications to privacy and security. Guidelines may be required to govern the release of public information that may contain personal or sensitive data," states Bhatnagar.

As a result, e-government can help but cannot wholly solve the temptations of greed known as corruption. It makes it harder to do and it can make at least some employees think twice before indulging. The key is applications that reduce discretion and maintain detailed data on transactions that can be seen by many and can be tracked and linked to the source.

In designing e-government applications that address these concerns, system designers need to identify the processes that enable corrupt behavior. The traditional analytical methods of consulting companies are often insufficient, according to Bhatnagar. High levels of participation by citizens and civil servants are necessary to make useful assessments. Such analysis tends not to be outsourced, he states. In addition, specific benefits may need to be provided to employees who will see their "income" reduced as a result of the increased transparency.

E-government applications can be developed that enable many government services to be provided electronically and with significant reductions in corruption. But it takes time. Rather than wait for total readiness, governments are advised to learn by doing.

Source: *Excerpted from "E-government and access to information" by Subhash Bhatnagar (Global Corruption Report 2003)*

Defending the turf in R&D term$

According to Steven Kosiak at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA), an independent policy research institute, "The FY 2004 US defense budget request includes a $4.8 billion increase in funding for R&D. This boost, coming on top of similarly large increases over the past two years, brings the US Department of Defense (DoD) R&D budget to $61.8 billion, its highest level ever.

The major reason for the boost is the Administration's desire to transform the military. However, there is some concern that not enough money and effort is being placed in the early R&D stages where "the discovery and development of new technologies promising major leaps in military capability are most likely to be made," writes Kosiak. The Science and Technology programs in the early phases of the R&D process did receive a slight increase from FY 2001 but it is "extremely modest compared to the increases provided for R&D overall," states Kosiak. The big money winners appear to be the Advanced Component Development and Prototypes (FY 2004 $13.2 billion); System Development and Demonstration (FY 2004 $15.9 billion) and Operational Systems Development (FY 2004 $19.4 billion).

Going buggy trying to come up with an angle? The following run-down on pages 24 and 25 may help get the ideas flying.

But remember the FAR rules.