

## **Using New Technologies, Governments Form New Relationships with Citizens**

**By Stephen J. Rohleder**

The change has been gradual, but the results have been dramatic. Over the last twenty years – since the spread of the Internet and the dawn of what has come to be known as the Information Age – the relationship between governments and citizens has changed forever. Citizens are no longer content to be passive recipients of government services, paying their taxes and expressing their pleasure or displeasure only at the ballot box. Armed with vast amounts of information and near-instantaneous communications, citizens are seeking not only better service from government, but service that is tailored to their specific needs.

Yet, while citizens' expectations are greater than ever, governments around the world are facing very real constraints on what they can and cannot do to meet those expectations. Higher spending and lower revenues are forcing governments to devise new solutions to the ways that services are designed and delivered.

Phase I of the Information Age – personal computers, the Internet and mobile communications - brought us to this point. There is evidence from all around the world, however, that Phase II of the Information Age – new technologies, and older technologies used in innovative ways – is changing not only the way that governments deliver services, but the essential relationship between governments and citizens themselves.

What we are witnessing today is the shift from e-government to e-governance. New technologies allow governments to deliver services more efficiently, but the change is deeper than that. These technologies – ranging from social networking to cloud computing – enable governments to seek advice and counsel directly from citizens and to engage them in the design and process of governance.

We have studied this trend in depth, identifying dozens of cases of governments adopting new strategies (and adapting old ones) to better engage the public, deliver more effective public services and involve citizens in their own governance. At the same time, we conducted a comprehensive international study – the Global Cities Forum – to hear what citizens believe government should be doing to help improve the quality of their lives. We held day-long panel discussions with residents of Berlin, Dublin, Johannesburg, London, Los Angeles, Madrid, Mexico City, New Delhi, New York, Oslo, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Rome, Singapore, Sydney, Tokyo and Toronto.

These studies led to the development of what we call the Public Service Value Governance Framework, a model of governance that connects people – as citizens, service users and taxpayers – with those whom they elect to lead them. The framework is built around four components:

1. **Outcomes** – Governments are focusing on improved social and economic conditions for citizens, such as health, learning and safety, and not merely on the amount of services provided or on efficiency.
2. **Balance** – Governments must balance choice and flexibility with fairness and common good, addressing gaps between those who are able to take advantage of service improvements and those who are not.
3. **Engagement** – Governments are engaging, educating and enrolling citizens as co-producers of public values by seeking their views and helping them make the best use of government resources.

4. Accountability – Governments must not only be more transparent about their actions and performance, they must provide accessible means for citizens to remedy problems with government and public services.

In our global research, we identified examples of governments at all levels – national, state, provincial and local – that are adapting innovative technologies to put this framework in place.

- To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public service provision, for instance, the Canadian Federal Government has launched a government-wide pilot for a new internal collaboration platform called GCpedia, an internal version of the popular online encyclopedia Wikipedia. The service allows federal employees to post articles as well as comment on and edit articles posted by their peers. The government is using GCpedia to enable informal collaboration amongst employees within and across organizations.
- Cloud computing is helping the District of Columbia provide employees with greater computing power and applications that facilitate collaboration. The switch to web-based Google Apps has reduced costs and ensured better business continuity by moving from a single data center to multiple, geographically dispersed data centers.
- The Swedish government's social insurance provider, Forsakringkassan, conducted extensive customer segmentation analysis to eliminate unnecessary face-to-face meetings with citizens who are most able to help themselves, while moving a greater proportion of customer service cases to more efficient self-service channels. This strategy has enabled the agency to deliver more personalized, effective customer service.
- In Malaysia, where, of 27 million people, 24 million have access to a cell phone while only 16 million have access to the Internet, the government has launched MySMS, a single number to which citizens can send an SMS message. In doing so, citizens can access more than 1,500 SMS services from 86 agencies, including the police, Road Transport Department, Ministry of Education and local councils. Providing citizens with a single gateway through which they can access information and services from multiple agencies makes it easier for citizens who are less able to help themselves interact with government and improves overall service levels as well.

We believe public service organizations should develop a vision of governance that focuses on citizens, not on the government. By adopting these strategies, government and public service organizations are transforming their relationships with citizens, reducing dependency and increasing the sense of shared responsibility.

Citizens not only have greater access to information, they have new opportunities for direct participation in their own governance. This type of engagement is critical to governments' ability to achieve high performance and deliver greater public value – crucial factors in an era of constrained resources and ever greater demand for government services.

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