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Contrasting Approaches to the Adoption of e-Government

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Contrasting Approaches to the Adoption of e-Government: The UK and the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT. This paper examines how e-Government was developed and implemented in two countries: the UK and the Netherlands. Drawing on a variety of documentary sources and extensive interview

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data the paper contrasts the differences in realizing the vision of e-Government between the two countries. The approaches to the realization of e-Government within each country are examined in detail, with the strengths and weaknesses of each approach identified. Based on this a mixed model for the implementation of e-Government is proposed and implications for e-Government policy are outlined. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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INTRODUCTION

Much of the literature still assumes that most countries are adopting similar approaches to the definition and implementation of e-Government policies. There is a trend, the argument goes, towards policy convergence, suggesting that “the colour of the government matters little” (OECD, 1998, p. 13) and that there are few relevant differences across countries when defining and implementing e-Government.

This paper compares e-Government policy processes in the UK and the Netherlands and draws some generic policy lessons for the implementation of e-Government policy. We draw on evidence gathered and analyzed for an in-depth study of ICT policies in the UK and the Netherlands carried out during 2003 for the Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies (ITPS), a Swedish Government Agency (Molas-Gallart et al., 2003).¹ A section of this study involved a comparison of policies to foster the public use of ICT,² focusing on how both countries designed and delivered e-Government initiatives. We use the term e-Government to refer to the growing application of ICT in the public sector, with particular emphasis on their application for service delivery.

The paper argues that we can identify different models of e-Government policy implementation; these models are determined by the political context of implementation rather than by the nature of the technologies being rolled out, or the explicit policy goals of the e-Government initiatives. While governments share generic policy objectives for the development of e-Government services and have applied, for

instance, similar Internet-based tools for their implementation we can find considerable cross-country differences in the processes of policy formulation and implementation. The paper highlights the influence of national political institutions, and of social and legal norms and practices when explaining the different approaches to e-Government.

We use a simple model of the policy process derived from traditional public policy analysis. We first distinguish between policy definition and implementation. Although it is now always easy to differentiate in practice between these two parts of the policy process,³ we find that the conceptual distinction between the definition of the policy objectives and tools, and their translation into policy practice (implementation) provides a useful heuristics for our analysis here. We then draw on concepts from the policy implementation literature to distinguish between top-down and bottom-up approaches to the policy process.⁴ In the context of this paper we understand a top-down approach to the policy process to be one that stresses the need for a strong set of policy objective and management rules set up by central policy bodies to be implemented across departments, or other government bodies including local authorities. In this model the policy designers are the central actors in the implementation process, and seek to enforce a strong chain of command to see their policies put into practice. In contrast bottom-up approaches stress the role of policy deliverers in the policy process. In a bottom-up approach “street-level” implementers become the key protagonists in the policy-formation process. Within this model, the implementer will at least be free to adapt to local conditions sets of broad policy goals, or they may even be ultimately responsible for policy definition, including setting up policy goals and objectives. A bottom-up approach will require a decentralized system of government.

We will use this distinction between top-down centralized models of policy formation, and bottom-down, de-centralized approaches to differentiate between the UK and Dutch experience in e-Government. The paper will first present our research methodology. We then provide a detailed account of the e-Government policies and the institutions involved in their definition and implementation in the UK and the Netherlands. We end the paper with a comparative analysis of both experiences, concluding that these respond to the two different policy models described above. We are able to characterize both models in a stylized form, and discuss some lessons for future policy development. The adequacy of bottom-up and top-down approaches to the develop-

ment of e-Government policies will depend on the stage (definition or implementation) of the policy process.

APPROACH

We focused our study on the policies developed and implemented between the years 1993 and 2003 in the UK and the Netherlands. The UK and the Netherlands are considered to be successful by traditional benchmarking measures of e-Government (Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, 2003; OECD, 2003; Booz Allen Hamilton, 2002 #2784) but operate within different policy and e-Government policy models. The UK provides an example of innovative ICT policy formulation in one of Europe's larger countries with a rather centralized, although evolving, political structure. The Netherlands is a small-size country facing different problems of scale, and operating within a more decentralized political structure where discussion and consensus making across the different government levels are part and parcel of the political culture.

The period covered encompasses a broad array of policies launched before and after the "dot-com boom." In the UK, this period coincides with the time of two consecutive Labour Governments following the Labour victory in the 1997 and 2002 general elections. In the Netherlands we have taken 1994 as our starting date as this is the year in which the *National Action Plan on the Information Superhighway* was published. The National Action Plan set up the framework for Dutch ICT policy for the following years.

"E-Government" is a broad term that covers a very wide array of activities, with different foci, but it can be regarded as a distinct public sector activity (Jackson and Curthoys, 2001). To keep our analysis manageable within the context of a journal article we are going to focus on those e-Government activities that are mainly cross-sectoral in nature, like the purchase and deployment of large IT systems by Government, and the use of such systems for public procurement and service delivery. We will also refer to the relationship between different levels of Government when developing and implementing e-Government policies, as this is an area in which different political structures have a clear bearing on the policy process leading to the development of e-Government applications. Thus we will focus on e-procurement. The article, however, will not address in detail any particular service delivery, such as e-health and e-learning. Although these are integral parts of e-Government, they are large and complex fields of policy activity that raise

special issues deserving of separate consideration. An analysis of these areas can be found in our report (Molas-Gallart et al., 2003).

The study draws on the analysis of a broad variety of documentary sources, including reports, policy documents, regulations and legislation, articles and other publications. It must be taken into account that, often, the formal statements and processes laid out in written documents are only one ingredient in the complex processes of policy formation. Informal practices, overlaps and disputes over emerging responsibilities are an equally important element in the development of e-Government. It is necessary therefore to go beyond the analysis of official policy documents and understand the informal processes that have generated them. We complemented and validated the information obtained from publicly available sources with interviews with current and past Government officials, heads of relevant agencies and other experts. Given the sensitivity of the issues explored we have conducted most of our interviews on a non-attributable and anonymous basis. In total during Summer 2003 we conducted 21 interviews (13 in the UK and 8 in the Netherlands). The majority of interviews lasted for an average of two hours and we transcribed all notes to allow a selection of suitable quotes by the respondents. Some respondents also provided us with restricted material on the agreement that they not be referred to or cited, but would provide us with a firmer impression of the “internal picture” of their corresponding department’s development of e-Government measures.

UK interviewees included the senior managers of the Office of e-Envoy, the Office of Government Commerce (which deals with Government procurement), the Department of Health and the Department of Trade and Industry. They were mainly charged with formulating a strategy for implementing the “e-Government” aspect of their department. For instance, the senior manager at the Office of the e-Envoy was tasked with devising various “inclusive channels” for the delivery of public information and services. These would focus not only the Internet and mobile telephony, but more importantly, kiosks in public places, such as libraries and post offices, and the television (teletext) as these avenues are more likely to be accessible by a large majority of the population. The executives at the Department of Health were responsible for drawing up the program for the implementation of telecare and telemedicine (health-related services and information, including electronic patient records), and briefing the Secretary of State for Health on the milestones achieved. As the Department of Trade and Industry is a key actor in the promotion of the Government’s e-Government overall

agenda, the senior personnel interviewed were involved in the development of e-schemes aimed at smaller businesses, against a prevailing impression that smaller businesses have not widely adopted the Internet for conducting their business activities. The Office for Government Commerce, as the name implies (more below), has as its primary mandate, to promote effective and efficient means for Government procurement. An identified effective means for such activity is e-procurement and the central figures we interviewed were specifically tasked with identifying the key hurdles for the adoption of e-procurement and processes involved in facilitating this practice at central and regional levels. Interviews were also conducted with senior management consultants working closely with the Office for Government Commerce and the Department for Education and Skills in e-learning projects.

Dutch interviewees included senior personnel from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, which is centrally charged with an overall agenda for the development of e-Government, and particularly for the promotion of e-commerce and the monitoring of the sectors where electronic commerce is rapidly developing in order to ensure competition in the market. Interviews were also conducted with key staff members of the Ministry of Interior, who also have a major role in promoting e-Government. Program managers of ICTU (see below) were also interviewed.

UK AND DUTCH APPROACHES TO E-GOVERNMENT

This section analyzes in some detail the e-Government policy processes in the UK and the Netherlands. Both have developed and implemented a broad range of e-Government policies and, like many other countries, share similar generic policy objectives. These objectives are couched in very generic terms and include increased accessibility to ICT-based government services, closure of the “digital divide,” and the extensive and efficient use of ICT by government agencies, among others. There are also some similarities in the technologies used. For instance, both countries have established a Government Internet portal giving access to a broad variety of government information and public services. Yet, this section will show that despite common policies with similar objectives and using similar technologies, the Dutch and British Governments follow two different implementation models to achieve their objectives.

THE UK

Formal Policy Process: The Role of Coordinating Agencies

UK e-Government policy formation follows the same general procedures common to all policy formation in the UK. Policy definition emerges from the Cabinet Office, which outlines intended policies and their main objectives and is then studied by Cabinet Committees that are formed to address each policy area. Here, priorities are established and then passed to the corresponding ministry or department, where the details of the policy will be developed and implemented. Each department or ministry will then identify its priorities and targets following the guidelines set out by the Cabinet Committees. Such policies will be funded by the budget allocation accorded to each ministry. Of course, depending on the ministry or department, policy definition will entail different sets of actors. At the departmental level, in the context of e-Government, each department nominates an *e-Minister* to provide political leadership for the e-agenda. Government's overall e-Minister is also the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (DTI). This e-Minister has the responsibility for Government's e-agenda and champions the e-agenda at Cabinet level, provides the Prime Minister with monthly progress reports, and assumes overall responsibility for the Government's e-strategy.⁵ E-Ministers are also expected to work with each other to facilitate joined-up approaches. A simplified structure for UK e-government strategy and implementation is shown in Figure 1.

Since it came to power in 1997, the Labour Government has developed and executed an ambitious strategy involving themed online government services for delivering e-Government, such as e-health.⁶ Following the general practice described above, the development of policy in the UK is a top-down, centrally driven process often initiated by the Strategy Unit of the Cabinet Office, which is attached to the Office of the Prime Minister. The Cabinet Office is responsible for outlining Government's policy vision, objectives and guidelines. Each policy is then scrutinized by Cabinet Committees, before being passed on to a ministry or department where policy details are developed and implemented. As far as the overall policy for the "e-agenda" is concerned, the overriding target is to deliver "joined-up government" through the use of ICT-based applications to deliver e-services to the public through better coordination and cooperation between departments and agencies that may have overlaps in service delivery.

FIGURE 1. Simplified Structure for UK e-Government Strategy and Implementation

Note: OGC was replaced by the e-Government Unit in 2004.

The effort to drive and coordinate e-Government policies is steered by a small group of specially established organizations. Here we will discuss the most relevant organizations. These usually combine tasks that are related to the development of e-Government policies with broader mandates to address other aspects of policy.

The Strategy Unit

Created in 2002, the Strategy Unit (SU) was the result of the bringing together of three existing units, the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU), the Prime Minister's Forward Strategy Unit (FSU) and parts of the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS). SU has a broad remit extending beyond e-Government and ICT policy. It undertakes long-term strategic reviews of major areas of policy, conducting studies and strategic audits of cross-cutting policy issues, and works with Government departments to promote strategic thinking and improve policy making across Whitehall.

The SU has a specialized e-Strategy group that undertakes all these functions and works with partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors as well as internationally. It provides strategic support to the e-Minister (see above) and the e-Envoy (see below) in the formulation of e-commerce policies, and analyzes Internet access issues, modern markets and market analysis. The SU also compiles monthly and annual reports to the Prime Minister, and updates the Action Plan for the UK

online Initiative. Since its creation the SU has undertaken a series of important studies that have all contributed to the wider policy agenda. However, in the context of e-Government, it is interesting to note that many of the major policy initiatives in this area pre-dated the Unit's creation by some years.

Because of its remit and its location within Government, the SU could play, on paper, a key role in the definition of ICT policy by the Cabinet Office, helping "join up" the different approaches and strategies across departments. Yet, despite the key strategic role that the SU could acquire, observers and ex-senior officials interviewed for this report pointed out that the SU does not generate new strategies, as one could in principle expect. Instead, its role in practice is to add some coherence, ex-post, across the ideas emerging from different Government departments. A senior official at a Government department compared the SU's role to that of a "PowerPoint operator who moves the PowerPoint slides around so as to provide real time (and sometimes post hoc) continuity to Government policies."

Office of the e-Envoy

The e-Envoy, appointed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, was a role created in 2000 to devise a strategy for implementing Government's e-agenda, stimulate the development, uptake of e-commerce and the use of ICT-based applications and services by Government and business. Until its closure in 2005, this office, Office of the e-Envoy (OeE), was a cross-departmental organization staffed by seconded personnel from various departments and agencies and was located in the Cabinet Office.

As the designated "change agent," the OeE led the development of the e-Government implementation strategy. However, although the OeE was required to meet Government targets for ICT implementation, it had no formal power over the Government departments that are ultimately responsible for achieving Government's objectives. In practice, the individual departments set quantifiable targets, which were submitted to the OeE and the National Audit Office. Therefore, while the OeE was charged with strategy formulation and coordination, implementation was devolved to departments, agencies and local authorities. Despite Government's intention to promote joined-up government by coordinating ICT activities across ministries and departments, the OeE had insufficient powers to undertake this process of horizontal integration. In particular, it was unable to prevent the emergence of multiple

e-Government initiatives resulting from individual departments launching their own projects and policies.

In an effort to coordinate the implementation of e-Government, the OeE developed a “channels framework”⁷ to promote a coordinated approach in the development of channel strategies across public sector bodies so that they can better deliver joined-up services.⁸ Recognizing that different Government departments have overlapping priorities, the framework suggested that for a coordinated approach to a channels strategy to be successful, departments needed to reconcile such priorities (Office of the e-Envoy 2002, p. 9). The OeE claimed that without this coordinated approach, e-Government services would achieve varying levels of quality and availability.⁹

The OeE attempted to achieve its goals primarily through consensus building. According to a senior Government official, it focused on “back office consensus” through a series of work groups for each of its objectives. Unlike its early ambition of developing a coordinated strategy for implementation of the Government’s e-agenda, it latterly focused on improving “back end office processes” in order to establish improved processes for ministries, departments and agencies to effectively support e-commerce. In other words, the OeE concentrated its efforts largely on “business process reengineering” in Government and less on setting the implementation strategy for the e-delivery of all Government services. Significantly, during 2003 the OeE shifted its emphasis from making *all* government services electronically available to focusing on key priority services, identified by ministries and departments.

While the OeE had no mandate for actual implementation, it was situated in the Cabinet Office. On the one hand, this specific location speaks to the importance of the e-Envoy’s position and Government’s commitment to the realization of its e-agenda, on the other, the lack of a mandate for implementation signals potential inefficacy. According to a senior Government official, the OeE became a learning organization building on the lessons derived from earlier projects. For instance, by bringing together seconded employees from the different departments and ministries, the OeE invested much effort to reach agreement on common programs requiring “buy-in” from each of the representatives. This form of “backroom consensus building” became crucial in the UK e-Government implementation process.

However, during 2003 the OeE was downsized from a total of 200 members to about 100 and its budget was also reduced, highlighting its reduction of influence and Government’s preference to fund projects

with a greater chance of success. In April 2005, the Office was dissolved and succeeded by the e-Government Unit (eGU) in June. The head of e-Government, who replaces the e-Envoy, has a much wider brief, but, as with the e-Envoy, is tasked with encouraging departments and agencies to “join up,” and helping improve the success rate of major IT programs.¹⁰

According to a senior official, the closing of the Office of the e-Envoy was not helped by the public perception that e-Government has failed in its mission to offer “joined-up” government, and had, instead, provided a disparate set of web sites and services. One rationale for these reductions was that the Office had not met its targets for ensuring the implementation of Government’s e-agenda and that it had not been able to develop a coordinated strategy for the implementation of Government’s e-agenda.

What the OeE may have achieved is not easily quantifiable. One can argue, for instance, that the ability developed to build consensus among disparate groups cannot be quantified. So in its defense, the OeE could claim that first, it never had the mandate to effect implementation and was only charged with strategizing and coordinating the e-agenda program, and second, that some important capabilities it had help develop cannot be reduced to a figure.

The Office of Government Commerce

The Office of Government Commerce (OGC) is responsible for modernizing and improving the efficiency of public procurement processes and projects. It was launched in April 2000 as part of a wider reform of the public sector procurement within Central Government with the aim of achieving substantial value for money improvements in the Government’s procurement activities. The OGC merged several existing procurement services including: The Buying Agency, Property Advisers to the Civil Estate, procurement units within the Treasury and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA), which had for decades been the focal point for IT in government. In addition to its wider role in modernizing Government procurement, the OGC is responsible for the successful delivery of major Government ICT projects. Government recognizes that the ability to deliver large ICT projects underpins the whole e-Government agenda.

The UK Government has established several initiatives for e-Procurement. For example, in January 2001 the (then) OeE launched *Government Gateway*, which will handle around £5-6 million of annual

Government-related transactions. A strategy for e-Procurement was established by Central Government in October 2002, aiming to use web-enabled tools to improve Government's relationships with private sector suppliers. More details of its activities are given below.

The Public Procurement of ICT Systems and Services

To undertake its ambitious public policy agenda Government has had to tackle significant weaknesses in the procurement and delivery of major ICT projects, while at the same time responding to the high rate of innovation found in the ICT sector. This has been achieved partly by the centralization and reform of public procurement processes, and partly by the greater involvement of the private sector in the management, delivery and operation of major projects and systems.

Within the wider agenda of public services reform, in which e-Government plays a major role, efficient and effective ICT systems play a key facilitative part. As a result the main policy objectives in this area have been focused on a series of cross-cutting operational issues concerning the procurement, delivery and management of complex ICT projects and systems. However, it is important to recognize that policy in this area was created as a result of the crisis within the public sector in respect to the very poor track record concerning the delivery of large IT systems. Indeed, during the 1990s there was a succession of high-profile public sector IT project failures that undermined public confidence in Government and threatened any future public sector reform agenda. As a result the conditions were created both to initiate and carry through a series of fundamental reforms to government procurement as a whole and, within that, ICT system procurement and delivery processes. Part of this process was the creation of the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) described above. The OGC has identified the 5 high-level objectives:

1. providing guidance and expertise to support the successful delivery of procurement-based projects and other forms of commercial activity;
2. developing the Government market so it is more efficient and attractive for both suppliers and customers;
3. developing a clear and supportive framework for best-in-class procurement activity to help achieve better value for money;
4. delivering efficient and effective services to external and internal customers;

5. gaining widespread recognition for excellence and as a leading contributor to Government modernization (Gershon, 2003).

A separate and parallel review of the handling of major Government IT projects resulted in the publication of the McCartney Report, *Successful IT: Modernising Government in Action*. This report (Cabinet Office, 2000) outlined a series of measures to improve project delivery (including Gateway Reviews, see below) and led to the establishment of the Successful Projects in an IT Environment (SPRITE) Program. The OGC now manages this program as part of its broader procurement remit within the public sector.

The importance of these reforms cannot be underestimated since the proposed spend on IT systems and services is around £12bn annually. This figure includes military spending (£4bn-£5bn investment in a complete communications and IT overhaul for the armed forces), a £4bn-plus 10-year contract to run IT systems for the Inland Revenue, and a £2.3bn investment in NHS (National Health Service) IT.

Policy Implementation

This section will provide an overview of some of the most notable initiatives that have been created as a result of the changes in Government policy concerning IT procurement. We do not pretend to provide a comprehensive list of all initiatives but are focusing on examples of successful innovation.

Gateway Reviews

All new procurement projects in Central Government are subject to the Gateway Review process. The Gateway Process examines a project at critical stages in its lifecycle to provide assurance that it can progress successfully to the next stage. It is applied to projects that procure services, construction/property, IT-enabled business change projects and procurements utilizing framework contracts. The process considers the project at critical points (Gateways) in its development. There are now six Gateways during the lifecycle of a project, four before contract award and two looking at service implementation and confirmation of the operational benefits (Office of Government Commerce, 2003a).

The Gateway process is subject to a continuous review process with feedback being collected and collated from the review reports produced by Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) and Gateway review leaders.

The SROs and the leaders of Gateway reviews are also encouraged to make recommendations that would improve the Gateway review process. The Gateway review process has been consciously set up to provide for continuous learning and is an example of a continuous improvement process that has resulted in a number of incremental developments in the implementation of policy concerning IT procurement. For instance, critical projects will have a named Government minister associated with their delivery, thus ensuring that appropriate political focus is applied to such projects. However, it is interesting to note that although the “Senior Responsible Owners” in charge of every project were to have remained in post for the duration of a program, this has not been achieved and senior civil servants continue to move between posts during the life of a project. The implication of this is significant since it implies that achieving long-term ownership and focused responsibility amongst the executive for major IT projects within Government may be much harder to achieve than was originally anticipated.

The Gateway review process has fundamentally changed the basis of the relationships between the stakeholders involved in major IT procurement processes. Suppliers now have a platform to feed information into the process, whereas they might previously have been ignored. The OGC staff who produce best practice guidelines are having to ensure that published guidelines reflect current practice emerging from the review process. Project teams obtain more meaningful, independent, peer review feedback on the status of their project. Those responsible for parliamentary oversight of major IT projects find that the Gateway process provides a powerful means of identifying problem projects at an early stage.

E-Procurement

The strategy for the adoption of electronic procurement by Central Government was established in October 2002. The strategy focuses on how web-enabled tools and techniques can deliver significant value for money improvements to Government’s commercial relationships. There are three main strands to the strategy:

1. the establishment of framework agreements to procure off the shelf tools where available;
2. the influencing of policy direction and best practice and the establishment of a common approach to e-procurement across Government departments;

3. undertaking a feasibility study for a single point of entry and commercial information exchange between Government and supplier systems (an eHub) (Office of Government Commerce, 2003b).

The e-procurement strategy was based on extensive research, including trials such as ePilots, eAuctions and eTendering projects into how e-Procurement can bring added value to departments' procurement activity. For example, in January 2001 the OeE in collaboration with Microsoft, Dell, SchlumbergerSEMA and Cable and Wireless launched *Government Gateway*, the official Internet-based website, or eHub, for e-procurement. Over time, Government anticipates that *Government Gateway* will handle a substantial part of the estimated £5-6 billion of annual Government-related transactions.

The idea of a common infrastructure is to allow it to be shared across national, regional and local public services. Furthermore, it avoids duplication of the common facilities and services necessary to connect individual Government organizations to suppliers and customers over the Internet.

Initially measurable e-procurement targets were set up and considered central to the Government's reform drive. The policy development in the area of e-Procurement has been one of gradual retreat from the largely unrealistic early targets made in 1999, well before any systematic study of e-Procurement had taken place. As the challenges involved in moving towards e-procurement became more clearly understood the nature of the targets were reappraised,¹¹ and earlier targets repositioned as being purely 'aspirational' (Gibbs, 2001).¹² This has given rise to the creation of second-generation targets focused on delivering value rather than achieving a specific volume of transactions.

Accompanying the change in targets was a different policy strategy. One of the early decisions made by OGC in 2000 was to abandon the existing approach to e-Procurement based on a "one size fits all approach" and initiating a series of pilots across Government. These pilots were concluded in 2002 and the results published in a series of reports.¹³ As a result of these pilots the OGC has moved away from numerical targets related to the volume of transactions and tenders to a target, which reflects the need for e-Procurement to deliver real business benefits. The primary target for e-Procurement initiatives is now to contribute £250m of value for money improvements over the period 2003-2006.

Local e-Government Initiatives

As explained above, Central Government sets out the policy for the country's e-Government agenda. This includes establishing guidelines for regional and local governments. The UK White Paper on Local Government produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM, 2001) proposed, as a component of this local policy, a local e-government strategy¹⁴ to enable councils to lead and undertake improvements in services. The aim of local e-government is to make local services more accessible, convenient, responsive and cost-effective. To achieve local e-government, local public services will have to operate very differently from the ways in which they operate at present. In particular, local services will have to be delivered or supported electronically and, where appropriate, *jointly* by local and regional partnerships, and connected to a national infrastructure. An important reason for joined-up delivery of services is to avoid repeatedly asking users for the same information and enabling providers to better identify, reach and meet their needs.¹⁵ As with the national target of universal Internet availability by 2005, local e-government is expected to have this in place by the same year.

There are 388 local authorities in England alone and each provides more than 700 services.¹⁶ Each is autonomous, with its own local priorities, service standards and Council Tax levels set by their elected councillors. There is, therefore, a compelling reason for local authorities to exploit the opportunities offered by ICT to transform the quality and efficiency of their services, and where possible, to align and integrate them with those of other public and community bodies. In order to spearhead the implementation of local e-government, about 97 per cent of local authorities have two e-champions, comprising one councillor and one officer.¹⁷

While local authorities are responsible for implementing local e-Government services, Central Government allocates funds. Through their Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) statements, local authorities have to explain their strategies and business plans to enable e-service delivery to Central Government. Yearly IEGs are required to inform Central Government of the progress and efforts towards e-Government,¹⁸ after which Government earmarks a budget for further support of local e-Government. The majority of local councils achieved more than 25 per cent electronic service delivery in 2001, and are seemingly moving promisingly towards the target of availability of all services by 2005.

Despite the apparent smooth process towards implementation of local e-government, problems persist. Local authorities will have to overcome considerable challenges in order to achieve this target. An estimated £2.5 billion will be required to deliver their programs. Councils have also identified the lack of comprehensive information and effective coordination between different e-Government programs and have called for a national framework to improve the coherence of local e-Government strategy and policy. More significantly, a threat to further progress in implementation lies in the cost, lack of ICT skills and leadership capacity and skills in change management, project planning and business analysis, and the scale of cultural and organizational change required. A survey undertaken in 2003 underscored these capability gaps (ODPM, 2003). In June 2003 the local government IT managers' association, Socitm, criticized the ODPM for dropping a commitment to allow councils to focus resources on key local e-government services.¹⁹ Socitm argued that "the continued emphasis on achieving 100 per cent of *everything*," regardless of whether services will be used or not, "is in direct contradiction to principles of value for money."²⁰ This indiscriminate approach, according to local council senior policy administrators, has tended to dilute resources away from priority services, leaving local authorities still grappling to implement e-government effectively.²¹

Conclusions: The UK Experience

Through a variety of initiatives the UK has pursued generic e-Government policy objectives common to many European countries. Efforts have been made to increase the availability and accessibility of advanced ICT infrastructure, and promote the development and use of ICT-based services. Yet, unsurprisingly, policy implementation has proved difficult. The UK is a large country, with complex and changing public institutions and a large public sector employing over 3.5 million staff. In this context the introduction of new technologies and associated practices calls for substantial changes requiring a wide variety of initiatives. The size and complexity of the public sector is also reflected in the extent of coordination problems despite a political tradition that is more centralist than in countries like the Netherlands. Coordination, which once lay in the OeE, continues to be a primary responsibility of the eGU. For instance, the head of eGU held its first Chief Information Officer Council in January 2005. The group comprises IT professionals from across all Government departments, agencies and local

government to build the “team culture” and is tasked with the development of a public sector IT strategy that will produce a career structure for Government IT professionals. Its underpinning rationale lies in the eGU’s belief that the “IT professionalization” of the British Civil Service will significantly improve the project management of Government IT projects. The head of eGU stated, “My position as head of the IT profession in Government is arguably one of the most pivotal roles and I can only discharge that if the rest of the CIOs [chief information officers] in Government buy in to that approach. The question is how can we collectively improve the capacity and capability of people in Government to implement IT enabled-projects more successfully than in the past” (Arnott, 2004). Yet, like the OeE, the eGU is not an executive body and cannot mandate implementation of any policy, but given that the head of the eGU is also Government’s Chief IT Officer, it is conceivable that he is better placed than the e-Envoy to accomplish Government’s e-Government agenda, albeit not without difficulty. After all, his role is to encourage adoption of best practice and guidance, and to reduce the likelihood of bad practice on the part of departments and agencies that continue to work discretely. As Government’s Chief IT Officer and with extensive experience in IT management consultancy,²² it is also likely that he will be alert to the need for customization of e-Government IT systems for different services (best practice) and thereby attempt to match IT systems to the “unique reality” of each public service (Heeks, 2001, p. 163).

Thus, despite the centralizing role of the eGU, it realizes that the size and scale of the programs already underway make it impractical to run them all from the center. The head of the eGU acknowledges that “strong departmental accountability with a credible central unit [i.e., the eGU] to tackle genuinely pan-governmental issues is the right approach. Things work less well when the centre tries to dictate” (Arnott, 2004, #39). Yet, this is not to imply that Government’s centralizing role has been restricted. As we have seen with the Local Government Implementing Electronic Government statements, delegation of authority increases the need to report to Central Government. Furthermore, as also discussed above, the complaint of local councils of “a lack of a national framework” suggests that fragmentation of information exists in which the central authority somehow appears to be reluctant to share information with local agencies. Such a situation is not unusual for countries with a centralized decision-making structure (OECD, 2003).

Finally, the focus on measurable targets is a general characteristic of UK policy across all areas, including e-Government policy. The pursuit

of such targets, which are by their own nature short term, is linked to short policy cycles and is compounded by electoral and ministerial cycles, a problem explicitly recognized by interviewees in the UK. Occasionally, however, Government has had to modify this “measurement and target based” approach to policy assessment as implementing agencies fall well short of achieving initial targets.

THE NETHERLANDS²³

The Dutch Government’s policy for e-Government was formulated in the 1998 *Action Programme Electronic Government* (Actie Programma Elektronische Overheid). The document called for annual progress reports on four main objectives:

- achieving electronic access to all public institutions;
- improving the provision of public services;
- improving internal management;
- targeting specific user groups.

We will focus on three areas that cut across this set of objectives: (1) the use of ICTs to provide public sector information to citizens, (2) the efforts to coordinate the procurement of ICT systems and services across Government departments and agencies, and (3) initiatives aimed at key target groups, for example, among disadvantaged communities.

Public Sector Information

A priority of the Dutch Government is to ensure that communications between Government and citizens take place electronically. In 1999 this objective was formulated as a target that 25% of all public communications should take place digitally. Several initiatives and programs have been set up to achieve this goal, for instance, the OL 2000, which is a program to develop a coherent and transparent network of physical (counters, information pillars) and virtual (websites) public-private interfaces in several selected areas including housing, healthcare and trade and industry. The *Kenniscentrum Informatievoorziening Bedrijfsvoering Overheid* [Expertise Center on IT management in the public sector] (KIBO) deals with the management of public administration processes and coordinates the different ICT-related activities within the various ministries and other Government organizations. It has launched

several initiatives including an effort to streamline data collection by Government, and an initiative to promote the use of open standards and open source software. A simplified structure for the Netherlands e-government strategy and implementation is shown in Figure 2.

Additionally, the Dutch Government has implemented targeted initiatives in a number of areas, including the digitization of the electoral processes, and programs to study and develop the ICT-mediated relationship between Government and citizens. Organizationally, a central role in developing and implementing public sector information policy is undertaken by two main organizations:

- ICTU (ICT Uitvoeringsorganisatie). The Dutch organization for ICT in the public sector, is in charge of implementing ICT programs in the public sector;
- ELO (Center of Expertise in Electronic Government), an initiative of the Ministry of Interior to create a platform to bring together experts and exchange information on different e-Government initiatives.

There have been several areas in which substantial progress has been made. First, the portal www.overheid.nl offers access to more than 1000 public websites (ministries, advisory boards, semi-public authorities, provinces, local governments, water boards, etc.). The portal also offers access to all official documents since 1995 and to relevant papers and

FIGURE 2. Simplified Structure for Dutch e-Government Strategy and Implementation

documents discussed or to be discussed in Parliament. The site is intensively used. In addition, there are several areas of public information that have recently been made available in digital format.²⁴

Procurement of ICT Systems and Services

To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of electronic communication, data exchanges between all public organizations and institutions need to be standardized. To achieve this objective, in 1999 the program *Stroomlijning Basisgegevens* [Streamlining Basic Data] was introduced. The program ended in 2003 and according to the responsible minister,²⁵ was estimated to be a success, having received a high level of acceptance in all parts of Government. Yet, the actual development of a reliable common public infrastructure has yet to be achieved. Since many ministries are involved (Economic Affairs, Interior Affairs, Environmental Planning and Housing, Justice, Social Affairs, Ethnic Integration, Finances), this is not expected to be easy. The consensus model followed by the Dutch government in these matters has been criticized in a report pleading for a more top-down approach.²⁶

Attempts have been made to organize public procurement of ICT equipment and services so that it could be monitored from a central direction unit. In theory, the Ministry of the Interior is responsible, but in practice it has been unable to execute leadership in the adoption of XML and Open Source Software. This is because the different ministries have preferred to protect their own independence in this area. The outcome is lack of coordination and standardization. In one area, however, there was a relative success: the OT2000 (Government Telecommunications, 2000) project on the public procurement of telecommunication services. OT2000 was an initiative of the Ministry of Interior attempting to raise the quality of the telecommunications services, reduce their costs, plan new services and to reach a level of inter-ministerial standardization and harmonization.

The initiative provides an example of how to coordinate different parts of Government—both national and local—on ICT procurement matters. In the initial stages, between 1995 and 1999, it was apparent that to organize the different ministries on the same technical platform was to be a very tall order. There were different requirements and few ministries collaborated in the program. Also, there was criticism that the final package of telecommunication services that was presented was too limited and lacked innovative and future-oriented aspects. The package to be acquired was then divided into three main lots (fixed national,

mobile national and international), and two providers were selected per lot. A total of 250 central and local public institutions joined in the final procurement procedure.²⁷ As a follow-up to this fairly successful initiative, ICTU organized ON21, aiming at a joint procurement of ICTs for government organizations and agencies. An outcome of this initiative is a joint contract with Citrix, an organization providing telecommuting services.

Finally, the OSOSS (Open Standards and Open Source Software) platform was launched in May 2003. OSOSS aims at developing an open standards and open source software community at all levels of Government. Typically, Government does not plan to force down this development, but through interactive mechanisms provided by OSOSS. OSOSS aims at providing a catalogue, being a service provider and developer, all with the aim to promote the use of open standards and open source software in the Netherlands. One big city, the Hague, has already adopted the “open” policy. The OSOSS website (www.ososs.nl) serves as a focal point for all Government organizations interested in open standards and open source software.

Engaging User Groups

Dutch policy includes several important initiatives aimed at enabling disadvantaged groups to use advanced ICTs. The project Digital Playing Grounds (*Trapveldjes*) originated in 1999 sought to close the “digital divide,” improve the labor market prospects of residents in problem areas and strengthen social cohesion. “Playing Grounds” are locations where people come together to learn how to use ICTs and continue to practice and experiment.

The three-year project was financed by the Large Cities Department of the Ministry of Interior, and was organized together with a number of specialized institutions and foundations.²⁸ The specific organization of the Grounds was left to the local authorities and therefore varies with the character of the target groups and the specific characteristics of each location. The centers were concentrated in “problem areas” in the 30 biggest Dutch cities. Almost half of them were established in community centers, about 25% in libraries and the others mainly within educational organizations and youth centers.

Taking into account that the original objective of the program was the establishment of 43 locations, that 243 Playing Grounds were established makes it an enormous success. Yet, seen from a quality perspective it should be noted that one-third of these initiatives operates

above expectations, while another one-third is working on a level far below its initial target.²⁹ In many cases the funds were allocated through existing decentralized welfare channels. The reluctance of these groups to collaborate with the educational and business communities has, in many cases, limited the extent of local commitment to specific projects. In the end, implementation has depended on the enthusiasm and talents of specific individuals.

Breeding Grounds (*Broedplaatsen*) is a project supporting the development of a wide range of innovative ICT services. It was launched in 2002 and it is still operational. It is an “umbrella project” of the Large Cities Department, Ministry of the Interior, and coordinates a number of projects presented by four cities (Amsterdam, Den Haag, Eindhoven, Deventer). The project builds on the Playing Grounds initiative and can be regarded as a further and more structured step in the development and use of ICT services. Whereas Playing Grounds were considered centers where people could acquire basic digital capabilities, Breeding Grounds aimed to promote and develop more sophisticated use of the available infrastructure and more innovative ICT capabilities. Projects under the Breeding Grounds umbrella project address areas such as neighborhood safety matters, citizen participation and education.

In order to support the cities that are involved in the project, a separate organization was established—the Institute for Social Quality Matters. In total a budget of €7.3 million was allocated for this initiative. The scheme, however, is based on 50 per cent co-financing by the local authorities or the private sector.

Despite the decentralized nature of the implementation of Breeding Grounds and the ready participation by local authorities, there are several reasons to expect the program to fall apart. There are no clear criteria for the degree of innovation or social coherence (two very different objectives) that are being sought, and consequently, it appears as if many “hobby-projects” are being brought under the program. The assortment of projects, each with very different objectives and user groups, coupled with the lack of professional program management has emerged as a serious problem. Improvisation seems to set the agenda. Unlike the British case in which attempts to “decentralize” the implementation of local e-Government has enhanced the power of the central authority, in the Dutch case, it appears that decentralization has indeed restricted the power of the Dutch Government.

Conclusions: The Dutch e-Government Experience

Since 1994 Dutch e-Government policy has invested substantial effort in consultation processes and studies. Much energy has been invested and several measures have been taken to consult various public agencies, non-governmental organizations and business representatives, to investigate market and technologies, and to forge a national consensus. Yet the policy implementation process has been slow, as it is clearly shown by the sluggish progress in the adoption of coordinated approaches to the public procurement of ICT systems and services. Policy implementation has found it difficult to catch up with a rapidly changing environment.

A feature of the Dutch political landscape is the emphasis on consensus building. On the one hand this orientation has sometimes been quite inefficient, on the other hand it can be concluded that consensual approaches have initiated projects that would have otherwise not been undertaken. On a generic level Dutch e-Government policies are part of a broader ICT policy aiming to develop a shared vision on the emerging information society (Molas-Gallart et al., 2003). The Dutch Government has sought a broad involvement of all public and private stakeholders, including all network operators, service providers, new entrants, local communities and councils, etc. The elaborate policy-formation process and lengthy consensus-seeking practices have often proved unable to respond appropriately to shifts in the ICT domain. Combined with the rigid division of responsibilities between the relevant ministries, a major obstacle has emerged to introduce more coordinated implementation strategies. Since one ministry does not have authority over others the process becomes more of a mutual advising and monitoring effort than a strictly coordinated implementation strategy.

Policy coherence had been lost as separate ministries, agencies and other authorities, launched their own projects and policies in the absence of clear political leadership. Program coherence suffered with the process of decentralization and delegation that led to the involvement of lower levels of Government and resulted in the Ministry of the Interior finding it impossible to execute leadership. Further, policy evaluation has been patchy. Instead of full-blown formal evaluation exercises, a dominant practice of cross-national benchmarking has evolved over the years. In these exercises, input, process and output indicators of several countries are compared, lessons and "best practices" learnt and conclusions drawn.

In international benchmarking exercises undertaken in 2000 and 2002, the Netherlands performed well in the provision of services (such as income tax returns by electronic means) to citizens, but achieved a below average performance in the provision of public sector services to businesses and across public departments and organizations.³⁰ Yet these exercises are not tantamount to evaluations of domestic acceptance, use and potential of existing e-Government policies. Instead, in the Netherlands cross-national benchmarking has been used as an instrument for policy learning, while domestic learning from previous implementation experience is limited. However, in December 2003 the Dutch Government launched a new e-Government vision and program of action in its "Modernizing Government" policy. This new policy, informed by the work of the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy, builds on the earlier works in e-Government and outlines the lines along which Government should be modernized and lays out a detailed action plan that provides a starting point for a fundamental re-examination both of the way in government works and of the relationship between government and civil society. The policy was articulated in a series of ambitions to improve services, regulate less and differently, organize Central Government better and improve relations between Central Government, the provinces and municipalities.³¹

This next phase in Dutch e-Government policy continued with the publication in 2004 of two further policy documents designed to clarify (rather than dictate) the direction of policy in this area. In February 2004 a nationwide ICT agenda was published with the clear aim of making better use of the possibilities offered by ICT and to realize improved economic and social returns. The ICT Agenda focuses on what can be achieved in the short term, but is also designed to a living document that will develop over time. This was followed in September 2004 by a policy statement on the Modernizing Government action plan called "Towards the Electronic Government" that provided an overview of the agenda for e-Government within the Netherlands. This document was clearly positioned as not being a "blueprint" for e-government, but rather a consultative document that would be subject to discussion with all interested parties before policy is finalized. This statement laid out future actions within seven domains: electronic access to the Government; electronic authentication; unique numbers for citizens and businesses; key registers; electronic personal identification (chip cards) electronic information exchange; fact connections between Government organizations. The "Towards the Electronic Government" action plan was designed to provide a guideline for coordination and manage-

ment by stakeholder groups and provide direction for the next phase of e-Government within the Netherlands.

The Dutch policy towards e-Government can be divided into two clear stages. In the early stage, the Dutch Government deliberately opted not to drive implementation through central imposition of policy diktats. In the second stage clear policy directions have emerged and an agenda for e-Government has been identified, subject to consensual policy approaches. In this second stage e-Government has also become part of the radical re-examination of the roles of government and civil society (Dutch society).

Decentralization of responsibilities and bottom-up consensus building are characteristic building blocks of the Dutch policy-making process and have extended to the implementation of e-Government policies. Although they can assure a strong and broad commitment in the long run, such level of decentralization makes it difficult to formulate alert and flexible strategies and tends to lead to bureaucratic inefficiencies. As stated before such an approach has its advantages (bottom-up practical projects, broad commitment) and disadvantages (inefficiencies, delays, no clear-cut decision making). Yet, despite the bottom-up orientation of the Dutch policy-making scene some of the e-Government programs and projects launched lacked a clear demand orientation. The stimulation of new and innovative public services was, for instance, largely seen from a technological and/or supply-side perspective. As a result, in the first stage of the policy process most policy interest was focused on infrastructure issues, rather than service and user involvement issues. This has changed in the second stage as clear central e-Government policy directions have now emerged and have been combined with the examination of the roles of government and civil society within the Netherlands, thereby providing for potentially radical policy outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS: TWO CONTRASTING POLICY MODELS

The preceding section has revealed that the UK and Dutch Governments have followed different strategies when pursuing their e-Government goals. The UK's distinctive approach to e-Government policy definition, implementation and evaluation reflects a political structure that is much more centralized than the Netherlands. The UK e-Government policy has followed a centralized policy model involving a combination of top-down implementation and technology-push initiatives. The particular challenge facing the UK has been to develop e-Government

policies across numerous and diverse ministries, agencies and local authorities: a large public sector employing over 3.5 million people. The British approach has faced difficulties in achieving its goal of delivering e-Government services that address citizens' expectations and needs. Coordination across departments has proved difficult, and large centralized initiatives have met with all kinds of implementation difficulties. In response, the UK has attempted to move away from a technology-push approach towards demand-pull initiatives that take into account citizen demands and needs for e-Government services.

In comparison, Dutch policy in general and approaches to e-Government in particular are decentralized and seek to foster the emergence of bottom-up initiatives. The Dutch approach seeks to develop policy consensus and engage in policy initiatives that will reach all areas of society. Achieving these objectives requires consultation among a broad range of stakeholders in the policy definition stage. The problems that the Dutch approach to e-Government policy are, not surprisingly, different in nature to those encountered in the UK. The consensus-seeking process has often slowed down the rollout of new initiatives, and a myriad of relatively small local-level schemes has made it difficult to co-ordinate across initiatives, and to develop a coherent national-level strategy.

These differences are not only the results of policy choices, or of different institutional structures, but are also deeply rooted in the political culture of both countries. Interestingly, we noted during our interviews that interviewees in the UK were using different metaphors from those favored by their Dutch counterparts when describing e-Government policies and their operation. In the UK, interviewees invoked the metaphor of "a machine" enabling Central Government to initiate actions by pulling levers, and developing and engaging new mechanisms. In the Netherlands an organic metaphor was usually preferred. Interviewees often talked about Central Government as a facilitator of actions rather than as a developer of strategies, its role being to create a space for autonomous initiatives and to "let a thousand flowers bloom." But as we have seen above, there is an emergent trend of Central Government taking a more direct step in directing where the thousand flowers will bloom. The verdict is still out on this fledgling departure from its past practice, but what still remains are the central roles of consensus building and "grass roots" implementation.

The differences between the UK and the Dutch approach can be stylized in the form of two different models as summarized in Table 1. These models do not necessarily reflect the complex detail of the different policy approaches to what is a rapidly moving policy field.

TABLE 1. Policy Models—Ideal Types

The Centralized, Top-Down Model (UK)	The Decentralized, Bottom-Up Model (The Netherlands)
Centralized politics (e.g., “first past the post” political system)	Decentralized politics (e.g., proportional representation and ample room for local initiatives)
Top-down initiative	Bottom-up initiatives
Machine metaphor: “build the machine and pull levers”	Organic metaphor: “let a thousand flowers bloom”
Central government’s role: implementing “grand designs”	Central government’s role: mobilizing societal initiatives, a “shared vision” for ICT, and consensus for implementation
Centrally controlled strategy—horizontal coordination across ministries and departments	Distributed policy actions—vertical separation of ministries and departments and local government
Relations between government and citizens: hierarchical and directed	Relations between government and citizens: horizontal and self-organizing
National guidelines for local ICT initiatives	Local solutions for local ICT initiatives with central help desk and expert functions
<i>Policy definition:</i> based on strategic and expert advice	<i>Policy definition:</i> loosely defined framework based on consensus among stakeholders
<i>Policy implementation:</i> rapid action, reporting and feedback	<i>Policy implementation:</i> consultation, lengthy discussions and recommendations
<i>Policy evaluation:</i> targets, internally focused, e.g., progress of ICT policies and projects	<i>Policy evaluation:</i> externally oriented, e.g., international ICT benchmarking

Rather, the “ideal types” are drawn to highlight key differences in the national policy models that the two countries are following.

In terms of its suitability to the definition and execution of e-Government policies, no model proved to be superior: each has its own merits and faces important, albeit different, problems. It is however important to note that, if we consider the policy process as divided into different phases, the two models are better suited to different tasks within the process. In our comparative study, top-down approaches appeared as superior when dealing with the definition of general policy objectives and frameworks. Here, the main advantage of a top-down centralized style is that it permits greater and more effective coordination of the government’s policy agenda. Central government agencies can provide clear frameworks for the development of e-Government services and develop clear policy objectives. These can act as general points of reference to frame and support specific initiatives developed closer to the context of application. In the absence of such generic guidelines, local initiatives may lack the necessary political and financial support to achieve their objectives, a

problem that has often been faced in the Dutch context. Furthermore, the Dutch emphasis on consensus seeking to develop a shared vision can lead to delays and stagnation in policy definition (see Figure 3).

However, when it comes to implementation (i.e., the processes by which policy objectives are pursued in practice) bottom-up processes have clear advantages. It is necessary to be closer to the user needs to be able to interpret them and translate them into appropriate service offerings that can then be taken up by their targeted users. When the centralized definition of policy objectives is extended to centralized implementation, and specific initiatives and their targets are defined away from the context of use, problems with take-up emerge and the agencies and departments in charge may resist the perceived imposition of policy practices. Such implementation problems were common in the UK. Instead, the Dutch Government's preference for a "light touch" (albeit changing) and the practice of devolving policy implementation in many areas to local authorities allows for a more effective identification of user needs and, consequently, increases the opportunities for the successful rollout of specific e-Government initiatives.

In summary, the adequacy of a centralizing or decentralizing approach will depend on the stage of policy formation. A decentralized approach can provide a stimulus for the generation of e-Government initiatives, but, on its own, it is unable to provide a coherent strategy to guide and support different policy initiatives across the country. In the Netherlands, even

FIGURE 3. Actors in a Mixed Model

talking about different policy *stages* proved difficult or inadequate. As policies stemmed from the bottom up, and were in fact defined “on the go” as they were being implemented, it was impossible to make a clear distinction between policy definition and policy implementation. Yet, as the Dutch case shows, sacrificing policy coordination for a persistent decentralized approach has risks: the Dutch example shows a slow process of e-Government diffusion with a tendency towards “stop and go” processes. In an emergent area, where the diffusion of new technologies may threaten entrenched institutional and individual positions (and we would argue that e-Government is such a case), a policy to support the introduction of new technologies will benefit from central coordination and the clear definition of policy objectives. The pursuit of policy consensus is likely, at best, to slow down the policy-making process and, at worst, result in muddled policy objectives. Yet forcing a centralizing top-down process on the details of policy implementation is likely to encounter resistance from those in charge of implementing the policy, and may run counter to the political traditions and practices of countries with a diffuse distribution of political power. Decentralization approaches will usually be better suited to the implementation stages of a policy.

Although we have been able to derive a clear policy lesson from our comparative analysis we must end with a cautionary note on the transferability of such lessons. The formation and implementation of e-Government policies does not develop in a vacuum. Political and cultural differences certainly play a role in explaining differences across countries, and we should not expect policy lessons to transfer easily across countries. To a great extent the reason why the UK and the Netherlands have developed such distinctive policy models can be sought in the different political and cultural systems from which they emerged. For instance, the UK’s distinctive approach to e-Government policy definition, implementation and evaluation follows a political structure that is much more centralized than in the Netherlands. From our analysis, we have been able to derive the challenges that these policy models face and suggest broad generic alternative approaches. These suggestions, however, cannot be taken as more than general policy principles whose adaptation to different national contexts will need to take into account existing political structures and cultures.

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NOTES

1. The study was carried out by the authors in collaboration with a team of Dutch experts and researchers. Its main objective was to support ITPS' assessment of Swedish ICT policy and its work to develop long-term approaches to promote ICT use through a comparative policy analysis of ICT initiatives in other European countries.

2. A key element in the diffusion of ICTs is their use by Government offices and agencies. The role of Government use can be twofold. First, as large customers, Government agencies can act as "first users" and influence the emergence of formal or *de facto* standards. Second, the use of ICTs for the delivery of public information and services can provide a powerful channel for the diffusion of these technologies among users.

3. It has even been questioned whether one can distinguish between both aspects of the policy process. See, for instance, Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier (1993).

4. On the concepts of top-down and bottom-up implementation see, for instance, Chapter 3 in Hill and Hupe (2002).

5. In addition, each department appoints a senior official as *e-Champion*. As a group, the e-Champions support the e-Minister and e-Envoy in driving forward the *UK Online* strategy. The e-Champions are organized into two groups: e-Commerce and e-Communications.

6. According to a Booz Allen Hamilton benchmarking report (Booz Allen Hamilton, 2002), the UK has been successful in achieving its e-Government objectives: it ranks second after the US in the uptake of e-Government and e-Commerce services.

7. A channel is defined as a means for delivering services to citizens. The main electronic channels are Internet, mobile phones, DTV, smart cards, kiosks and call centers.

8. Office of the e-Envoy (2002) and interview with a senior officer at the OeE.

9. The ability to achieve this policy goal, however, may be undermined by the scaling back of the OeE's activities that took place in 2003 (see below).

10. His task is also to ensure that ICT continues to support the business transformation of Government and build on the achievements of the last four years of the Office of the e-Envoy. Where the former e-Envoy predominantly focused on online services, the eGU head is to cover the full breadth of Government IT systems and processes.

11. For instance, by 2001 only 40% of low-value transactions were carried out via e-procurement methods in comparison to an initial target of 90%.

12. Jane Gibbs, Director of e-Commerce at the OGC speaking at a CSSA conference. Reported in Mike Simons (2001), "Blair's unrealistic e-procurement deadlines dropped" *Computer Weekly*, February 15.

13. Three reports were published under the title "e-Procurement: Cutting through the hype," available at the OGC website www.ogc.goc.uk.

14. See also ODPM (2002).

15. Especially where services are e-enabled, but accessed through physical channels such as contact centers and one-stop shops located in post offices, Government encourages local authorities to deliver these services jointly. Yet, Government recognizes that there will be limits to such integration of services primarily because of the capacity of staff to provide effective customer service across the vast potential range of local e-services.

16. This does not take into account the hundreds of other local authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

17. This mirrors the e-Ministers at Central Government.

18. According to our interviewees and other documentary sources, the IEG process has been successful in engaging councils and in promoting a corporate approach to tackling e-government. At the national level, the IEG process also provides a valuable source of information from which Central Government can identify progress in implementing local e-government.

19. <http://fastlink.headstar.com/soc2>.

20. *E-Government Bulletin*, June 30, 2003.

21. Further, ODPM's policy change seems to be out of tune with other Government policies. For instance, the OeE, which was still operational in 2003, had already shifted away from insisting on digitization of *all* public services and, instead, had focused more strongly on key services, such as health and education.

22. Ian Wartmore was Accenture's Chief Executive Officer.

23. This section draws on research carried out by Wim Hulsink, Jack Spaapen, Willem Gooijer for the report Molas-Gallart, Tang et al. (2003).

24. A good example is the Elektronisch Loket Rechterlijke Organisatie [Electronic Counter Legal Organisation], which offers relevant information about legal procedures.

25. Letter of the Minister of Interior to the Parliament, March 19, 2003.

26. Commissie Docters van Leeuwen, *Burger en Overheid in de informatiesamenleving. De noodzaak van institutionele innovatie*, The Hague, Ministry of Interior, 2001 (Citizen and government in the information society. The need for institutional innovation).

27. The average savings on the existing tariffs were estimated to be 18%. The project has just entered a new term and will continue until 2006.

28. For instance, *Nederland Kennisland* (The Netherlands Knowledge Country), IPP (Institute for Public and Policy), Seniorweb and Technika 10.

29. Only 123 of the Playing Grounds can be at present self-sufficient, the rest can fail if further public funds are not made available.

30. Internationale ICT toets 2000 and Internationale ICT toets 2002.

31. Kenniscentrum Elektronische Overheid – www.elo.nl/elo/english/egov/policy/index.jsp.

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