Abstract

This paper is about the complex task of organizing the use of ICT in government. Ideas about how to handle the task are examined by analysis of two recent reports on the use of ICT in Australia—the Gershon report on the management of ICT in the federal government and a report by Ovum on e-government in Victoria. First, a comparative analysis of the main themes of the two reports is made. Second, the analyses of the impact of ICT on government by Jane Fountain and on business by Peter Weill and Jeanne Ross are compared. This is done to illuminate the issues analysed by Gershon and Ovum and to suggest that despite the differences between government and business the work of Fountain and Weill/Ross is complementary. However it is concluded that even the most promising suggestions for improving the governance of ICT in the public sector remain provisional.

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ORGANIZING FOR E-GOVERNMENT: IN SEARCH OF EFFECTIVE ICT GOVERNANCE IN AUSTRALIA

INTRODUCTION

E-government is about the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in government. This paper is about the complex task of organizing the use of ICT in government. For developed as well as developing countries the task is hard. Costs of ICT projects are tangible and immediate; benefits are diffused and delayed.

Two threshold reasons are often given. The first is the impact on arrangements in the public sector of the numinous benefits sought from ICT. As Dunleavy and Margetts (2000) have argued, the Web era holds out simultaneously two very different promises both of which are frustrated by cultural barriers in the public sector. ICT promises

...genuinely open government (backed by the power of rapid reaction, cost-sharing on-line communities) at the same time as more efficient government. The cultural change that the civil services of liberal democracies all need to grasp in the web era, and yet find hard to face, is a change towards making their organizational operations visible in detail to each other and to citizens.

The second is that developing effective ICT capability entails steering through contradictory styles of organization. As Fountain (2005:22) has argued:

The virtual state is intersectoral, interagency, and intergovernmental yet achieves connection through standardization, rationalization, and systems interdependence.

For these reasons deploying ICT in government entails much more than getting the technology right.

Initiatives in technology can be disrupted at almost any stage by contested views about authority, feasibility and value. The commitment of the highest levels of legislative and executive institutions, the leadership and operating systems of diverse public sector agencies, and the skills and engagement of staff at many levels all need to be aligned. Substantial benefits from ICT initiatives for users, whether citizens or office holders, seem to depend on the ability of very complex organizations to craft strategies that require deep changes to organizational practice. In Charles Lindblom’s (1977) terms such strategies need to employ both analysis and interaction. Analysis is needed to make a business case for ICT initiatives; interaction is needed to establish the value of initiatives for citizens, manage the organizational requirements of implementation, and engage meaningfully with citizen demands for participation.

Familiar problems in organizing ICT in the public sector include:

- Decision makers find it hard to determine relevant issues
- Attention of key decision makers wanders
- Imbalance between expectations and feasibility
- Imbalance between in-sourcing and out-sourcing
- Suppliers over promise and under deliver
- Large, complex projects hard to manage
- Churning of coordination agencies and arrangements
- Machinery of government changes
- Projects uncoordinated
- Political sensitivity about contents of websites
- Institutional and legal barriers to information sharing
Chronic cost overruns
Critical audit reports
Political attacks
Staff disruption
Cultural barriers
Communication problems between managers and ICT staff
Demand that ICT staff patch up flawed systems
Web based access to services partial, uncoordinated and static
Expectations about improved analysis and advice for decision makers not met.

Ideas about how to handle such problems are examined through the lenses provided by two recent reports on the use of ICT in Australia. The reports are: *Review of the Australian Government's Use of Information and Communication Technology*, by Sir Peter Gershon, commissioned by the federal Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Lindsay Tanner MP and presented in August 2008; and *Victorian State Government E-Government Landscape Scan*, by Ovum, a business and technology consulting firm, commissioned by the Citizen Access and Transformation Group in the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Victoria, presented also in August 2008. The two reports provide an opportunity to compare contemporary trends at different levels of government in the same country.

The authors brought to these reports substantial expertise: Sir Peter Gershon had a long career in the computing and telecommunications industries in Britain before becoming the first Chief Executive of the Office of Government Commerce in the UK, after which he returned to the private sector; the principal author of the Ovum report, Dr Steve Hodgkinson had experience as an IT consultant and internet entrepreneur before becoming Deputy Chief Information Officer in Victoria and then joining Ovum.

First, a comparative analysis of the main themes of the two reports is made. Second, the analyses of the impact of ICT on government by Jane Fountain (2001, 2005, 2007, 2008; Mergel, Schweik and Fountain 2009) and on business by Peter Weill and Jeanne Ross (2004, 2009) are compared. This is done to illuminate further the issues analysed by Gershon and Ovum and to suggest that despite the differences between government and business the work of Fountain and Weill/Ross is complementary. Problems of organizing the use of ICT are about more than culture. They are about the very structures and strategies of governments.

**GERSHON AND OVUM REPORTS**

The reports share a common concern with securing the support of political leaders at the centre of government, coordination mechanisms in the public sector, and value for money from investments in ICT (annual expenditure on ICT is approximately $6 billion federally and $1.4 billion in Victoria). Both were prepared against a background of periodic reshuffles of responsibilities for ICT, tussles over ICT strategy, and allocation of considerable responsibility for strategy to finance departments.

At the federal level responsibility for ICT under the Howard coalition government (1996-2007) was decentralised to agencies. Responsibilities for coordination were allocated to committees of senior officials and, for much of its term to a coordination agency (National Office for the Information Economy, renamed Australian Government Information Office (AGIMO) in early 2004) with little formal power located in an operating portfolio. Later in 2004 AGIMO was shifted to the Department of Finance and Administration. In Victoria responsibility for ICT strategy under the Brack and Brumby Labor government (1999- ) was located first with Multimedia Victoria (MMV) set up by the previous coalition government (1992-1999). Responsibility then shifted briefly to an office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) located in the Department of Premier and Cabinet. It was then diffused between the Department of Treasury and Finance and operating agencies. In this
reshuffle the Treasurer assumed again the role of Minister for Information and Communications Technology but depended on advice from different agencies.

The reports differ however in authority. Gershon reported to an attentive client; Ovum’s analysis regretted the absence of such a client in Victoria. After a period of drift a new federal government showed interest in taking charge of public sector ICT as part of a more coordinated approach to leading the public sector; after periods of intensive support for ICT under two different governments Victoria appeared to allow directions to fragment. The Gershon report was commissioned by a senior minister, whose portfolio included significant responsibility for ICT. The report linked proposals for ministerial and senior officer oversight of ICT strategies with an ambitious agenda of cost savings. The government adopted the recommendations in full. In contrast Ovum’s report was commissioned by a section of just one of a number of public service departments concerned with ICT as a contribution to discussion. Deliberately it made no explicit recommendations. The Citizen Access and Transformation Group which commissioned the report was formed from elements of the disbanded office of the CIO and located in another agency before transfer to the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Victoria. There it joined other elements from Multimedia Victoria, which had itself been shuffled between agencies.

**Gershon**

Gershon concluded that weak governance (direction and control) of ICT in the federal public sector had led to poor outcomes. Weak governance within agencies compounded weaknesses in arrangements across government as a whole (Gershon: 2):

> [T]he current model of very high levels of agency autonomy, including the ability to self-approve opt-ins to whole-of-government approaches in the ICT domain, leads to sub-optimal outcomes in the context of prevailing external trends, financial returns, and the aims and objectives of the current Government. The impact of this autonomy has been heightened by a previous lack of strong focus on whole-of-government ICT issues at both Ministerial and top official levels. This conclusion applies no matter how well-intentioned individual agencies are in their pursuit of whole-of-government outcomes.

More detailed concerns included: failure to consider necessary ICT capability before announcing policies; sparse reporting of actual measurement of benefits; limited re-use of effective applications; and comments of several agencies that coordination committees were not linked to the budget process, acted as ‘sand traps’ slowing down initiatives, and ‘tended to share issues rather than solve them’ (Gershon: 14, 20, 24, 27).

The report recommended ‘a major program of administrative reform and cultural change’ based on two critical requirements (Gershon: 4):

> [F]irst, sustained leadership and drive at Ministerial and top official levels: second, ensuring the enablers of change are properly resourced not only in funding terms but also skills of the right calibre.

Its primary recommendations aimed to improve governance and cut spending (Gershon: 3-4, 63-73):

- Governance: Ministerial and Secretaries’ committees to take responsibility and drive efficiency and effectiveness; opt-outs from whole of government activities to require approval of Ministerial Committee; central unit (a revised Australian Government Information Management Office) to support committees
- Capability: improve agency capability to manage ICT; common methodology for assessing agency capability
- ICT spend: cut the proportion of ICT spending on business as usual activities (BAU); aim to increase average proportion spent on new capability from 23% in 2007-8 to 30% in 2011-12
• Skills: create a service wide ICT career structure and cut the number of contractors
• Data centres: develop a whole-of-government approach
• Sustainable ICT: develop a whole-of-government plan to manage the energy costs and carbon footprint of government ICT.

It reinforced its recommendations with a detailed implementation plan, a draft list of broad ranging criteria for whole of government approaches (including economy of scale benefits, joined-up services and building in flexibility for machinery of government changes), and a more substantial role for AGIMO (including ‘identifying the need for common approaches (in areas such as standards, platforms, applications, infrastructure, business process and aggregated ICT procurement) and preparing the associated business cases…’) (Gershon: 4,105,106).

Following the Gershon report the government initiated an ICT Reform Program. AGIMO managed most implementation projects (http://www.finance.gov.au/e-government/strategy-and-governance/ict-projects.html#proj3). The government also established a Government 2.0 Taskforce to explore the use of Web 2.0 applications in government (http://gov2.net.au/about/). Taskforce consultations and deliberations are continuing. More controversially the government decided to set up a National Broadband Network to provide broadband connectivity throughout the country. Impacts on the telecommunications industry, especially the privatized provider Telstra which resisted the government’s plans, will be substantial.

The Gershon report and associated initiatives addressed strategic problems the resolution of which cannot be taken for granted. Scepticism remains abundant. Critics continue to bemoan the silos in the federal public sector, duplication of effort, uncoordinated initiatives, reluctance to release information to the public, and tentativeness in adapting Web 2.0 applications (For example: http://www.crikey.com.au/ 23 June 2009, 4 September 2009). Further, the report focused only on analysis and interaction inside the federal public sector. A key test of the government’s implementation of the Gershon report may be not only the success of particular projects but also whether it facilitates development of a more widely shared agenda for the future use of ICT in the public sector, federally and in other jurisdictions.

Ovum

Ovum took a wider view than Gershon, especially on comparative directions in e-government, government policy statements with implications for the use of ICT, cross jurisdictional issues, Web 2.0 developments, issues raised by Parliamentary inquiries, and the need for imaginative consideration of how ICT could enrich interaction between citizens and governments. However it shared many of the same concerns. Indeed Ovum commented that many of Gershon’s recommendations had already been implemented (or perhaps more accurately, tried) in Victoria. Ovum referred to e-government as a set of eight elements of ICT-enabled change (Ovum: Overview: para 4): easier access, service innovation, better engagement, better coordination, shared information, efficient operations, and ICT governance. It judged that Victoria had made significant progress on core elements: service transformation, aggregated procurement, common corporate applications, shared services (especially creation of CenITex—a centralized ICT services agency), creation of departmental chief information officer roles, and investment management processes (including the Gateway process of short structured reviews of a program or project that are carried out at key decision points in the program or project's life cycle, major project reporting processes and a project to report department ICT spending and initiatives). It also listed many complementary projects in progress in departments, including large-budget multiyear projects aiming to integrate information systems in complex field such as justice and health administration (Ovum: Appendix 1).

However it concluded that whole of government capabilities had eroded. In contrast with directions in the 1990s and early 2000s (an aggressive, centrally driven Government Online program in the 1990s; and a broad vision in a major policy statement entitled Putting People at the Centre, published in 2002), Ovum suggested that in 2008 the government preferred to drive ICT based
innovations within rather than between departments (Ovum: Section 3). It chronicled briefly the rise and fall of whole of government bodies such as the Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) in the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) in the then Department of Infrastructure. The government set up these offices after extensive deliberation in 2003 but quietly abolished them in 2006. It transferred whole of government ICT functions to a newly set up Government Services Group in the Department of Treasury and Finance (Ovum: Section 2). Focus appeared to shift from broad strategy to specific services and programs.

Ovum identified significant weaknesses in current arrangements (Ovum: Overview: para 18.2):

- the fragmented, and as a consequence diffuse, leadership of the e-government agenda
- project delivery practices
- promotion of reuse of systems and their components
- the visibility of drivers for service transformation in terms of empirical evidence of citizen's service needs and preferences.

It argued that (Ovum: Overview para 20-21):

> [L]eadership of the e-government agenda seems to have drifted to the edge of the radar (into the 'too hard' basket?). ICT is merging into the background in terms of its role as a source and driver of innovation and organisational reform. This is inconsistent with the reality that ICT is (a) increasingly, and unavoidably, an essential ingredient of virtually any public sector innovation, (b) a significant and rising cost, (c) a vital part of the 'organisational glue' that binds the different parts of the [Victorian Public Service] VPS together, and (d) difficult and risky.

No large and complex organisation today can afford to neglect enterprise-wide leadership of ICT without it inevitably sub-optimising achievement of enterprise outcomes that are dependent on process/system integration, information sharing and collaboration.

Ovum made no overall suggestions about what to do. On the grounds that circumstances in other countries were too different it cautioned against looking for guidance from practice elsewhere. It did however make three general suggestions. First, that stakeholders in Victoria would benefit from systematic discussion of the issues raised in its report. Second, that the government should widen its consideration of ICT beyond the current focus on programs (for example HealthSMART and Transport ticketing) and ‘plumbing’ (‘commodity’ ICT infrastructure and applications). Third, that closer consideration was also desirable of both citizen access channels and engagement and the internal functions of the public sector.

Ovum’s report provides a frank sketch of the difficulties of organizing ICT. The initiatives of the 1990s followed by *Putting People at the Centre* and a wide range of attractive projects did not provide a sure path forward. The quiet but tough change in 2006 away from overall coordination and towards a focus on programs, projects and technical support led from within the Department of Treasury and Finance throws the difficulties into high relief.

Three proximate reasons for Victoria’s gravitation to an incremental approach to ICT may be suggested. First, the gap between vision and practical management in *Putting People at the Centre* was too great. Internally, too many significant relationships within the public sector remained un-negotiated. Externally, projects that sought to engage citizens entailed too many opportunities for ministerial embarrassment. In effect, the Offices of the CIO and CTO may have been expected to resolve too many problems all at once. Second, as the government became more concerned with controlling IT budgets, capability to consider wider agendas declined. Projects and their budgets consumed most of the available energy. Third, initiatives in coordination came in the wrong sequence. Bodies such as the Offices of the CIO and CTO may have needed the prior establishment of strong budget and project controls. Information available on the public record is insufficient to test these suggestions. However, Ovum’s report and a steady stream of
audit criticisms and project delays (notoriously with the transport ticketing system) suggest that current arrangements remain under pressure. The potential for further changes exists.

The Gershon and Ovum reports show two governments grappling with the use of ICT in different but comparable ways. Gershon’s recommendations, promptly endorsed by government, set out centralised, budget focused directions in a public sector used to decentralised management of ICT. However, Victorian experience of vision and coordination giving way to incremental, agency-based directions holds warnings. Unintended consequences of implementation may be expected. Nevertheless, even partial implementation of Gershon’s recommendations may provide the federal public sector with a more confident platform than currently exists in Victoria from which to approach the wider opportunities for applying ICT in the public sector and reaching out to the community.

In considering the longer term impact of Gershon’s and Ovum’s analyses it will be important to remember the ingrained preferences for decentralization in the federal and Victorian public sectors. These are reinforced by outcomes based budgeting in both jurisdictions. The federal and Victorian governments are conglomerates of conglomerates. The whole of government strategies recommended by Gershon and preferred by Ovum need to address not only the desires of departments and agencies to chart their own course, but the often just as ingrained wish by units within such bodies to do the same.

FOUNTAIN AND WEILL/ROSS

The experience analysed by Gershon and Ovum shows that to manage ICT in the public sector sophisticated management of government organizations is needed. Interaction between organizations and technology puts pressure on both. In Gershon’s and Ovum’s analysis two challenges recur. The first is to secure informed and continuing ministerial and public service leadership at the highest levels. The second is to engage management, operational and technological capabilities in appropriate proportions at different levels throughout public sector organizations. In complementary ways Fountain and Weill/Ross suggest where to look for guidance about how to meet these challenges. Fountain focuses on organizations and how they influence and are influenced by ICT. Weill and Ross focus on how to manage the relevant elements of ICT throughout organizations. However Fountain writes about government and Weill/Ross write about business. A key question is whether such perspectives can indeed be complementary.

Seven significant propositions can be distilled from the work of Fountain and her collaborators. First is the complexity of interactions within government. Technology is applied through interactions between vendors and employees skilled in technology, and policy makers, managers and operators. Through such interactions ‘objective technology’ (hardware and software with a range of capabilities) becomes ‘enacted technology’ (those aspects of available systems that organizations choose to employ) (2001). Second is that technology is enacted by organizations in which significant characteristics are embedded. At a strategic level redesign of public organizations to take advantage of ICT is limited by constitutional provisions, departmental models of organization, public sector cultures, budgeting systems, and requirements for public accountability tightly linked to hierarchical structures. Proposals for cross agency collaboration encounter highly institutionalised obstacles (2001, 2005). Authoritative institutional leadership is essential, but such leadership also incurs high coordination costs (2007b:14, 16). Third is that bureaucracy and ICT reinforce each other. Both involve standardization, rationalization, interdependence and hierarchy. Fourth is that analysis of organizations needs to draw on a wide range of theory. Fountain began by exploring insights from new institutional economics. However later work found that to understand the activities of people working with ICT it was necessary to explore also sociological theories of organization behaviour (2007a). Fifth is that citizens are not customers. In a democratic system of government ‘citizens have deep obligations to government and governments have deep obligations to the polity’ (2005). Service provision is one among a number of government obligations. Overemphasising service provision at the expense of other government tasks is to
miss a significant part of what ICT in government may be able to do. Sixth is that in a world of cross border economic and social systems institutional redesign to support integrated cross boundary activities should assume priority. It is essential to examine the ‘core governance challenges in … networked projects’ including (2008:75):

[J]oint accountability, joint budgeting and resourcing, joint management and leadership, and joint operations. Laying the management and practical foundation for integrated initiatives is a key imperative for eGovernment and “next generation” public services.

Further (2008):

Rather than simply focusing at the boundary between Government and citizen, working upward in the value chain might focus attention on enabling legislation, budgetary processes, optimal workgroup structures and management, and flows of information and data that define many of the policy-related problem solving capacities of the state.

Seventh is that Web 2.0 tools appear to generate the need to ‘create, distribute and collect information outside the given hierarchical flow’, including information generated by citizen participation (Mergel, Schweik and Fountain: 1, 27). It is thus important to examine the ‘underlying fundamental structures that they might affect’ and ask whether they can ‘dramatically affect key public sector concerns such as transparency, accountability, communication and collaboration, and promote deeper and richer levels of civic engagement’ (2008:29).

Overall, Fountain suggests that organizing the use of ICT involves close attention to the institutions of government and the relationships on which they depend internally, with citizens, and increasingly with governments and citizens in other countries. ICT may limit some organizational options, especially in its reinforcement of bureaucracy. However, ICT cannot drive through entrenched organizational barriers that limit technology based initiatives. Promises of dramatic change are often followed by more prosaic impacts. Prospects for far reaching change in government through the use of ICT are less about technology than about reimagining government and how it relates to citizens (2007b).

Whereas Fountain probes widely and throws up big questions, Weill and Ross focus on how organizations can support their operating strategy with ICT. They acknowledge that technology is often regarded as a strategic liability. Their aim is to turn it into a strategic asset. Their recommendations are framed in the language of business and are based on extensive international research, mainly on business firms (2009: xi). However their research also includes public sector cases (2004:185) and they are sensitive to the complexities and culture of not for profit organizations (2004: 214). They acknowledge that in organizing ICT not for profit organizations will make more use of formal and joint decision making mechanisms. They suggest that their conclusions apply to government and not for profit organizations as well as to business (2009: xi).

Weill and Ross start from the proposition that businesses should determine an operating model and then build a digitized platform to support stable core operations. This entails close attention to governance (2009: 90):

The only way to deliver a digitized platform—and superior business value from IT—is to design IT decision rights and accountabilities so that daily decisions about IT support the firm’s strategic goals.

Building a digitized platform involves substantial change to individual roles, organizational structures and organizational culture; like Fountain they stress that ‘This is a fundamental business change and, thus a major leadership challenge’ (2009:17). As Fountain also noted, building a digitized platform entails judgments about standardization and integration. Weill and Ross crystallize such judgments into two strategic decisions (2009:34): ‘how much to standardize
business processes…and how much to integrate business processes’. They identify four operating models and requirements for digitized platforms (2009:34-5):

- **Diversification**: low standardization, low integration—shared services to support autonomous businesses
- **Coordination**: low standardization, high integration—shared data to support integrated management decisions
- **Replication**: high standardization, low integration—standard technologies and business processes to define a common brand
- **Unification**: high standardization, high integration—standardized technologies, business processes and shared data.

They recognize that choosing between models is hard. They suggest that one way to handle competing requirements is to have different operating models for different organizational levels and localities. However such choices need to be related always to strategic business needs, including rigorous analysis of costs and benefits.

In order to tighten relationships between technology investments and business needs they focus on three specific fields. First is the need to manage an overall ICT portfolio comprising distinct asset classes. They identify four separate technology asset classes (2009:58):

- **Strategic IT**: to increase sales and conduct business experiments
- **Informational IT**: to provide information for management
- **Transactional IT**: to cut business costs through automation
- **IT infrastructure**: to provide a shared base of IT services.

Second is the sequence for implementing strategic initiatives (2009:70):

- **Localizing**: rapidly grow new systems
- **Standardizing**: look for efficiencies through standardization and shared infrastructure
- **Optimizing**: disciplined enterprise processes and shared data as prescribed by operating model
- **Reusing**: think of business processes as reusable components for new but related opportunities.

They argue that this sequence is crucial: a stage cannot be skipped. Moving from stage to stage invokes to the full the leadership and management skills of the organization. Third is governance. This relates to decision rights and accountabilities for five key decisions (2009:91):

- **IT principles**: operating model
- **Enterprise architecture**: design of digitized platform
- **IT infrastructure**: services available to all parts of business
- **Business needs and project deliverables**: new systems and processes, including business cases and implementation reviews
- **IT investment and prioritization**.

They conclude that there is no single best governance design. As organizations implement new initiatives in sequence governance needs will change: in particular business transformations ‘impose unique requirements’ (2009:98).

Overall, Weill and Ross’s approach is strategy driven, highly controlled but very sensitive to organizational complexities. As for Fountain, technology provides opportunities, but strategies and governance arrangements determine the way technology is used. Throughout their work Weill and Ross wrestle with the tension between ICT driven standardization and integration and the need for adaptation and agility in business. They recognize that in the early stages of the use of ICT in organizations diversity is inevitable. However demands to manage costs and meet strategic
objectives promote standardization and integration. Adaptability and innovation then come from making additional use of infrastructure, reuse of applications and new centrally endorsed initiatives. One of their key contributions is to propose a means by which to diffuse conflicts between differing principles of organization by reframing arguments about centralization and decentralization as questions about how to match operating models to appropriate levels of organization.

Fountain and Weill/Ross’s analyses meet at three points. First, Fountain’s argument about the need to take into account the purposes and institutions of government is congruent with Weill and Ross’s argument about the need for ICT to be shaped by business strategies and operating models. Second, they have a shared appreciation of the rationalizing demands of ICT. Third they share a focus on governance and the management of change.

Their analyses also clearly diverge. Fountain stresses that citizens are not customers, the importance to outcomes for citizens of the internal operations of government, the range of organizational theories needed to comprehend the activities of public sector organizations, the challenge of managing across organizational and jurisdictional boundaries, and the potential for Web 2.0 applications to challenge hierarchical controls of information. Further, while Fountain is unprepared to place limits on the extent to which ICT may change structures of government, Weill and Ross work within conventional notions of the firm. Weill and Ross do not so much contradict Fountain’s propositions as head deeper into a field that Fountain does not address in the same depth. They focus on the detailed management of ICT strategy and operations. Fountain explores in depth the problems of using ICT in government. Weill and Ross’s analysis of the management of technology suggests a set of possible improvements. Their emphasis on strategy, operating models, asset classes, sequencing, and governance converges with Fountain’s appreciation of the complexity of government. However Weill and Ross do not have overall answers to questions about which operating models and governance arrangements should match particular enterprises and organizational levels. Such answers need to be worked out enterprise by enterprise. For working out such answers in government, Fountain’s exploration of internal public sector processes are highly relevant.

The question remains about whether it is acceptable to mix in this way analyses from business and government. The easy assumptions of the recent past that lessons from business are what government needs are no longer credible. Weill and Ross’s focus on business strategies, markets, customers and sales does not sit easily with Fountain’s analysis. However, a pragmatic test is to ask whether Weill and Ross’s work suggests useful questions about the issues canvassed by Gershon and Ovum. It is argued that it does. Weill and Ross’s prescriptions to identify core operations, build a digitized platform to support operations, and build enterprise wide governance arrangements all recall the questions addressed by Gershon and Ovum. The Office of the Chief Information Officer in Canada also used earlier research by Weill in its own work on governance (http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/cio-dpi/pres/2007/overv-aperc/page01-eng.asp). More specifically Weill and Ross’s arguments about the importance of sequence in governance initiatives suggest questions with which to test the robustness of Gershon’s whole of government recommendations and add weight to the possibility that the failure of key whole of government initiatives in Victoria was a problem of sequencing.

CONCLUSION

Organizing for e-government entails crafting strategies that have deep consequences for the structures and processes of government. Initiatives that help governments use information more effectively in policy-making, enable improved services and offer citizens opportunities for greater participation make big waves. They demand large amounts of scarce resources—not only money but also the skills and time of ministers and public sector leaders and managers. They also involve challenging layers of interactions in which systems of management, technology and budgeting intermix. In business Weill and Ross argue that the stage of optimising ICT investments is perhaps the most challenging. As Gershon and Ovum show, in Australia similar questions preoccupy the
federal and Victorian governments. On Gershon’s advice the Australian government has embarked on tighter governance arrangements and budgetary controls. However, following disillusionment with an experiment in central leadership, Victoria has focused more narrowly on budgets, projects and agency level arrangements. As the Ovum report and previous experience at the federal level show, governance arrangements tend to have high rates of mortality.

In different but complementary ways the analyses by Fountain and Weill/Ross identify key problems in organizing e-government. In search of means of realizing for citizens the benefits of ICT, Fountain probes the many different ways in which government organizations can frustrate initiatives. Weill and Ross suggest detailed approaches to managing ICT at different levels in organizations, especially matching operating and governance strategies to appropriate levels of organization. However large questions remain. If Weill and Ross are right attention to many of these will need to await effective outcomes of the current focus on getting control of costs. For this reason at present even the most promising suggestions for improving the governance of ICT in the public sector remain provisional.
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