OECD E-Government Project

OECD SYMPOSIUM FOR SENIOR E-GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS
From Theory to Practice: Prioritising E-Government Action

SUMMARY RECORD AND PARTICIPANTS LIST

9 June 2003, Washington DC
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SUMMARY RECORD

Overview

On 9 June 2003, senior e-government leaders met at the White House for an OECD Symposium chaired by Mark Forman, the head of the U.S. e-government initiative. This Symposium offered a unique opportunity for high-level e-government leaders from nearly 20 countries to network and to identify issues, debate and compare priority areas where the exercise of e-government leadership has a strong impact.

Participants were pleased at the opportunity to be part of a high-level group in order to exchange ideas freely in an informal environment. A forthcoming policy brief, “Tips for Leaders” will summarise key findings.

Following the success of this meeting, countries wanted to build on the network and to continue to meet regularly. Two countries have proposed to host follow-up meetings over the next 9 months. With a third meeting in September 2004, the group would cover the set of priority topics it identified in Washington, focusing on the challenge of planning and leading back office changes to make the most of e-government.

Main Points of the Discussion

The Symposium was opened by Deputy Secretary General Richard Hecklinger who challenged participants to focus on technology as a means to improve governance. Using the OECD report “The E-Government Imperative”, as a starting point, participants discussed the importance of ensuring central co-ordination of initiatives, the challenge of getting different government agencies to collaborate with one another, the opportunities of using e-government to break down barriers to change and the importance of international co-operation in this area.

Symposium participants stressed that “e-government is more about government that about ‘e’”, but also that at some point, leaders have to “start taking the ‘e’ out of e-government”. Rather than focusing on technology in itself, participants recognised 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, and the question was raised as to what extent e-government leaders are in fact becoming reform leaders, and is this the appropriate role for Chief Information Officers (CIOs) or equivalent officials?
The second main challenge identified at the meeting 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 countries have different approaches, there was general agreement on the importance of incentives to ensure coordination and to promote a sense of ownership and accountability for decentralised initiatives.

Other challenges identified 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.

Follow-up

At the end of the meeting, participants identified four themes for follow-up work through additional meetings:

1. Integrating information and services
2. Organising for re-engineering
3. Identifying common business processes
4. Funding, incentivising, and sustaining change

The OECD proposes to cover these four themes over the next year and a half through three symposia. Two countries have already proposed to host follow-up meetings for this senior group in September 2003 and February 2004.

In response to member demand, meetings will be informal and focused on creating opportunities for discussion. Meeting outputs will consist of short, focused thematic papers and country reports which will support the OECD’s work on e-government. The intended outcome of meetings is to advance members’ e-government initiatives by developing shared knowledge and a possible consensus around key priorities and strategies for e-government advancement.
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