

ICA 41st Conference The Rapport's Review

What We Learned at the 41st ICA Conference Rapporteur: James Mackison, USA

Introduction

As Rapporteur, I was given the difficult task of condensing 4 days of discussions and deliberations at the 41st ICA Conference in Dublin, Ireland into a concise summary. The role of the Rapporteur is to summarize what attendees did over the week. The theme was "Building Trust through Transformational Government" and the good news is that much was accomplished during conference. At the beginning of the week, the theme may have seemed a little fluffy, but over the course of the week attendees:

- Defined the terms "transformation" and "trust" more precisely and described why they are important to governments.
- Elaborated on the gaps, barriers and complexities to achieving transformation.
- Documented a path forward for governments that are incremental, building on successes and learning from mistakes of the past.
- Placed the path in the context of a vision for what "transformed" governments will look like.
- And reassessed trust as a goal in light of our discussions.

Definition of Trust and Transformation

The opening speakers of the conference did an excellent good job of framing our discussions of transformation and trust by providing some useful definitions. Professor Frank Bannister of Trinity College, Dublin addressed trust in institutions. He described and later debunked what he termed the "transformation hypothesis." In short, the hypothesis states: Trust in government is low. A change in government will be needed in order to gain more trust. ICT is an agent of change. Therefore, ICT can transform government in a way that increases people's trust.

The Professor proceeded to debunk this hypothesis, noting that ICT is limited in its ability to transform government. Most measures imply a low correlation between e-Government satisfaction and citizen trust. However, implicit in his discussion was a strong relationship between transformation and trust. In other words, we will know a government is transformed when it is trusted. The question is – what role can ICT play in that transformation? His ultimate conclusions were that while ICT won't make citizens trust government, it can play an incremental role in transformation through continuous improvement. But that transformation will be long and difficult.

Barriers to Transformation

One of the best things about ICA is the honest exchange of not just successes, but failures. There was a healthy dose of realism in the proceedings, as governments

provided honest assessments of where they have fallen short, and what obstacles stand in the way of transformation. While the agenda for ICT is becoming broader to include social and economic goals, its ability to change things remains limited. Furthermore, transformation is contingent on things that governments, much less ICT agencies within them, have little control over – technological change, shifting demographics, labour markets, etc. Usually, transformation happens to governments more than it is brought about by governments.

ICT Skills Gap – Current managerial and technical skills in government are inadequate for transformation. On behalf of the breakout session on ICT Skills, Peter Dale of Australia noted that while the state of ICT skills in government is not in crisis; it is an issue in need of attention. A lack of technical skills prevents governments from pursuing emerging technologies. For example, it does little good to know the code behind an open source application if you are unable to understand it. Larry Caffrey of ICA noted at the conference that the skills gap might well be the product of the “reorganizations” of the recent past that reduced the size of the government workforce in the name of efficiency. The lack of skills also impacts the division of labour between public and private sectors, leading to greater outsourcing than is perhaps optimal.

Complexity of Integrated Identity Management – Coordinating an approach to electronic identity management in decentralized environments is a difficult challenge. Shimon Broner of Israel reported from the Identity Management breakout session that the group could not come to a consensus on the issue, a similar problem faced by all integrated ID projects. A coordinated approach in governments to electronic identity management is a key to integrating transactional services. An additional difficulty is the fact that take-up of e-ID’s has been slow.

Lack of Uptake and Awareness – The lack of uptake and awareness of online services makes transformation difficult. Japan’s 2007 ICA Country Report refers to a dilemma faced by many governments – despite a world-class technology infrastructure and a focus on collaboration within and outside of government; they “were not able to meet the citizens’ expectation for providing better public service.” Prof. Dr. Nagaaki Ohyama of Japan noted that there is less than 20% usage. Taiwan also reported that there was 64% Internet penetration and 50% usage of websites, but only 9% of citizens were truly interacting with government online. There are three potential causes for the lack of uptake:

- citizens are not aware of the services, in which case marketing and awareness campaigns can help;
- citizens do not have access to the services they could use, in which case efforts to improve the digital divide can help; or
- citizens do not like or have no use for the service, in which case work to improve services and change the way government engages citizens is in order.

Imprecise Measurement – Another difficulty in transforming government is the fact that it is hard to measure performance of ICT and the benefits derived from it. Measurement

of both expectations and results can be difficult to quantify and convey to policymakers and citizens.

Digital Divide – Lack of access to services and technology remain an obstacle. Many governments are addressing the Digital Divide, particularly for immigrant populations and the disabled.

Governance, Coordination, Interoperability – The complexity of coordination across multiple agencies, levels of governments and sectors is a further obstacle. To fully transform, governments must integrate systems across boundaries. We also struggle to find governance models that complement cross border and intergovernmental services. Trust across organizations plays a key part in transformation as well. The increasing interconnectedness of European countries serves as a useful illustration of the challenges governments are facing in intergovernmental coordination

Keeping Pace with Technology – John Suffolk, CIO UK described another challenge to transformation – keeping up with technological change. If we do not fully understand how we can use the technologies and expertise available to us effectively, we will not be able to keep pace with citizen needs and expectations.

Progress: The Incremental and Iterative Path Ahead

In the opening session, Professor Bannister also laid out a path forward based on incremental improvement. Governments have been doing this already, taking an iterative approach to transformation by building on successes and learning from the mistakes of the past. We launched portals and placed transactional services online, but there were limits to how seamless the front-end could be when the back end was fragmented. So we reorganized and recentralised. While these efforts created the building blocks necessary for transformation, this focus inward did not always result in immediate gains for citizens. So now we are seeing renewed efforts to centre ICT on goals that impact citizens. Based on the presentations and discussions this week, governments realise that there are no silver bullets, but progress continues to be made.

Governments are exploring emerging technologies. There were many examples of emerging technologies and innovative ICT implementations at the conference. Sweden's E-Me was an innovative use of online avatars as liaisons between students and services available to them. The simple Interpreter in Pocket from Sweden demonstrated the ability to serve the hearing impaired with mobile devices. USA's search clustering was an innovative approach to categorizing and presenting government information. Singapore's showed its Standard Operating Environment (SOE), a standard set of tools and technologies for use across all of government to improve coordination and government bargaining power. Progress has also been made in the development of e-Passports. Finally, Dave Molchany of the U.S. summarized the breakout session on governments' use of social networking and web 2.0 technologies, which are being used to disseminate information to a wider audience and reach young people.

Governments are working hard to raising citizen awareness - Frank Leyman of Belgium presented the findings of the marketing and outreach breakout session, which highlighted the need to communicate to citizens about the services they can receive. The first key to outreach is to have good services to talk about. However, there is a danger if the communication becomes outright marketing.

Governments are making incremental progress in the adoption of shared services. According to Edwin Bruce's (New Zealand) report from the breakout session, shared services have been successful in instances where they are built on existing services such as payment, reuse of information and small entities leveraging large entities. There is also progress in e-ID. Austria's Robert Kristöfl presented an example of identity management in the education sector. That said, many barriers remain, which could take years to overcome. According to the breakout session, shared services are more prone to failure when the service is new or large in scale (e.g. health). There also are interoperability and pricing challenges in shared services.

Governments are getting better at assessing their performance. Ireland discussed its major effort with the OECD to benchmark itself against other countries on a wide array of government functions and use the process to recommend reforms. Another innovative approach was highlighted in Hungary's country report, e-GAMES, which measure the quality and impact of online services. e-GAMES use of quantitative methods to control a variety of factors that could influence the scores received by traditional survey methods on websites.

Governments are addressing skills shortages. Governments are also taking steps to build up the skills necessary to transform. Many are focusing on training, particularly for project management skills. Entry-level apprenticeships are one strategy being utilized by Australia. Salary benchmarking is allowing governments to see where they stack up against other potential employers.

Governments are delivering more multi-channel services. A conference panel discussed multi-channel services as length. Interestingly, many governments highlighted efforts to use Digital TV as a delivery channel. There continues to be an emphasis on delivery of services and information through wireless devices. Panellists noted that many citizens still prefer telephone to online. At the same time, satisfaction levels are lower for phone delivery than online, which is likely owed to the fact that citizens prefer routine interactions over the Internet and more complex interactions over the phone.

Governments are getting better at working with others. Circumstances far broader than ICT are forcing governments to work with other sectors and jurisdictions. Constantijn van Oranje-Nassau of RAND Europe gave some examples of the progress made and challenges in serving populations across Europe. Another example, referenced in the Belgian country report, PloneGov allows Walloon local governments and counterparts in Spain, Argentina, Switzerland and France to collaboratively develop applications and websites through a shared content management system.

The Vision of a Transformed Government

The incremental progress highlighted above is tied to a vision. There seems to be a consensus forming around a vision of what a transformed government should look like. Many government strategies have been revised over the past year or so to reinforce the goals ICT should support. Additionally, the 41st ICA Conference helped to further define the vision for a transformed government. A government should be:

- **Networked** – The transformed government will work across agencies, jurisdictions, countries and sectors of society. Des Vincent's (UK) presentation on the third sector described how a networked government would work, particularly the non-profit sector, to meet social goals. Declan Deasy's (EU) laid out a vision of an interconnected Europe guided by shared goals.
- **Skilled** – All countries highlighted the importance ICT and managerial skills. Frank McDonough of the U.S. called for new types of leaders skilled at collaboration and negotiation in his presentation.
- **Secure** – Of course, a transformed government should be able to protect its citizens, online and off. There is no one approach, but all governments recognize that a shared ID infrastructure is a critical component to transforming government. Japan's e-PO Box showed us an innovative approach to manage eID's and share secure data in a flexible way.
- **Coordinated** – Governments need to integrate their management of systems and use of information. John Riddle of Canada discussed the importance of leveraging, securing and sharing information across organizations in the future. The vision is that gained efficiencies and reduced administrative burden can enhance trust.
- **Modernized** – Governments should be able to use current technology to serve the public as efficiently as possible.
- **Inclusive** – Governments should be inclusive. Europe e-inclusion goals and other efforts to reduce digital divide demonstrate the importance of this. Attendees discussed serving immigrant populations and reaching citizens through new channels during the week.
- **Ubiquitous** - Michael Yu-Chuan Lin of Taiwan brought up the need for government to become available everywhere to everyone, particularly leveraging wireless technology and new devices.
- **Focused on Public Value** – Larry Caffrey of ICA rightly pointed out that governments' use of ICT should be focused on the same things governments should focus on in general, the health, wealth and happiness of citizens. The transformed government focuses its efforts on beneficial outcomes for citizens.
- **Ethical** – Governments act ethically in the best interest of the people they serve. Throughout discussions this week, we have constantly stepped back to address the ethical considerations. During the week, ICA members discussed ethical implications of marketing by government, the potential misuse of information that can come with increased integration and the infringing on citizen's space in social networking sites.

Where we ended up. – In Gov We Trust

On a fitting note, the conference ended with attendees revisiting the notions of trust and transformation through a lively debate between Christian Rupp of Austria and John Murray of Trinity College, Dublin. Professor Murray argued that the last thing the public needs is to place its trust in the controlling and inefficient behemoth that is Government. To counter, Mr. Rupp presented Austria's impressive record in improving citizen services and ICT use. Not a complete transformation, but certainly on the right path.

The 41st ICA Conference showed that transformation remains a work in progress and trust is a goal that cannot be achieved by ICT alone. Yet ICT has a role in protecting and nurturing that trust through the services and interactions it supports. ICA also has a role to play as governments continue the long journey toward transformation, as an invaluable resource for helping governments share the knowledge needed to meet the challenges ahead.