



## Checklist for e-Government Leaders

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What competencies are necessary for e-government decision-making?

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### Introduction

E-government is more about government than about “e”. As a tool to achieve better government, e-government offers potential solutions to leaders across the whole of government: IT managers, programme managers, agency heads, government-wide e-government planners and co-ordinators, and politicians all have a role to play. Yet the roles of these leaders differ, and even the role of an individual leader changes as e-government develops in a given country. At the beginning there may be an immediate need to foster innovation and diffusion of technology, whereas organisational change becomes more important once IT applications are in place. Certain key e-government principles are common to all leaders, though their relative importance will differ. While the elements in this policy brief may be applicable to leaders at various levels, they are especially relevant to leaders with broad responsibilities and a strategic vision of e-government.

Because of their broad range of responsibilities, and the guidance given to multiple agencies, leaders are in a unique position to deal with inter-agency e-government issues. In particular, leaders are well placed to encourage co-ordination and collaboration, and to identify and resolve problems that cannot be solved in any single agency.

Senior management attention is a scarce resource, and IT projects are often regarded as low-priority technical issues rather than essential to the success of the overall business plan. However, many OECD countries have found that sustained leadership is important at all levels of the e-government cycle. At the early stages of e-government implementation, leadership can articulate and promote acceptance of vision and strategy, and set frameworks to facilitate electronic service delivery and structure implementation efficiently. As more complex transactional services are developed, leadership and support are needed to sustain momentum, particularly as benefits may take time to emerge. Leadership can broaden the support for a compelling vision of integrated services and more fundamental service transformation.

This *Policy Brief* highlights the issues and challenges of leadership for e-government, drawing on current experiences in OECD countries and the OECD Symposium for Senior E-Government Officials, held on 9 June 2003. Building on the outcomes of this Symposium and the OECD report *The e-Government Imperative*, the policy brief provides a **checklist of 10 key areas** where leadership is particularly necessary for the successful implementation of e-government initiatives. ■

## Why is leadership important?

Strong leadership can speed the process of e-government implementation, promote co-ordination within and among agencies and help reinforce good governance objectives.

*Implementing e-government:* Senior officials have many responsibilities, so why should they pay special attention to e-government? The answer lies in the cross-cutting nature of e-government initiatives, and the many partners that must be involved and work together if they are to succeed. High-level leadership involvement is essential to ensure vertical e-government planning, to acquire the necessary resources, to motivate staff, to support dealings with external partners and stakeholders, and to ensure co-ordination across ministries and agencies. Top management involvement, support and responsibility are also necessary in order to produce an e-government strategy that is integrated with the general business plan of the organisation as well as incorporated into the planning and budget process.

*Co-ordination among agencies:* One of the main conclusions of *The e-Government Imperative* is that leadership is an indispensable tool to promote co-ordination within individual agencies, as well as across government. Managers can exercise leadership in order to avoid duplication, produce savings and increase efficiency through joined-up services. Across government, the increasing use of common systems, common applications and outsourcing means that managers can help build a shared understanding of IT's potential to transform service delivery.

*Reinforcing good governance:* Experiences in OECD countries demonstrate that leadership is also helpful in linking e-government to good governance objectives. IT should not be considered in isolation, as it has become an essential instrument to transform the structures, operations and culture of government. E-government has a considerable impact on good governance in many ways. For example the cross-cutting nature of e-government promotes the reshaping of existing government structures. E-government delivers services to citizens and business on their terms and at their convenience rather than following the logic, or illogic, of internal governance structures. E-government

promotes growth through a healthy environment of investment and business by supporting open and accountable government and helping to prevent corruption. Finally, e-government acts as a driver in speeding modernisation and organisational change, including facilitating greater teamwork, flexible working arrangements and remuneration, and enhanced knowledge management practices. ■

## How can leaders mobilise support for e-government?

Leaders are well placed to make the case for e-government and to articulate such benefits to other stakeholders. Leaders drive e-government planning by setting a broad vision. At the same time, specific objectives can motivate action, but only if used carefully.

Following the burst of the “dot.com bubble”, many people have lost confidence in IT use in government. It is essential that e-government leaders make the case: e-government has a positive impact on efficiency, service quality, citizen engagement and trust. The box on page 3 lays out the major elements of the case for e-government.

Leaders are in a strong position to articulate the value of e-government processes to other government organisations, employees and the public at large. They can also make sure that broader policy and service delivery goals, broader public management reform processes and information society activities are integrated under a common e-government strategy. All leaders (not only e-government project leaders) can help maximise the benefits of IT by integrating e-government into their own strategic planning.

Leaders are strategically placed to ensure that e-government initiatives encompass a vision statement, broad objectives at national level, and a planning process with specific goals and targets.

A vision statement and plan can help administrations set a course at the start, monitor progress forthrightly, help orient individual initiatives and make mid-course corrections. A common vision is an important tool to engage and co-ordinate agencies implementing e-government. A vision statement can also help promote inter-ministerial co-ordination,

## The case for e-government

### **E-government improves efficiency**

IT helps improve efficiency in mass processing tasks and public administration operations. Internet-based applications can generate savings on data collection and transmission, provision of information and communication with customers. Significant future efficiencies are likely through greater sharing of data within and between governments.

### **E-government improves services**

Adopting a customer focus is a core element of OECD countries' reform agendas. Successful services (both online and off-line) are built on an understanding of user requirements. A customer focus implies that a user should not have to understand complex government structures and relationships in order to interact with government. The Internet can help achieve this goal, by enabling governments to appear as a unified organisation and provide seamless online service. As with all services, e-government services must be developed in light of demand and user value, as part of an overall multi-channel service strategy.

### **E-government helps achieve specific policy outcomes...**

The Internet can help stakeholders share information and ideas and thus contribute to specific policy outcomes. For example, online information can boost use of an educational or training programme, information sharing in the health sector can improve resource use and patient care and information sharing between central and sub-national governments can facilitate environmental policies. The sharing of information on individuals, however, will raise privacy protection issues, and the potential trade-offs need to be carefully assessed. Timeframes for initiatives need to be realistic, as there can be considerable lags before benefits accrue.

### **...and can contribute to economic policy objectives**

E-government helps reduce corruption, increases openness and trust in government, and thus contributes to economic policy objectives. Specific impacts include reduced government spending through more effective programmes, and efficiencies and improvements in business productivity through IT-enabled administrative simplification and enhanced government information. Given the reach and influence of government, e-government initiatives promote information society and e-commerce objectives. Government consumption of IT products and services can also support local IT industries. However, impacts in these areas are difficult to quantify.

### **E-government can be a major contributor to reform**

All OECD countries are facing the issue of public management modernisation and reform. Current developments – globalisation, new fiscal demands, changing societies and increasing customer expectations – mean that the reform process must be continuous. IT has underpinned reforms in many areas, for example by improving transparency, facilitating information-sharing and highlighting internal inconsistencies.

### **E-government can help build trust between governments and citizens**

Building trust between governments and citizens is fundamental to good governance. IT can help build trust by enabling citizen engagement in the policy process, promoting open and accountable government and helping to prevent corruption. Furthermore, if limits and challenges are properly overcome, e-government can help an individual's voice to be heard in a broad debate. This is done by harnessing IT to encourage citizens to think constructively about public issues and assessing the impact of applying technology to open up the policy process. However, few expect e-government arrangements to replace completely traditional methods of information provision, consultation and public participation in the near future.

Source: OECD Policy Brief *The e-Government Imperative: Main Findings* (2003).

ensure balance and fairness of e-government initiatives and help to stay the course over a number of years. Through their commitment, e-government leaders can help maintain momentum when benefits take time to emerge and to respond when things go wrong. Having a clear vision of reform helps to maintain consistency and a sense of purpose.

Towards this end, OECD countries have identified leaders as key initiators and supporters of an e-government vision. Political leadership serves to diffuse the vision and to give it added value. While a vision statement is needed, it is not enough. Leaders can help disperse the vision, the rationale and the validation for reform throughout the bureaucracy.

*The e-Government Imperative* found that national objectives have helped promote e-government implementation in many OECD countries. However, in order to avoid a “one-size-fits-all” approach, leaders can help ensure that national objectives are flexible enough to take into account the context and mandate of individual agencies. ■

### What competencies are necessary for e-government decision-making?

In the past, the adoption of e-government solutions has been hampered by leaders’ lack of knowledge about how technology can be used as a tool to accomplish or improve government processes. Today, in many OECD countries it is leaders’ understanding of IT that enables them to set and manage the information strategy and match government processes with appropriate technical solutions. Leaders understand how technology can be incorporated into existing government functions, and how e-government applications can build new government services and products or open new channels of communication. A solid understanding of the options and their strengths and weaknesses gives managers confidence to negotiate and to specify characteristics for developing projects that will work.

Broad competencies help IT managers and e-government programme managers engage in e-government decision-making. Expertise includes an understanding of information technology, information management and the information society. In

terms of information technology, leaders need the means to evaluate different technologies and understand product life cycles, key players and the various risks involved.

In terms of broader skills, agency heads, government-wide e-government co-ordinators and politicians must be able to lead (and not be led by) the organisation’s IT department and outside partners. With the appropriate skills, leaders can help integrate the organisation’s IT strategy with the broader goals of the organisation. Furthermore, traditional management expertise can be updated and strengthened to deal with the complex governance challenges that arise from increased inter-governmental collaboration. Additional competencies may also be useful in areas such as organisational change, co-ordination and collaboration across agencies, public-private partnerships, accountability frameworks and performance management. ■

### How can leaders improve co-ordination and collaboration?

One of the major conclusions of *The e-Government Imperative* is that the nature of e-government requires co-ordination and collaboration to ensure interoperability, avoid duplication, ensure coherent action in a range of crucial areas such as security and privacy, and to provide the framework and capacity for seamless services. The need for co-ordination and collaboration becomes more pressing as countries increasingly move to implement more complex, transactional services. Given the cost of introducing such services, and making them interoperable, projects need to be implemented in a structured environment. Leaders can help create conditions that encourage co-ordination and collaboration within and among agencies, for example by using financial and other incentives.

Leaders can use central co-ordination as a tool to bring strategies from different agencies together, ensure compatibility and reduce duplication. Leaders can use central co-ordination to facilitate the efficient implementation of e-government by:

- Promoting **sharing of information and good practice**. Measures here include central online registers of projects, seminars, publications and Web sites on good practice and communities of interest. This can also include the exchange of

good practice on common operating processes such as Enterprise Resource Planning systems, as well as sharing and comparison of outsourcing costs and other information among agencies.

- Gaining acceptance across government of various **frameworks and standards** to facilitate interoperability and efficiencies, such as policy frameworks, outlining principles governing acquisition of IT, business and technical policies and standards.
- Promoting **innovation and risk taking**. Agencies implementing critical applications generally have little scope to experiment and take risks. If funding is available, a central e-government unit can act as a central R&D unit on behalf of agencies across government.

Leaders can also strengthen collaboration among agencies by:

- Facilitating **efficient acquisition** of IT products and services. This may cover e-procurement, compulsory central purchasing of communications services and software, and expenditure approval processes.
- Brokering **joint operating arrangements** and contracts among agencies in order to gain benefits of scale.
- Ensuring **consistency** of political and technical e-government strategies.
- Supporting the **joint action** that is needed for seamless online service delivery and shared infrastructure projects. ■

### How can leaders identify and avoid external barriers to e-government?

Leaders can identify and avoid many external barriers to e-government by understanding the context in which e-government is taking place. They are best placed to identify and defend e-government needs and to act collectively on behalf of agencies. For example, leaders can ensure that e-government processes have formal legal equivalence to the paper process. Complexity of regulations and requirements on agencies can be another problem. If agencies are unable to determine what is required of them, they are less likely to move for-

ward. Finally, privacy and security need to be ensured before e-government initiatives can advance.

OECD governments operate within vertical funding structures. This is in accordance with the core public management principle of holding an agency accountable for achieving organisational objectives and giving it the resources to accomplish those objectives. However, such budgetary frameworks may not take into account the specific needs of certain e-government projects, particularly those involving long-term funding requirements and collaboration across agencies. Current budgetary arrangements can, in fact, be a barrier to e-government. In order to maximise the benefits of e-government, leaders in the central government can address these financing issues through the central administration. ■

### How can leaders ensure a customer focus?

OECD countries have noted that not all services are amenable to being put online, and not all online services are useful to citizens and businesses. In order for e-government initiatives to be effective, leaders can take steps to evaluate customer demand of e-government services, and work closely with citizens and businesses to provide users with the services that are most useful to them. Leaders can also promote the value of services and help implement migration and take-up strategies for online services.

It is up to leaders to ensure that service delivery and policy processes are open to input from citizens and businesses. Most importantly, it is up to leaders to ensure that input received from citizens and businesses is taken into account during the policy-making process. Leaders can also ensure that the process of incorporating user feedback is transparent and timely.

In addition to their responsibility vis-à-vis government, when requested, leaders can demonstrate to legislatures that they are getting value for their money. Additionally, citizens want accountability in service delivery. E-government leaders are responsible to citizens for the overall success of meeting e-government objectives and hold agencies

responsible for fulfilling their role in helping meet these objectives. ■

### How can leaders facilitate international co-operation?

National e-government leaders play an important role in the facilitation of international standards. Most importantly, leaders play a key role in determining the areas where international co-operation is most important and explaining the purpose and objectives of the standards in the whole-of-government context. Leaders can also help clarify what such standards can and cannot do and how they support broader e-government objectives.

Once areas that would benefit from international standards are identified, leaders can ensure that their priorities are represented at international fora. And once the standards have been agreed, leaders can facilitate their implementation.

International co-operation can also help develop a shared understanding and/or good practices for the protection of e-government data that is shared across borders. But leadership is needed in order to find common governance approaches to strengthen security (for example regarding cross-border data exchange). Leaders can help make international sharing more transparent and effective. ■

### What are the next steps for e-government leaders?

As e-government advances, the role of the e-government leader continues to change. Leaders are beginning to appreciate that e-government is more about modernisation and reform than about technology, and advanced e-government countries have suggested that the next step is “to start taking the ‘e’ out of e-government”. Rather than focusing on technology in itself, e-government leaders recognise the importance of using technology as a strategic tool to modernise the structures, processes and overall culture of public administrations. However, this has a profound impact on the role of the e-government leader, as the next ques-

tion is to what extent e-government leaders could in fact become reform leaders or facilitators.

A second challenge involves the re-orientation of government to make it more customer-focused. E-government leaders are aware of the importance of restructuring organisations and processes in order to maximise value to the user, but must overcome considerable internal resistance when implementing change. While governments have different approaches, most OECD countries agree on the importance of incentives to ensure co-ordination and to promote a sense of ownership and accountability for decentralised initiatives.

Other challenges included looking beyond electronic service delivery to ensure links with other service delivery channels, with overall public sector modernisation efforts and with the legislative and regulatory frameworks in which e-government changes are taking place. The OECD E-Government Project will be examining these issues over 2003-2004. ■

### For further information

*The e-Government Imperative*, was published in 2003 and may be purchased from the OECD Online Bookshop ([www.oecd.org/bookshop/](http://www.oecd.org/bookshop/)). The report was written under the guidance of the OECD E-Government Working Group, a group of 12 OECD member countries (Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, United States). The *Policy Brief* and report draw heavily upon the insights and guidance of national experts and senior officials from the centres of government in OECD countries participating in the OECD Symposium for Senior E-Government Officials.

Additional information on this topic can be obtained from Elizabeth Muller;  
Tel.: (33-1) 45 24 90 57;  
[email: [elizabeth.muller@oecd.org](mailto:elizabeth.muller@oecd.org)].

For more information on the OECD E-Government Project contact Christian Vergez;  
Tel.: (33-1) 45 24 89 54;  
[email: [christian.vergez@oecd.org](mailto:christian.vergez@oecd.org)]  
or Edwin Lau; Tel.: (33-1) 45 24 80 36;  
[email: [edwin.lau@oecd.org](mailto:edwin.lau@oecd.org)]. ■

## Checklist for e-government leaders

### Vision/political will

1. **Awareness and commitment:** Leaders are in a strong position to set a broad e-government vision and show commitment to that vision in order to sustain momentum when benefits take time to emerge or to respond when things go wrong. To do this, leaders can help articulate the positive impact of e-government on efficiency, service quality and citizen engagement and trust.
2. **Integration:** Given the wide potential impact of e-government, leaders are well positioned to align the e-government strategy with broader policy and service delivery goals, broader public management reform processes and information society activity in order to better integrate processes and services under a whole-of-government vision.
3. **Information society competencies:** E-government leaders need a broad range of competencies to engage in e-government decision-making. An understanding of information management and the information society can help leaders to better identify the potential benefits of e-government and how to achieve them. Furthermore, traditional management expertise need to be updated and strengthened to deal with the complex governance challenges that arise from increased inter-governmental collaboration.

### Common frameworks/collaboration

4. **Harmonisation:** By harmonising IT policy where necessary and supporting information sharing, e-government leaders ensure that agency managers operate within common frameworks, promote interoperability, maximise efficiency and avoid duplication.
5. **Avoiding external barriers:** Leaders are well positioned to ensure that legislative and regulatory frameworks do not act as barriers to e-government. Potential barriers need to be identified, and leaders are in the best position to work with central agencies to make sure that the necessary frameworks are in place to facilitate and promote e-government. Likewise, leaders are best placed to overcome barriers to cross-agency purchasing of shared systems and services.
6. **Encouraging collaboration:** Leaders can create conditions that encourage co-ordination and collaboration within and among agencies. These can include development of both financial and non-financial incentives.

### Customer focus

7. **Customer demand and engagement:** The involvement of leaders can help ensure that agencies actively consult with citizens and businesses to provide users with the services and delivery mechanisms that are most useful to them. Leaders are also well positioned to ensure that the policy process is open to input from citizens and businesses, and that input received is taken into account in a transparent and timely manner.
8. **Responsibility:** E-government leaders are responsible for the overall success of meeting e-government objectives. They are thus able to hold agencies responsible for fulfilling their role in helping meet these objectives. In addition to meeting specific e-government targets, leaders ensure that their e-government efforts support the broader transformation process.

### International co-operation

9. **Standards:** Leaders are well placed to identify the need for international standards, what they can and cannot achieve, and how they relate to and support e-government objectives.
10. **Strengthening privacy and security:** It is essential that leaders help develop a shared understanding and/or good practices for the protection of e-government data that is shared across borders.

## For further reading

**E-Government**

- **The e-Government Imperative**, 2003  
ISBN: 92-64-10117-9, € 35, 204 p.
- **E-Government in Finland**, 2003  
ISBN: 92-64-10259-0, € 35, 152 p.
- **OECD Policy Brief: The e-Government Imperative: Main Findings**, 2003 - available on internet at [www.oecd.org/publications/pol\\_brief/](http://www.oecd.org/publications/pol_brief/)
- **OECD Policy Brief: Engaging Citizens Online for Better Policy-Making**, 2003  
available on internet at [www.oecd.org/publications/pol\\_brief/](http://www.oecd.org/publications/pol_brief/)
- **OECD Policy Brief: E-Government in Finland: An Assessment**, 2003 - available on internet at [www.oecd.org/publications/pol\\_brief/](http://www.oecd.org/publications/pol_brief/)

- **OECD Policy Brief: The Hidden Threat to e-Government**, 2001 - available on internet at [www.oecd.org/publications/pol\\_brief/](http://www.oecd.org/publications/pol_brief/)
- **OECD e-Government Seminar Proceedings** (forthcoming)

**Other**

- **OECD Guidelines for the Security of Information Systems and Networks: Towards a Culture of Security**, 2002  
ISBN: 92-64-05917-2, 29p.
- **Implementation Plan for the OECD Guidelines for the Security of Information Systems and Networks: Towards a Culture of Security**, 2003

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**Where to contact us?****FRANCE**

OECD Headquarters  
2, rue André-Pascal  
75775 PARIS Cedex 16  
Tel.: 33 (0) 1 45 24 82 001  
Fax: 33 (0) 1 45 24 19 50  
E-mail: [sales@oecd.org](mailto:sales@oecd.org)  
Internet: [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

**GERMANY**

OECD BERLIN Centre  
Albrechtstrasse 9/10  
D-10117 BERLIN  
Tel.: (49-30) 2888353  
Fax: (49-30) 28883545  
E-mail: [berlin.contact@oecd.org](mailto:berlin.contact@oecd.org)  
Internet: [www.oecd.org/deutschland](http://www.oecd.org/deutschland)

**JAPAN**

OECD TOKYO Centre  
Nippon Press Center Bldg  
2-2-1 Uchisaiwaicho,  
Chiyoda-ku  
TOKYO 100-0011  
Tel.: (81-3) 5532 0021  
Fax: (81-3) 5532 0036/0035  
E-mail: [center@oecdtokyo.org](mailto:center@oecdtokyo.org)  
Internet: [www.oecdtokyo.org](http://www.oecdtokyo.org)

**MEXICO**

OECD MEXICO Centre  
Av. Presidente Mazaryk 526  
Colonia: Polanco  
C.P. 11560  
MEXICO, D.F.  
Tel.: (00.52.55) 5281 3810  
Fax: (00.52.55) 5280 0480  
E-mail: [mexico.contact@oecd.org](mailto:mexico.contact@oecd.org)  
Internet: [www.rtn.net.mx/ocde](http://www.rtn.net.mx/ocde)

**UNITED STATES**

OECD WASHINGTON Center  
2001 L Street N.W.,  
Suite 650  
WASHINGTON D.C. 20036-4922  
Tel.: (1-202) 785 6323  
Fax: (1-202) 785 0350  
E-mail: [washington.contact@oecd.org](mailto:washington.contact@oecd.org)  
Internet: [www.oecdwash.org](http://www.oecdwash.org)  
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