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Deliverable 1a: An Inventory of Legal and Institutional Issues that are or can become Barriers to eGovernment

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Breaking Barriers to eGovernment



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The Barriers to eGovernment project team has identified seven key categories of barriers that can block or constrain progress on eGovernment. These were derived from a wide review of relevant literature and research relating to eGovernment, augmented by an analysis of the experience and knowledge of the project's partners, including growing feedback from stakeholders obtained from the expert group and project workshops. The project aims to collect further information about barriers relating to eGovernment from stakeholders. The inventory enables those interested in eGovernment to share experiences and ideas with others working in this area and ensure the research team considers all the key barriers to eGovernment within the project.

The project's partners are analysing the key legal issues that underpin the seven barrier categories.

[Click here to find out more about these legal foundations.](#)

Leadership failures

Slow and patchy progress to eGovernment can result from a lack of adequate leadership during any stage in the processes of initiating, implementing, promoting and sustaining developments. Advances towards wider eGovernment take-up can be limited by failures in political and management leadership, such as a lack of clear vision and adequately resourced planning that clears blockages before they become barriers. This can significantly restrict the number, scope and impact of eGovernment initiatives.

Examples

- Lack of political will for eGovernment.
- Low prioritization of eGovernment in public policies and resource allocation.
- Cycles of attention and inattention that lead to patchy, stop-go progress on eGovernment.
- Poor senior management understanding of eGovernment.
- Poor strategic vision and planning.
- Inadequate marketing to reach and motivate target audiences in the general public and business.

Financial inhibitors

The costs of developing, implementing and maintaining eGovernment and/or a lack of R&D and innovation funding available for this area can be important financial inhibitors. Related to this issue are the difficulties of measuring the cost/benefits of eGovernment initiatives. Inappropriate cost/benefit analyses fail to release the flow of investment at the levels necessary to support future eGovernment innovation. The costs of developing, implementing and maintaining ICT systems often dominate eGovernment financial impact assessments because they come before the benefits and are easier to measure, particularly when many benefits are of a more qualitative character. When competing with other critical demands on public resources, difficulties in calculating substantive tangible benefits to offset clear, often apparently high, costs can lead to the financial tap to eGovernment being tightened or turned off, thereby severely hampering or stopping eGovernment progress.

Examples

- Difficulty in demonstrating the cost benefits of eGovernment initiatives.

- Cost of developing eGovernment services.
- Cost for government of providing services through multiple channels.
- Increased costs for governments of meeting laws and regulations relating to eGovernment (e.g. freedom of information or data protection).
- Short-term costs more politically relevant than long-term benefits.
- Lack of flexibility in exploring funding innovations (e.g. involving the private sector).
- Lack of R & D and innovation funding.

Digital Divides and Choices

Inequalities in skills, access to appropriate systems, knowledge and motivational support can limit and fragment take-up of eGovernment. Social and economic divides – demarcated by wealth, age, gender, disability, language, culture, geographical location, size of business and other factors – can mean eGovernment resources are used in very different ways (or not used at all) by different individuals, groups and organizations. These divisions range from users at the ends of electronic 'pipelines' who don't even know there is a 'tap' or how to turn it on to those capable of interacting in sophisticated ways as providers as well as consumers of digital content. This makes it particularly difficult to provide networked services that meet such greatly varying user perceptions, knowledge and capacities.

Examples

- Failure to develop and implement eGovernment services that meet citizen needs.
- Lack of strong motivations among citizens to use eGovernment services.
- ICT skills among citizens.
- Lack of affordable technological access to eGovernment systems for some social groups or geographical areas.
- Low levels of Internet use amongst certain groups.
- Making eGovernment services easily accessible to the visually impaired and others with disabilities.

Poor coordination

Lack of coordination and harmonization can put a brake on establishing appropriate eGovernment networks and services crossing governance, administrative and geographic boundaries. Emerging forms of eGovernment service delivery and ways of working often cross traditional government jurisdictions and administrative and departmental boundaries, as well as having the potential to overcome geographic distance. Legal and organizational differences on different sides of those boundaries can inhibit and block the flow of information and services through new channels of networked governance.

Examples

- Differences in laws and regulations across the EU.
- Government departments failing to agree and implement common procedures and standards to provide shared networked eGovernment services.
- Differences in administrative traditions and processes in the EU.
- A lack of co-ordination across central, regional and local levels of government.
- Co-ordination between member states and the European Commission.

Workplace and organizational inflexibility

Wide realization of eGovernment benefits constrained or blocked by inflexibilities in responding to necessary changes in public administration practices, processes and organizational structures. Resistance to innovation by public administration management and staff can fail to allow the redesign of organizations and reengineering of processes necessary to move to new forms of networked governance that support eGovernment services which cut across traditional administrative responsibilities and organizational structures. Without greater flexibility, barriers can be erected to the creation and delivery of efficient and effective eGovernment services that meet changing citizen and business needs and the new opportunities afforded by ICT-related innovation.

Examples

- Departmental 'turf wars' involving competition over who is responsible for what in a networked service.

- Inadequate skills training and capacity building for management and staff.
- Inadequate ICT skills among government officials.
- Failure to learn from good practice.
- A government-centric, as opposed to a citizen/business-centric focus, when developing and implementing eGovernment services.
- Resistance to change by government officials.
- Employment laws inhibiting flexibility in changing working practices or the deployment of staff.

Lack of trust

Fears about inadequate security and privacy safeguards and controls undermine confidence in applications of eGovernment involving sensitive personal information, vulnerability to online fraud or other illegal or abusive eGovernment risks. Although increasing experience with the Internet and eCommerce in the private sector is establishing more general trust in the use of ICT-enabled networks, eGovernment raises particular trust concerns as so many public services require the handling of highly sensitive personal information in digital forms. These can be exacerbated by wider distrust of government and concerns about an unwillingness of public authorities to be as transparent as possible in the provision of information about their operations. eGovernment service take-up can be hampered if such real or perceptual causes of low levels of trust are not adequately identified and addressed.

Examples

- The 'Big Brother' fear of unwarranted government intrusion into private lives and business operations through the growing use of networked or integrated digital databases.
- Insufficient priority to implementing and promoting effective eGovernment security.
- Intrinsic 'cybertrust tensions' as shown in the general desire for both privacy and security even though a degree of disclosure or loss of privacy is typically necessary (e.g. to identify the user of an online tax or welfare service).
- Public administration anxieties over liability for online content.
- Public concerns over the potential for online theft and fraud.
- Public perceptions over the risk to privacy and civil liberties.
- Lack of secure electronic identification and authentication systems.

Poor technical design

Design flaws, such as incompatibilities between ICT systems, block the 'pipelines' through which information and communication should flow. eGovernment systems and services frequently fail or perform poorly because of inadequate design. Incompatibilities in hardware, software or networking infrastructures within and between public agencies are among the most common. However, there are also flaws in the user interface or usability of systems that can hamper the ways agencies can interface with citizens and businesses. These operational problems can sabotage even potentially successful services and discourage those experiencing them from trying other eGovernment opportunities.

Examples

- eGovernment applications that are difficult to use.
- Incompatibilities between newer eGovernment systems and older 'legacy' systems.
- Lack of standards for electronic identification across the EU.
- Lack of interoperability between IT systems.
- Government technologies lagging behind societal use of the Internet and related technologies.