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#### FEATURES

### Research to inform the next wave of e-government activity

**As the march to get government services online continues apace, Professor Zahir Irani, leader of a new think-tank into e-government established by Brunel University, calls for input from stakeholders to help shape tomorrow's service delivery...**

The accountability of public services can often present an undeservedly unflattering picture. Much of the negative press surrounding the progress made in delivering e-government services belies real advances that many local authorities have made to date. Some excellent work has already taken place, with local authorities having risen to the challenge of building an e-government infrastructure, often from nothing. However, almost all of this work has been developmental, reacting to central government mandates. It is now time to reflect on what has been done and to establish a research agenda to help build future e-government capacity. This is where the world of academia is helping.

Brunel University's School of Information Systems, Computing and Mathematics (SISCM) has successfully secured government funding to establish a think-tank of key stakeholders to identify critical research challenges in the area of e-government integration and systems evaluation. This focus is considered by many in government, as well as the academic and practitioner communities, to be very important and topical, relating to how information systems are pieced together, as well as identifying their benefits, costs and risk implications during development, roll-out, implementation and operation.

The network created by and led at Brunel is called the e-GISE Network and is funded (to the tune of an initial £60,000 and a recent follow up £40,000 to broaden out the research) by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC). Members include key figures from the UK research community, as well as representation from those in local government and other supportive non-governmental organisations (NGOs). All participants are determined to make a difference through research, as well as having a genuine desire to help shape the future of e-government. In total, as well as bringing together active academics in the area of e-government, the e-GISE Network involves over 50 local authorities, public sector agencies and private companies to form strategic partnerships.

Dr Stephen Jones, Head of Information Technology Services at Conwy County Borough Council, explains the value of e-GISE as being "rewarding and thought provoking. It allows me to brainstorm and interact with people who are all motivated to think outside the box... to signpost e-government research challenges around IT services, systems, support and strategy."

We hope that e-GISE will help local authorities realise the expected benefits associated with their significant investment in e-government through promoting national debate. Through this debate, we hope to identify the research strategies needed to increase the understanding of e-government and the processes involved in effectively evaluating the implementation of information society technologies (ISTs). As Dr Tony Elliman from Brunel University, a co-investigator

and an active member of the think-tank, points out: "It's an exciting opportunity to help shape the direction of electronic government."

#### **How can you help?**

The Network has now emerged from its first year of activity to signpost what are considered the most critical areas of research within its remit of integration and systems evaluation. In particular, the Network has defined and promoted research on IST strategies and their embedded mechanisms for evaluation and integration within government and the public sector. At the genesis lies several research strands that e-GISE members believe are core to building a successful e-government infrastructure, and upon which the think-tank will now focus their efforts and resources. These core research areas are classified as either agency or citizen facing, and then broken down into research themes.

#### **Agency facing**

- **The Efficiency and Effectiveness Agenda**
  - Non-monetary evaluation: value, benefit, cost and risk
  - Maturity models
- **Organisational & Technical Integration**
  - Partnerships and collaboration: shared services
- **Knowledge Management and Exchange**
  - Information and experience sharing

#### **Citizen facing**

- **Citizen Take-up and Engagement**
  - Citizen service re-invention
  - Social and technical integration (including semiotics)
- **Democracy**
  - Impact and opportunity
- **Social Inclusion and Entrepreneurship**
  - Authentication
  - Accessibility
  - Entrepreneurship and innovators.

We now anticipate that themed work grounds within the network will gravitate to explore further the areas above – work that will translate into position papers to be presented at leading conferences nationally and internationally, and to be published in journals, magazines and online. It also falls within the remit of the Network to develop robust research proposals that will be submitted to government for possible further funding. If any of these areas resonate with those reading this article, the Network would welcome your input! Please do get in touch – it's a great opportunity to help shape how we deliver tomorrow's e-government services.

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#### **The e-GISE Network**

The EPSRC has pledged £60,000 toward the development of the Network. Strategic partners for the e-GISE Network include: Oracle, Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), Welsh Assembly Government, Office of e-Envoy, Office of Deputy Prime Minister (External Evaluator of e-GISE), Electronic Business (Berlin), East of England Telematics Development Trust (Cambridge), Synergy UK, Conway County Borough Council, London Borough of Havering, Wolverhampton City Council, Scottish Executive, and East of England Telematics Development Trust & Norfolk County Council.

**e-GISE Network objectives**

The Network's discussions will encompass a significant stakeholder dimension and include deepening the socio-technical understanding of these phenomena as an important part of the research agenda. In particular, the Network group has the following objectives:

- To identify and promote IST evaluation techniques and strategies appropriate for use within the public sector. New contributions, distinct from those in other IST evaluation research, can be expected to emerge in this area because the competitive pressures that drive most private sector evaluation decisions are not present;
- To allow academics, practitioners and consultants to perceive the area holistically, and discuss research issues and initiatives. e-GISE will develop and publish a normative frame of reference that covers human, organisational and technical factors influencing successful e-government infrastructure development;
- To facilitate collaborative research planning initiatives through the organisation of colloquia and workshops. These will act as a forum to promote and disseminate debate, thus developing, sustaining and enriching the group.

**e-GISE Network deliverables:**

- An established annual series of workshops for e-government staff run in conjunction with an appropriate professional institution;
- The Network website will be created to promote the work that is being carried out and help disseminate its output;
- A published frame of reference for discussion and planning of e-government IST integration and systems evaluation;
- A research agenda to meet the needs of e-government IST – identifying the research questions and issues that need to be addressed to improve e-government service planning and management;
- At least 10 research proposals will be generated and submitted to relevant funding bodies.

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