Leadership for a Networked World

The Cross-Boundary Agenda

The Harvard Policy Group on Network-Enabled Services and Government

Leadership for a Networked World: The Cross-Boundary Agenda
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Harvard Policy Group on Network-Enabled Services and Government (HPG)

Mission and Procedures

The HPG is an advisory body for the e-Government Executive Education Project of Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

The HPG is composed of leading practitioners and academics seeking to help identify and disseminate valuable innovations related to the application of computer and information technologies.

The HPG meets three or more times per year to share experience and develop recommendations. It disseminates its work through the Internet as well as traditional publications, and especially through workshops at Harvard and in the field.

The HPG was made possible through a partnership among the Kennedy School of Government, IBM's Institute for Electronic Government, and Microsoft. Note that the views presented in these papers are those of the individual members of the HPG and not the institutional views of their home organizations or project sponsors. Without the opportunity to meet together and share insights over an extended period of time, it would have been impossible for the group to learn and to produce what it has.

We sincerely hope that these papers will prove helpful to leaders and to the public at large.

THE HARVARD POLICY GROUP ON NETWORK-ENABLED SERVICES AND GOVERNMENT
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
MARCH, 2003

Jerry Mechling, John F. Kennedy School of Govenrment

…the time is ripe for public leaders to engage information technology issues more deeply, directly, and successfully.

PREFACE

As we penetrate deeper into the new millennium, everyone from futurists to the general public has observed that information technologies are changing our patterns of social, commercial, and political interactions. These changes raise profound opportunities and threats for people everywhere. It is a revolutionary period, with many issues not yet fully understood, let alone resolved.

Until recently our public leaders – including elected and appointed officials and their overseers in all branches of government – have too often ignored technology issues or delegated them to others. The conventional wisdom has been that technology is either not very important, or requires technical expertise rather than leadership, or is simply too risky for leaders to get personally involved.

These views are changing, however. Due primarily to the astonishing growth of the Internet and e-commerce, technology is now widely acknowledged as a critical force in shaping the future. The need for leadership has become obvious.

But the risks are still there.

As a result, public leaders – often under enormous and competing pressures – remain uncertain about how to successfully engage technology-related issues.

In response to these developments, Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government has assembled a group of distinguished public leaders to explore what is being learned about computer networking and its impacts on the roles and responsibilities of government.

The Harvard Policy Group on Network-Enabled Services and Government (HPG) includes legislative and executive leaders, private and public sector leaders, technology managers and general managers, and public officials from federal, state, and local governments in the United States and Canada. Working together for the past several years, the HPG has concluded that the time is ripe for public leaders to engage information technology issues more deeply, directly, and successfully. To improve the quality of this engagement, the HPG has developed a set of eight imperatives for those who seek to lead. Each of the individual imperatives addresses a significant leadership issue and is the subject of a separate paper (for a list of the papers, see the back page). Taken together, the HPG papers provide a framework for developing successful Information Age leadership strategies.

The report you are reading goes beyond the eight imperatives to assess where the e-government movement needs to go next. It explores not only the logical next steps – i.e., initiatives requiring coordination among multiple public and private institutions, or what we call the "cross-boundary" agenda – but also the responses required to adapt to a changed world situation, with dominant concerns about terrorism and recession and with many administrations in transition as a result of recent mid-term elections.

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Often quietly and without much notice, the movement to e-government has made dramatic progress. Thanks to continued technological innovation, a policeman today may tote a three-pound laptop more powerful than the mainframes controlling national defense during the Cuban missile crisis. The Internet has become pervasive. Private and public services are now commonly accessible on a one-stop, non-stop basis. According to the recent Hart-Teeter polls, more than 70% of the American public has used the net to access government.

But we should not be misled. While electronic service delivery is important for government and saves society much time and hassle, it's just the surface of the new possibilities.

The heart of the matter – and the enormous value that a networked world has yet to release – lies much deeper. It will not be enough for government simply to continue to improve electronic service delivery. We must also reform the flow of work throughout the government value chain. More broadly, we must improve coordination across the boundaries that define separate institutions and across a vast additional array of social, economic, and political interactions. It's not just the registration of a new small business that some towns require in order to set up a business bank account; it's the related interactions with multiple state and federal programs and all the other work involved in setting up the new firm. Technology can obviously help with this broader web of work, but it involves cooperation among many institutions.

So far our e-government work has nibbled on the surface of the apple, working mostly on one program and institution at a time. Now we need to bite much deeper.

As we proceed, we must also confront other new realities. The "dot.com bubble" has burst. The economy has weakened, leaving many governments in worse financial shape than at any time since WW II. The terrorist attacks of September 11 and their aftermath have thrust concerns about security and war to center stage. The 2002 mid-term elections have brought sweeping change to the political landscape.

The world is indeed different than a few years ago, and in many ways more difficult. In the midst of these changes, where do we stand with e-government and where should we go from here?

Only now are we moving to seriously address

Where Are We Now? Getting into Real "e" . . .

The term "e-government" has been ambiguous. For most people, it means services delivered electronically. But that's only part of it. For those leading the charge, the "e" of "e-government" has also referred to a government vision that is "e" fficient and "e"ffective and these very often on an "e"nterprise-wide basis.

Only now are we moving to seriously address the deeper possibilities of this vision and to respond to new economic and political realities.

Cross-boundary territory

E-government has progressed through predictable stages. It's only natural that when we started using the net, we used it first to do old things in modestly new ways. On an agency-by-agency basis, we've worked to extend the reach of individual services rather than transforming them. Most e-government work has thus progressed from:

- planning and preparation
- to information dissemination
- to citizen interactivity, some of which has offered binding transactions such as driver's license renewals.

This has created better access, even MUCH better access. People today can use computers, phones, PDA's, and other devices to reach government from many more places and at many more times than before.

Having learned from much of these relatively easy first steps, we are now ready to turn to the net for new things and more aggressive reform (dare we say "reengineering"?). We next need to use technology to cut costs and integrate services across institutional boundaries – the boundaries of authority that define workflow, government programs and departments, jurisdictions, and sectors of the economy. We need, for example, to reform not just the way emergency calls are handled by the local police department, but broader communications among police in tracking and protecting against global criminal and terrorist activities. Some of this will yield to "virtual" integration – i.e., web-based portals and access that looks integrated to users over the internet without changing much in the back offices where the bulk of the work gets done.

Much of this "cross-boundary" integration, however, will require real reform and changes in the structure of jobs and organizations. "Virtual" integration won't reach many of the most important possibilities for productivity improvement. The real-world changes that are needed will depend on negotiating new relationships and new forms of governance. We won't be able to rely as heavily as we have so far on command and control within established hierarchies of authority.

Contentious tradeoffs

The new e-government work will inevitably raise contentious issues including:

- *Who will benefit from the efficiencies to be created?* How much of the new value should go to clients, to taxpayers, and/or to government workers?
- *How can we protect privacy and security?* Of course we'd like win-win options where possible, but how should we strike a balance when more of one means less of the other?
- *What issues should individuals and/or local concerns have the power to decide rather than communities and/or global concerns?* To what degree should standards for communications, data, and even regulatory processes be harmonized across communities?
- *To what extent should the benefits of a digital society flow to the rich versus the poor?* How should we decide whether opportunities and results are distributed fairly? How should we proceed if we must make tradeoffs between equity and efficiency?

These questions are being newly raised and shaped by technology. The answers, however, will depend mostly on leadership and politics. And leadership and politics must respond not only to technology-enabled possibilities, but also to other powerful forces that are now clearly in play.

No money; security problems; and governments in transition

Unlike a few years ago, the economy is no longer strong. While e-commerce has demonstrated its productivity potential, venture capital remains scarce. With public budgets contracting drastically, bitter battles are often required in carving out money for new initiatives.

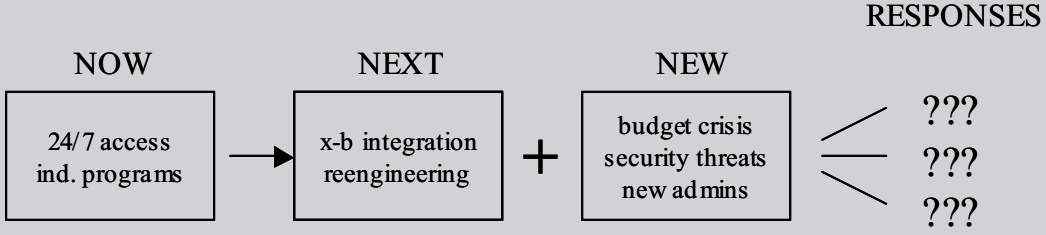
Unlike a few years ago, security has become a critical concern throughout the nation and, indeed, the world. Even as budgets are being cut, funds simply MUST be found to protect information infrastructure and homeland security.

In addition, the 2002 elections created an unusually large wave of new administrations. Many of the CIOs, budget directors, department heads, and governors who pioneered e-government have now left the scene. The future will depend on the new people.

* * *

So . . . as we go forward from "online, not in line" to bigger reforms, what should we do next? The context for choice is summarized in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1
Next Steps for E-government: the Context for Choice



The cross-boundary agenda introduces difficult but essential new challenges…

Where Next? The Cross-Boundary Agenda

To develop an effective new e-government agenda, a workshop was held at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, in 2002 to evaluate options and lessons from the front lines. Participants spent two and a half days sharing experience and assessing the value and feasibility of some 30 possible e-government initiatives.[1] These were sorted and in some cases combined, then reduced to 17 proposals and finally to a handful of top priorities.

The theme of the new agenda was change rather than continuity. Yes, recent e-government initiatives need to continue. But more important changes will also be needed and must focus on the new territory of cross-boundary reforms. Here are the five top-priority guidelines that emerged:

1. Cut costs through consolidating, standardizing, and reengineering: all on a cross-boundary basis.

The problem. A weak economy for the next several years will make severe cuts in government budgets economically, politically, and even legally mandatory. Money doesn't and won't exist for IT that "looks nice" or "may pan out in the long run."

What to avoid. Don't become irrelevant by hunkering down, and don't miss crisis-raised opportunities for IT-based productivity savings.

What to do. Use IT for cost reduction both within the IT function and across the government enterprise.

- Consolidate and standardize IT infrastructure and support: networks, data centers, desktop office suites, help desk services, etc.
- Consolidate and standardize electronic procurement for leveraged buying power and "just in time" efficiencies.
- Shift high-volume transactions such as tax and other payments from staff-assisted to computer-based self-service.
- Outsource to public and/or private partners using reengineering motivated by "share in savings" incentives.
- Use fees, capital funds, and enterprise-wide development funds to reduce pressures on departmental tax-levy budgets.

Example: Virginia IT consolidation and standardization. Governor Mark Warner and George Newstrom, his Chief Technology Officer, exemplify public leaders whose computer experience – in this case primarily from the private sector – has allowed them to confidently push for savings on state IT budgets while simultaneously using

IT to create savings in other state services and the economy at large. Savings in the IT base budget are sufficient to support many much needed reengineering projects.

For more detail on the Virginia strategic plan for technology explore: http://www.technology.state.va.us/TechVA/Reports/2002/govTechPlanFull_020914.pdf

Example: USPS Moversguide as complex public/private partnership. When a public "service" (in this case the requirement to report a change of address to the Postal Service) was combined with private services (those that people often turn to when they move), the total savings to be derived from web-based service were substantial. In fact, the savings to the private firms were enough that the USPS paid much less for its web service than it would have had it built a stand-alone system.

To explore these cross-boundary applications in more detail: http://www.usps.com/moversguide/

2. Get better at "making the case": face up to risks and weigh all the returns.

Problem. In the early phases of e-government, project approvals were often based on loose "everybody wins" promises. But frequent failures and financial pressures mean that proposals now require much more rigorous "business case" justifications.

What to avoid. In evaluating technology-related change, don't ignore risk analysis and don't think that the only benefits are savings to the government budget.

What to do. Use "best practice" cost-benefit and/or related analytics as developed for the public sector. Make sure to include benefits to the general public as well as to the government agency. Also make sure that line managers who will be held accountable for results make the judgment calls about how much organizational change to plan for.

Example: Federal Value Measurement Methodology. This methodology was awarded a "best practice" by the Federal CIO Council. It explicitly estimates benefits for clients and the general public as well as for the agency. It offers a practical approach to evaluating risks and returns.

For an introduction to the VMM explore: *http://www.cio.gov/documents/ValueMeasuring_Highlights_Oct_2002.pdf*

Example: Michigan and risk management. In designing e-government programs, Michigan under Governor Engler did not organize work as technology-only projects. Instead, the administration gave responsibility to general managers. These were the people who could best be held accountable for cost reduction and other business results in addition to making sure that the technology functioned properly. The risks that got the most attention were organizational risks, not technology risks.

Results of work towards a "single face" for Michigan government can be viewed through the award-winning state portal: *http://www.michigan.gov/*

3. Provide pro-active leadership on security and privacy issues.

Problem. In the aftermath of 9/11, public leaders need to pro-actively push to promote security while at the same time taking care to preserve civil rights; while much of what needs to be done is well-known, much is either uncertain and/or controversial.

What to avoid. Leaders should NOT imagine that security and privacy will be solved by somebody else or will

always yield to technical solutions or top-down decision-making; the new realities are too uncertain and the underlying conflicts too deep for that.

What to do. Distinguish between technical challenges (where known best practices apply) and adaptive challenges (where learning and loss are involved). These require different forms of leadership:

- *On technical challenges,* identify and enforce best practices: e.g., good password management, timely installation of security patches, adequate system redundancies and business continuity planning, up-front assessments of security and privacy issues as part of the systems design process, etc.

- *On adaptive challenges,* push people to clarify their values and help them through the difficult work of adjusting to new conditions such as those brought about by identity authentication technologies, widely shared databases, and, in general, situations where technology requires new tradeoffs among security, privacy, and/or other strongly held values.

Example: IRS security and privacy assessment methodologies. The IRS, long in the hot seat for privacy and technology issues, has developed assessment procedures for security and privacy. These engage stakeholders early to help avoid the enormous costs otherwise incurred downstream when large systems are implemented with security or privacy errors.

The privacy impact assessment process won a federal CIO best practice award. The guide can be seen at: *http://www.cio.gov/Documents/pia_for_it_irs_model.pdf*

Example: The CapWIN initiative. This initiative seeks to develop "cross-boundary" communications and information integration for police, fire, medical, and other "first responders" in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. The project raises new vulnerabilities even as it seeks to solve old ones, so adaptive as well as technical leadership is required. The project leaders seek to develop governance structures to adapt and control the new systems on an ongoing basis.

CapWIN has its own site for further exploration: *http://www.capwinproject.com/*

4. Improve transparency and accountability.

Problem. From the public's perspective, the most important e-government priorities are typically transparency and accountability; the public worries more about tyrannical and unresponsive government than about inefficient government.[1]

What to avoid. Despite near-term budget problems, don't ignore the need for transparency and accountability, or think that just making raw data available is an adequate answer.

What to do. Give the public navigation tools and understandable data – much as we have learned to do for other "secondary" users of information. Often the most important technology-enabled tool for transparency is opportunities to engage in the conversations that shape policy and its implementation.

Example: The Pew Foundation and Government Scorecards. Pew grants have supported surveys and assessments of government performance on a number of activities including the use of information technologies. These assessments have been widely published, making low and high performance visible across jurisdictions.

Government performance measurement work is well indexed at: *http://www.seagov.org/perfmeasures/index.html*. The Pew Foundation efforts in particular are explained at the Pew Internet and American life project: *http://www.pewinternet.org/*

Example: MyGov models. A number of jurisdictions have moved not only to make data available, but also to allow users to customize what they want to see and how they want to see it. This makes it easier for users to find what they need, making the most relevant parts of government more transparent and accountable, even pushing information out via email so citizens can choose to avoid having to initiate the contact with government. Very handy for reminders of deadlines, etc.

The myGov service for the City of Boston can be explored at: http://mygov.cityofboston.gov/

5. Build a bigger and more future-oriented vision, moving reform from the government alone to the economy and society at large.

Problem. E-government as "e-services" alone is too narrow, shallow, and old. We need a new and more compelling vision for the journey that lies ahead.

What to avoid. If "e-government" as e-services only no longer mobilizes support, avoid merely letting the old vision die. Movements need a compelling vision.

What to do. Engage stakeholders broadly to develop your vision, especially exploring the downstream and longer-term benefits of a truly transformed government, economy, and society. Life in a global, knowledge-based world will require wise governance and good governments.

Example: Georgia broadband. Georgia is building state networks not only as infrastructure for state services, but for the entire state economy. The vision is broader than typical for e-government initiatives, leading the state to serve as "anchor tenant" to help rural Georgia as well as Atlanta succeed in the information age.

The web site with more can be found, believe it or not, at: *http://www.yamacraw.org/*

Example: Singapore. Singapore has worked longer and more aggressively than perhaps any other government at using technology to transform its economy and society. While plans for the "Intelligent Island" have not always been successful, progress has been truly impressive and generates important lessons for others as well as for Singapore itself.

Commentary to put Singaporean IT and development work in context can be found at: http://choo.fis.utoronto.ca/FIS/ResPub/IT2000.html

The cross-boundary agenda introduces difficult but essential new challenges for e-government. The agenda will be difficult because of politics, controversy, and complexity. But it will also be essential. Failure is not an option when high value jobs can so easily be moved to other parts of the world.

Figure 2.
Guidelines for Crossing to the Cross-Boundary Agenda

1. **Cut costs** through consolidating, standardizing, and reengineering: all on a cross-boundary basis
2. Get better at **"making the case"**: face up to risks and weigh all the returns.
3. Provide pro-active **leadership on security and privacy** issues.
4. Improve **transparency and accountability**.
5. Build a bigger and more **future-oriented vision**, moving reform from the government alone to the economy and society at large.

Cross-boundary reform is difficult, but increasingly feasible and ESSENTIAL.

…the next phases will require more direct engagement . . .
Leaders will need to rely more on negotiation and less on authority.

* * *

Leadership Challenges

As e-government focuses on cross-boundary reform, what are the implications for leaders?

For most, the next phases will require more direct engagement than required by earlier e-government work. Leaders will need to rely more on negotiation and less on authority.

Leaders will not be able to provide all the answers or always protect their followers from the pains of change, although they will often be pushed by various constituencies to do so. Leaders will need good judgment on how much pressure for change their followers can sustain.

This will not be easy. Sometimes it will be dangerous. Rapid progress will be rare. Transformational change
• where many jobs must change along with the relationships, social status, and power dependant on those jobs
• has always been difficult.

Given the risks and returns, what are the main paths forward? When and why and how should e-government leaders:

- Continue to expand access through "virtual" integration?
- Push for productivity via real-world as well as virtual reforms?
- Push beyond agency-only and government-only initiatives to build broader partnerships for economic and social change?

Good answers will depend on the context, interests, and skills of the leaders themselves. Some advice, however, will be broadly applicable:

- *for CEOs, program leaders:* The e-government agenda now focuses on organizational and multi-organizational change rather than technology. This makes it primarily *your* agenda, not something you can delegate to someone else.
- *for COOs, OMB directors:* Major changes in government organizations typically require sustained directive leadership. With control over assignments and budgets, you are well positioned to provide this.
- *for CIOs, technology leaders:* Organizational change requires careful political and other preparation, then rapid progress once implementation begins. Get your infrastructure and methodologies ready for fast-cycle work.
- *for government overseers:* You are the ones often required to resolve conflicts and complaints. Get comfortable with the big picture in order to provide context and leadership for the many details that will come your way.
- *for technology partners:* To succeed with the new e-government agenda, technology capacity must be combined with political will. You should help build both.
- *for the press and public:* In today's world, getting lost in overload is a huge problem. Keep the pressure on for transparency, responsiveness, and productivity in government.

It will be difficult, but we can do this. And we must…

The Cross-Boundary Agenda: Making Good on the Promise

The world of e-government is decidedly different than it was a few years ago. While the e-government movement has made good progress, many governments have turned control over to new administrations. Politics are dominated by a weak economy and the likelihood of war. The cross-boundary agenda lies ahead, with substantial risks as well as rewards.

In light of these and other forces, one option for leaders might be to try – so far as possible – to ignore the new challenges, or at least to avoid them. To be fair to this option, discretion is often the better part of valor. Leaders must learn to pick the right fights.

In this report, however, we have argued that what we need now is stronger and more effectively engaged leadership. More particularly, we need leadership for the kind of cross-boundary reform that can only be accomplished through skillful application of information technologies. With jobs moving anywhere the information infrastructure permits, leaders can't let their own people be bypassed and fall out of the competition.

As we cross into cross-boundary territory, leaders must help their followers make good on the promise that e-government has offered from the beginning. We need to use technology for more than making services accessible through electronic delivery. We need to use technology to make government better overall and then to help it relate better to the larger economy and society. We will need skillful and engaged leaders, but the technology and economics and politics are poised for success. It will be difficult, but we can do this.

And we must.

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Note: Organizational affiliations and position titles reflect the professional status of HPG members and alumni at the time of their initial association with the group.

Footnotes

1 See appendix B.

Endnotes

1 Hart Teeter poll reference

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