



A Time to Think. A Time to Take Stock.



The Walkway, Brunel University

The project “Towards a Virtual Institute for Research into e-Government” (VIEGO) is aimed at developing a coherent research agenda for the next 5 years. It is working with the “e-Government Integration and Systems Evaluation network” (eGISE) to improve public sector IT. Both are EPSRC funded activities with academics from over 13 universities. If e-Government was “completed” in 2005, why then, you ask, do these groups exist.

Putting Government online was meant to produce major changes in the way citizens interact with Government but change has been limited and slow. Local authorities and agencies have risen to the challenge of building an e-Government infrastructure, often from nothing. However, most of this work has been developmental, reacting to central Government mandates.

Tight deadlines, short-term funding and low risk strategies all militate against the exploration of novel and untried solutions. The media exacerbate this by ignoring success and pouncing on the slightest hint

of failure. Project based funding treats each activity in isolation with a defined end point where the group dissipates. We believe that, IT supported transformation of the public sector needs a seed change in strategy.

The record is excellent but more can be achieved.

New ideas cannot be produced to order. Innovators (ideas generators) need a supportive environment in which to generate ideas, while managers and elected members need to develop a culture where success is encouraged and failure is not stigmatised. Transforming an idea into a project requires specific skills and support. People with good ideas should not be excluded from developing them simply because they lack the skills or authority. The role of management (and government) must be to support **all** staff in developing their ideas.

We have not accumulated much by way of a body of knowledge to support IT Professionals. However, the role of the University sector is to do just that – extend,

organise and disseminate knowledge. Unlike the EU, the UK has tended to ignore this and there has been little coordinated funding of academic research into e-Government. Both eGISE and VIEGO are Brunel University initiatives to fill this gap. In 2007 VIEGO will deliver its research plan to EPSRC for a funding decision.

Working with the Chartered Institute for Public Finance VIEGO has just held a series of workshops around the UK seeking the views of stakeholders on the need for e-Government Research. We are about to publish the results.

Sustainability is critical

One of the most critical concerns expressed by stakeholders was the need for sustainability. This emerged in three ways. First the recognition that change is inevitable, and hence the need for flexible systems that adapt with demand. Second the need for **coordination** and integration at all levels, from policy and R&D through to exploitation. Lack of coordination between projects and planning for sustainability after the funding period were identified as issues. Finally the lack of participation and change resistance from all stakeholders, including both citizens and authority members, was seen as a problem to be overcome.

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