

HIGHLIGHTS FROM COUNTRY REPORTS

Day 3

Larry Caffrey

ICA Treasurer

Welcome to the last session of the Country Reports. If you recall, two days ago we talked about whether or not e-government actually existed. I think that we were able to show that it does now and your country reports quite clearly show that having reached the first tranche of e-gov you are all now very much into phase two. The really interesting point that I think I closed on was that a number of the governments who have always been considered as advanced e-government users aren't just refining their strategy, they are totally revising it from the top down. I think that's a very important point for some of the other country reports where perhaps you may have been, a year or so behind in the development.

What I am going to do this morning, though, as I give fair warning, is that most of the country reports identify excellent delivery services but they do tend to support the bureaucracy rather than the citizen in bringing in benefits. And what I asked you to think about was to point out this morning to colleagues where you do provide good user benefits. I recall very clearly a strategic statements that one, two, three years ago where the emphasis was on delivery of services to the user. I am going to define that slightly more in what food do you put on their table?

Many of you are now providing online tax collection. Yes, it's a good service and it helps the user fill in his tax forms, but I think as was pointed out from the floor and one or two other areas, its not the first thing people think about when they get up in the morning, about how quickly they can fill the taxes.

A couple of countries also reported that you are able to report crime online. Now I can see that's a good user service, and that the users themselves can get some advantages out of that. It doesn't stop the crime but it does enable you to get a crime incident report so the user can move straight on to the insurance company for a refund. So it helps them. It eliminates the middleman. I mean, there is no need for the police any more: just report the crime, get the report incident number and bingo, you're away. So the actual thieves and burglars, they love it. I mean, that is a real benefit to the user. It's not really the examples I'm looking for. Just one further real example is, my own country, the UK. E-government exists now so the Chancellor was finding that in order to satisfy the citizen, he could cull 80,000 civil service posts. This was a smart move. No one minds losing a few Civil Servants. But the other lot, the opposition, offer even more posts. Then the troubles begin. None of the services are working and there is no one available to repair them.

So, user benefits can be useful to some sort areas but not necessarily to all. I was going to open the debate by calling on Arvo Ott, because in Estonia they have some real examples of user benefits, but he's had to go away, he has a Minister speaking

tomorrow. In Estonia, they have something called e-school. This puts the parents of schools in touch, direct touch, with the teachers. So you are able to follow online your children's progress. Of course, Arvo tells me the parents love it, the teachers love it and the grades have improved, but the kids aren't too happy. But, there again, it is a real user service. They also, in Estonia, have avoided bus queues because you can use your user ID card to get the bus ticket before you leave home. Just recently, you might be aware in the UK, a guy had to get off a busto get his bus ticket – he had his children on the bus and he didn't see them for two days, so it can be difficult. The kids were lost for 48 hours. So, where you can actually know you don't have to stand in the bus queue that you don't have to stand to get the tickets. I think that is a real user benefit.

Another example is Finland; they also use ID cards but they have more than one depending on what the user fancies, on what the user wants to do.

What can you offer me from the floor? I've got plenty more suggestions that I will be coming to you if you don't tell me but perhaps someone from the floor would like to offer a real user benefit from e-gov.

While you're thinking, have we got anyone from Ireland and your Reach programme. Does it reach out to the citizen or does it reach out to other government departments?

Enda Holland, Ireland. We do have the Reach Programme but it is still progressing and it should see some real development in the next few months. In the meantime, a lot of the work is in hand we are still putting services online, for example like Revenue and you can pay your Motor-Tax renewal online. A lot of work has gone into interoperability, and a particular example is the inter-agency messaging service. What it does provide are support services at the birth of a child, when the child is registered at the General Registry Office, the message is sent to the Department of Social Welfare and the Child Benefit Payment is automatically initiated so that the family don't have to apply separately for the Child Benefit Payments. An offshoot of this is a message is sent from the same system to a central Statistic Office so that the statistics on births are available in what is almost real time. This is going to be a standard to record other life events in all other agencies.

Larry Caffrey. Okay, thank you. It seems to me that training as well is particularly important. Education is very important for the end user. Have we got one for Portugal, this morning? I've seen Luis around. You have the EU virtual campus which appears to be a real user benefit. Perhaps a few words from you on that subject?

Luis Vidigal, Portugal. This is a real political objective so its one of the main targets of the new government to have something really new, a real difference in our country. You know, that all of the governments expect to make something like that. At the end, it puts a lot of pressure on broadband and those wireless facilities throughout the university campus. A large amount of money was provided for that and also it was important to see not only the students and professors can access each other by wireless but also can access the visual library because they also the government made lots of contracts with editors, with a good price because all the libraries have different contracts. So they joined together, and now we have a single contract for the entire caucus, something special for researchers, for students, for professors, and it's a really

successful project. There was also an agreement with providers of computers to have many facilities for students to access computers with wireless facilities so we are also trying to have most of the people, even the most poorer of them to have access with those facilities. So it's a really success story. It started this year, its working, but you have to follow it for the next year to see what will be the results. Even from a cost benefit point of view.

Larry Caffrey. As I understand it I think, you said it's a virtual campus for students but it's tied in to this online knowledge library as well so it can help the students develop their own work but its also available for researchers; from any sphere?

Luis Vidigal, Portugal. Not only for universities but also for visitors for research. For example, my own tutorial work is prepared by access to that service.

Now Welcome to Taiwan.

Michael Lin, Taiwan. Thank you Larry. Taking this opportunity I would like to say that regarding the question, do we really benefit our citizens? In a survey we did last June, this year, I would like to say that was a kind of sad e-government, current that is situation that related to real benefit to our citizens. We asked three questions regarding our e-government. The first one is that we ask our citizens, was to those citizens who had used our e-government judicial services online and those should be direct to the users, the online transaction services, and we got a percentage, is only 25%. 25% of our citizens in the past twelve months who had used our online services. And our last question was that have you ever had any kind of feedback to government agencies during the last twelve months? Answers we got were as only a few as 11%. I just got kind of sad feeling that since most of the countries here has already provided online tax finding services. So tax as an example we had promoted such kind of services for 7 years but currently for this year we only got 20.5% of taxpayers who file their tax online. So, the meaning of it is clear. That means that probably we still have got not the three-year benefit to the citizens. With such kind of situation we found that we need make more available to provide real beneficial services for our e-government, so that hopefully we can effectively broaden the real e-government user percentage in our society. And furthermore, in order to develop a real use of service to our citizens we need to adopt a very real use for strategy to improve our current situation and to overcome our difficulties.

Larry Caffrey. Thank you Michael. Now to our friend from Romania.

Marius Eugen-Opren, Romania.Hi, I'm from Romania. I have to report first, that at the level of the Romanian government we are considering the e-government methods as very efficient weapon to fight things like low and medium sized corruption. The main idea is ,by these methods to want to reduce the number of the direct contacts between the citizen and the civil service. And also we are considering that we might introduce this by Internet. It means the Romanian government is considering it as a very efficient tool for this purpose. The second question is considering the e-learning. Three years ago the Romanian government started a big programme in this field. It means we are to supply to all the schools, many schools, 1 million, computers with Internet connection. It means end of 2005 in all the million schools, it doesn't matter if there are computers there already, at least two will have

PC's with Internet connection. The programme of 1 billion Euros based on a strategic partnership with Microsoft, and now we just last week the Romanian government approved the final funding of a million Euros. And we are to develop special software for e-learning which from this month received a very good appreciation from the European commission on this software. And we are able to make changes to information using software from countries such as Portugal in this field. And also, the last question, also it's a decision of the Romanian government that each university will build a software pack where the software companies will work together with the students from the IT universities whenever they can. Especially the students who are in the last year of their university which can work with very well known companies in the field of ICT. Thank you.

Larry Caffrey. Now also, I mentioned the UK before, but they made enormous strides in the last twelve months. The thing I want to ask you about, although feel free to comment on any of the other developments, is that you provide now something to the citizen and you don't need a computer at all because you are providing it through the television network. Direct-gov, isn't it? Perhaps a few words on that if you could.

Ewan McKinnon, UK. A couple of years ago we did a kind of bench-marking study to look at where we were in our e-government roll-out and we found that we were doing very well in terms of the supply of services but where we were doing less well, and it's been alluded to a couple of times during the conference, has been in the take-up of services. And so we did a fundamental kind of re-think about the way that we deliver services and started to develop a kind of portal concept - a one-stop shop concept around different customer segments. And the design principle really is that by having multiple, have a single location where people can go to in a thematic way. So, as a motorist you will go and look maybe for motoring services, or motoring information. You are also a parent as well, potentially, so you would also want to visit the same part of the site and consume parent services. And this kind of theory of cross-cell between different areas of the site is a fundamental design concept to increase take-up.

The one other element of direct-gov is being able to offer it over multiple channels as well, and so recently we developed, we re-launched direct-gov in April with a kind of thin layer of content over a broad set of themes and segments, and a deeper layer of content in a number of areas. That is now being, the concept is being developed over a central content management system that can translate the content to different platforms so it can be translated to mobile phones, it can be translated to digital television and it can also obviously be offered over the Internet as well. So it is a multi-channel portal type concept. It's a thin portal kind of concept at the moment in that it doesn't have a CRM system sitting below it but the concept ultimately will be to provide, in a similar way to the Canadian presentation that we saw this morning, some kind of customisation of services. So it will be a one-stop shop, single sign-on type principle where you can go to the content that you are most interested in, at that particular time, be it motoring or education or health. Consume services in that area, and then move around the site in a single location and consume other services in the same way. We are hoping that it will significantly boost take-up of services. It is a fundamental re-design from the UK online portal that we had originally.

Larry Caffrey. Thank you. To me that fills an enormous gap. I think we've heard a number of times over the last three days that it's the citizens who needs access to the services most, who can afford them least. The fixed income people can't necessarily afford a computer, and if they can afford a computer 50 dollars a month or £1 a day which is what it was to get broadband services available to you is a huge amount of your disposal income. On the other hand I was particularly struck with the digital TV idea because no matter how poor you are there is not any way you're going to miss the football! If you've got to have your football you've got your digital television, and now you've got instant access to those types of services that they probably really need. So I think it's a really good step forward.

Larry Caffrey. Any more volunteers?

Gerald Trost, Austria. Thank you Larry, just to, a comment what has been said on reducing the direct contact between administration and citizens where appropriate. Let me give you an example in Austria. We have a project which you can see under the title, My Government. With the topic that we are gathering all of the most important documents in the centre of registry. So that means the benefits for the citizens that can be seen in the replacement of standardised paper documents such as birth certificates or the citizenship verification. So that means in the end that the citizen do not have their relevant documents with them when going to the authority. Another point is that we closed the whole supply chain and we re-launched our help portals based on more than 200 life situations, including different languages.

To give you an example: to obtain a certificate of residence from the Central Residence Registry it takes about only two minutes. So we have included the whole processes including identification. Over mobile phone on smart-card and we have integrated the whole processes in terms of electronic methods of paying fees by online and including the possibility to pay over mobile phone. So it means that the whole payment process is rightly integrated into the whole online process. At the end of the chain, there is the electronic service delivery which means that the user can accept simple and uncomplicated delivery without going to the post office. So that is the whole supply chain re-launched of our portal and perhaps we might have an opportunity in Salzburg to think about that and to give you an experience and an example of how that works. Thank you.

Larry Caffrey. Thank you. It's a clear example of volunteering because there were two more questions you were going to be pressed on, just that issue, thank you. Anyone else?

Anna Lundbergh, Sweden. You challenged us on reaching out to citizens; an example that comes to my mind is a few weeks ago we had a bad train accident in the southern part of Sweden. It was the end of the week and it was early in the morning when people were in commuter trains. The central or local hospitals where people normally go to give blood regularly and they could send out text messages to their clients that regularly give blood. These responded quickly and by the end of the day they had got a large amount of fresh blood. I think it is a high benefit to users both with the people that were injured and could have blood transfusion, and also a high benefit to people that wanted to volunteer and help out in a bad situation. That was my example from Sweden.

Larry Caffrey. Thank you. Anyone else?

Barry West. US. We just recently, implemented our online registration for disaster victims. Those victims that were in any type of disaster; for example in the US we've had four hurricanes take place in the last two months. They can actually have a cheque cut for disaster assistance in three days where they can actually have a cheque, in hand. We were working through the small business administration and through the Department of Treasury to make this happen. So if their home is totally destroyed they can go to a central location and use a kiosk type of device, or a local library and do the online registration.

Larry Caffrey. Yes, that really is food on the table. Having lived through Hurricane Charlie in Florida a few weeks back, I realise just how important that could be. Now I mentioned when we started that Estonia had the ID card to book bus fares and bus tickets. Strangely enough that facility meant that within three months it had doubled the demand for ID cards so they moved around. However I want to move to Finland, who are here now, to say that you're handling the ID card problem by actually changing or provided different types of ID card depending upon what the citizen wants. Have I understood that correctly?

Arja Terho, Finland. The ID card has not been a success story in Finland so far so there is another decision that people can, if they want to, combine the social security card and the ID card together. So that means that all people in Finland do have a regular social security card that is free of charge. Then you can have the identity card if you want to but you don't have to have one because you can have a driver's licence to show your identity.

There have been two changes since we last met. One is that if you want an identity card it always has the electronic ID on it also. Earlier on you could select the ID card with or without the electronic ID. But now you have to have the electronic ID and it's a little bit more expensive now than it used to be. Then there is another change that if you want to have the electronic ID on your social security card you can have that too. So you can have a combined ID and social security card. But you still have the old ones too, so you have the old social security cards as well. And the combined card has not so far been a successful story either. And I can understand that because there really is no reason to change from the old fashioned one to the new electronic one. What is being used most for the authentication in Finland to the electronic services is the bank's authentication. Most of the Finns do their banking through Internet and have been doing it since 1984 or 85 maybe, so they are very used to using pins and passwords that are delivered by the banks, and they use it maybe not daily but on weekly basis anyway. So when they authenticate to public services that's the easiest way for them, and that's nowadays used the most.

Larry Caffrey. Okay, thank you very much. I'm not going move far from you, I'm going to move literally next door because it was very clear in the Switzerland report that you have an entirely different need to work much more closely with the citizen who, in some cases, is very direct in telling you what they require. I'm wondering if that actually causes more difficulties than the top-down approach?

Jean-Jacques Didisheim, Switzerland. I'm not sure from what part of the country report you got this! But I just looked at our country report when you said you were looking for a good example of direct services to citizens. Actually there are almost none in our country report this year because I focussed more on the first leg of our e-government strategy where we say, we first want, before offering services to the outside world, to put our internal IT within the government in order and enable cross-government processes. We have put most of our efforts into this lately. The other reason is that the federal level, which I represent here, has relatively few direct interactions with the citizens. Most of the services to the citizens, if we take the 20 services from the EU benchmark, 12 of them for citizens, 8 for businesses, almost all of them are provided either by the cantons or by the municipalities. So we put out efforts at the federal level more on encouraging the cantons and municipalities to do their homework; we can only do that. We have no possibility to "sanction" them if they don't do it.

Larry Caffrey. Yes I think that was exactly the point. The main thrust come from the cantons and the municipalities themselves, whereas you are making at federal level a great effort to advise them on what common approaches they should take but they make their own decisions, and whether or not they adopt them, if I understand correctly.

Jean-Jacques Didisheim, Switzerland. Yes, that's correct. So we have started a number of initiatives, maybe two of them I can mention; one that has been quite successful already. It is to try to develop e-government standards, technical standards, but also process standards for the whole of Switzerland. And in order for this not to be a top-down approach, but a more collaborative one, we created an association whereby we are a member but also most cantons are now members, private companies are members, IT providers are members. And this association works together and elaborate standards. They are not mandatory of course but when everybody has agreed that this is a good standard they will mostly be used. So this is one way of doing it.

The other thing that we have started is an initiative to try to have an exchange of good solutions. Because one of the reasons, we think the main reason, why Switzerland is not on the top ranking in the EU or the benchmarks is because of our decentralisation. Because some cantons have very good solutions but others are not very developed in terms of e-government. So we have developed a platform to have a complete e-government portfolio for Switzerland. We don't know if it will work as we have just set up the technical infrastructure and the process for the cantons and municipalities to register their solutions there so that others can see what is around and share experiences. This has just started this year and we hope that maybe this will also give incentives to take good solutions instead of re-developing things.