

Chapter 5

Defining the Organisation's Needs for Public Service Delivery in the Digital Era

ABSTRACT

This chapter has the objective of defining a practical framework to define an ISSP for government entities to enhance public service delivery in the digital era. However, before it defines this framework, the chapter addresses a number of important and fundamental concepts. The chapter starts by addressing the confusion of terminology by providing an unambiguous explanation regarding the differences between various terms, such as information technology (IT), information systems (IS), and information communications technology (ICT), amongst others. The chapter then focuses on specifically identifying the end user and examining the role of the end user by relating the discussion to the research of the previous chapters regarding the ICT strategy-centric aspects. The chapter concludes with a practical ISSP framework that aims to provide enhanced public service delivery in the digital era.

INTRODUCTION

When public and private sectors combine intellectual and other resources, more can be achieved. Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway (1981, 1986–89, and 1990–96)

Government organisations must recognise that enhancing Public Service delivery in the digital era has become a complex matter because certain basic traditional concepts have been drastically modified and transformed. Firstly, there is a need to clarify the confusion in terminology when discussing Public Service delivery in the digital era. For example, there is a tendency to use certain terminology, such as IT, IS, and ICT and applying these terms synonymously, as if they all mean the same. These terms may vaguely imply the same general idea but they certainly do not have the same equivalent meaning. Therefore, this confusion in terminology needs to be addressed to bring all aspects into context.

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Secondly, there is also a need to define the term “end user” when applied to information systems applications in a Government environment. With the advent of communications networks, namely the wide-area-network (WAN), the term “end user” has taken on a very wide meaning. Before the introduction of WANs, the user was basically the government employee that was utilising the application system. However, in today’s digital environment, the end user of the application systems includes every class of individuals representing themselves as citizens, or representing a commercial entity as an employee or owner of the business or part of the civil society networks representing a host of persons and organisations related to some social cause.

It is very difficult for a government to define its ICT strategy leading to an ISSP unless it knows its customers. The term “Customers” in this context is taking a broad meaning. It includes both internal and external end-users. The internal end-users being government employees at all hierarchical levels within the organisation they work for, from the humble clerk to the top executive management levels. Government’s external customers represent the users of the numerous government services, be they the individual citizen, civil society organisations, and business enterprises. Within each class of external users there are many subclasses that all need to be served by their governments. It is in this context that having a proper ISSP framework will help governments to provide enhanced Public Service delivery in the digital era.

BACKGROUND

The evolution of the term “End User” has compelled Governments through their Public Service to embrace a number of concepts over time, such as eCommerce, eGovernment, eGovernance and with the extremely high penetration of smart phones, mGovernment and all its offshoots. This evolution has created the need for Governments to restructure themselves and be outward looking, seeking new revolutionary ways of serving their diverse customer base. Fuelling this trend is the customers’ expectations. People, business entities and proponents of civil society expect the same digital services from their governments that they normally receive from the private sector and more. Hence, end-user expectations when dealing with their governments are rapidly changing and increasing considerably.

Advanced Governments have taken a proactive stand while others have adopted a reactive approach in meeting end user expectations. Governments need to seek innovative ways of how they conduct their business and more importantly how they form a relationship and relate to the ever increasing spectrum of customers. Those Public Services that are successful in integrating digital technology within their public sector capacities; operational methodologies; legal and administrative frameworks; work and information flows; and business processes will be thriving from the economic synergies created through their intelligent and effective digital environment.

CLEARING THE CONFUSION IN TERMINOLOGY

It is important when defining an ICT Strategy that once reference is made to a particular term, its meaning is fully understood. The confusion in terminology is created by the digital technology industry sector itself, because there appears to be a lack of consensus as what we mean by such terms as Information Technology (IT); Information Communications Technology (ICT); Information Systems (IS), amongst other terms.

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