

Digital Government - hopes, aspirations and reality for the public sector workforce

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The art of predicting the future

Executives, by contrast, are likely to resist sullyng their fingertips, just as they resist fetching their own mugs of coffee...

- Alvin Toffler, *The Third Way*, 1980, p. 280



Definitions

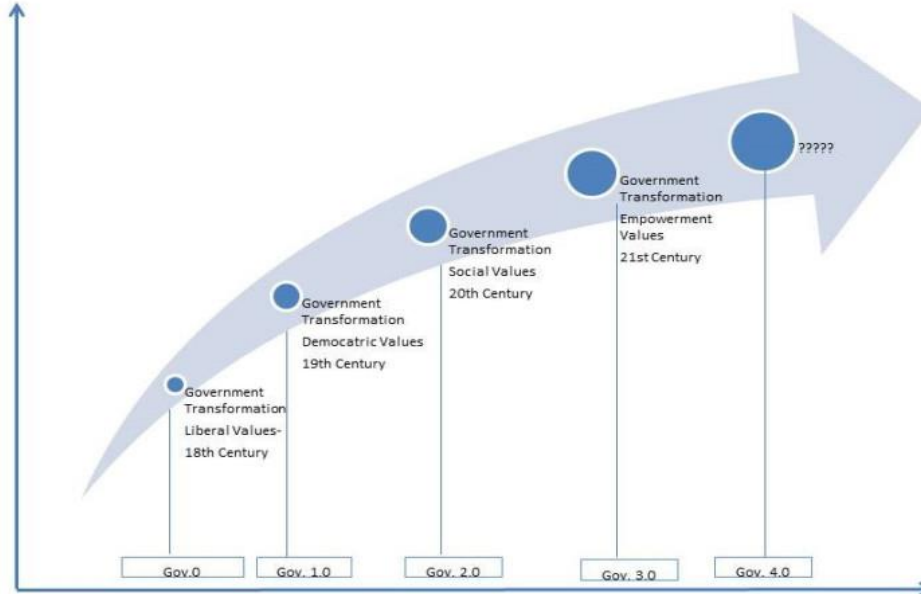
- *E-government*: a focus on new electronic channels and interfaces for delivering public information and services.
“*The provision of governmental information and services electronically 24 hours per day, 7 days per week*” (Norris, 2010)
- *Digital government/governance*: also includes e-democracy and e-participation, and/or include the internal digital mechanisms of public management (e-administration).
- China: ‘Internet+’; South Korea: ‘Government 2.0’; Thailand ‘Government 4.0’.
- The current buzzword in NZ is ‘Govtech’

Three levels of discussions

- The broad '**information society/digitisation**' discussion: a general discussion about future societal changes in the light of technological progress. Future of work, surveillance and control, 'the fourth industrial revolution' etc.
- **The actual use of ICTs in society and subsequent policy themes:** issues around access, accountability, security, safety and ownership. For example, data protection, social media, surveillance technology, digital divides/literacy etc.
- **Public sector use of ICTs:** the discussion about public sector service delivery, government information and data analytics, and public engagement. For example, shared digital services, smart cities, and co-production.

Myth #1 – transformation

‘E-government is enabling a transformation in the way government operates’



The history – ICTs in the public sector

1950-70s:

Government use of information systems (punch-cards, mainframes etc.) for larger calculations and automation of work processes

1990s:

Networked systems, the Internet, 'Information society strategies', e-government strategies, e-democracy.

2010s:

'Digital by default', citizen co-production, 'Big data'

1980s:

Personal (micro) computers in government offices, national 'Computer plans'

2000s:

Integrated digital service delivery (one-stop-shops)

Myth #2 – New occupational roles

‘Because of new technologies, the role of the street-level bureaucrat, is being replaced by a ‘system-level bureaucrat’



The reality

- Lack of empirical evidence
- Differences between professionals and between policy fields
- It negatively affects professional and relational values (including quality in decision-making and demoralisation of staff)

Myth #3 – integration

‘Our public sector digital services are becoming increasingly integrated across organisational boundaries and levels’



The reality

- Departmentalism (the silos)
- The sow and harvest dilemma (investments)
- Interoperability
- Clashing organisational cultures
- Commitment and loyalty to the organisation, not necessarily to the policy aim.
- Data sharing (privacy/security)

Myth #4 – digital inclusion

‘The digital divide is so over that it’s passé’



The reality

- Many non-users of the Internet are it by choice
- A number of groups are at risk of not being digitally included
- Younger people often have lower skill and knowledge than what might be expected

Myth #5 – Just get the right people to do the job

‘With a good business case you can’t go wrong’



The reality

- Once the business case is approved, the benefits seem to ‘get lost’ in the process
- Benefits for whom? The ‘blame-game’.
- The mechanic rationality failing to see people, process and ‘organic’ systems
- Failure to recognise the variety of projects
- The one-sided focus on the technical side (‘the platform/artefact’)

Myth #6 – producing public values

‘Digital government has the capacity to enhance public values’



The reality

- Which public service values are we actually pursuing?
 - Ethical (integrity, fairness, respect)
 - Democratic (rule of law, accountability, openness)
 - Professional (efficiency, service, quality)
 - People (caring, inclusion, compassion, tolerance)

Which values?

	'Infocracy'	ICT as NPM	'We' and 'Wiki' government
Form	State	Market	Civil society
Emphasis	Rule of law, bureaucracy	Service outputs	Co-production, open data
Governance mechanisms	Hierarchy	Contracts, chains of accountability	Stewardship, interactivity, autonomy
Role of citizens	Citizens	Consumers	Active co-producers
Role of private sector	External supplier	Role model and contractor	Absent
Role of ICT	Rationalisation, reintegration	Quality improvement, decentralisation, and result-orientation	Connecting citizens in networks
Value base	Integrity, professionalism and equity	Efficacy and customer-satisfaction	The strong and responsible community

Myth #7 – data analytics

‘Data analytics/big data will reduce the need for policy analysts’



The challenges of Big Data

	Data collection	Storage	Analysis	Usage
Technologies (examples)	Social media IoT Sensors/camera 'Smart devices' Existing data sets (e.g. census)	Distributed databases 'Clouds'	Data mining Machine learning Algorithms Social Network Analysis Visualisation	Business analytical methods Citizen profiling Predictions Open data
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection (purposes, biases) • Inequalities • Privacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security • Access and transparency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incompatibility of data • 'Correlation is not causation' • The power of algorithms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intellectual property • Privacy and surveillance (reidentifying data)

Myth # 8 **A better work life**

‘Digitisation supports efficiency and more flexible working practices’



Reality

- Increased efficiency likely to be offset by increased costs elsewhere
- Different contexts, different challenges
- The need to physically access records (e.g. client files) and attend meetings
- Business process not set up to functionally handle 'flexible' technical solutions
- The downside of shared office space and portable technology (noise, stress and lack of privacy)

A few lessons

- Technology is a servant, not a master
- Think about ‘organic’ systems, processes and relationships – not the technical solution
- ‘What will people actually use?’
- Learn from the past
- Maintaining an ‘ironic’ approach

Thanks for your attention!

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