HUMAN(E)GOVERNMENT REVISITED

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-Abstract-
This paper examines the linkage between trust and perceptions of ICTs and e-government and the effects of media coverage and suggests we need to re-engage at a human level if eGovernment is to be accepted by digital non-natives. It introduces the SIMIT model.

1. INTRODUCTION

It should be noted that the use of e-government in that model and throughout this work includes all strands of digital interaction including m-government. Anderson et al (2015, p.37) pose the question of whether m-government will replace egovernment as a dominant mode or will"be just another access channel to public administration." Here we view them very much as the later whilst not at any point wishing to downplay the significance of mobile technology in helping egovernment be accepted and trusted throughtout the globe particularly in areas which have traditionally had lower usage and ownership of more traditional computing equipment (Alotabi , Houghton and Sandhu (2016).

The introduction of e-government had been championed as the start of a revised relationship between government and citizens (Rose et al 2015). One cannot doubt that there has been a revolution in the ways in which people interact with government. However, lived experiences of e-government are not shared and pooled in the same way that traditional experiences of government traditionally have been. Although with the rise of social media and mobile telephony we can see differing forms of experience sharing. Often people's first impression of e-government and governmental use of ICTs is formed via media reports. Often bad news is presented with a higher profile than news which reveals success, the reporting of spectacular project failures impact on the overall perceptions of the

average citizen though as Nixon noted one might argue that the relative lack of stories on e-government is a silent testimony to its success (Nixon 2010), a situation that pervades to this day.

Mansbridge (1997) argued that citizens' expectations of governments have risen as perceptions of trust in politicians have declined. Baldassare (2000) posits that politicians and government are no longer seen by citizens to have answers (if they ever did) to problems which in turn taint perceptions of government and thus creates a more citizenry which is much more critical of government in general and as Norris et al (2001:113) comment "there is widespread concern that the public has lost faith in the performance of the core institutions of representative government". This has been evidenced by the rise of populist parties in many European countries. One can also see evidence of citizen distrust in the 2016 non-binding but influential referenda carried out in the UK and the Netherlands. The Netherlands referendum relating to the signing of A EU – Ukraine Association Agreement was instigated by a citizens' petition which forced the government to hold a referendum on the issue and the objectors narrowly won the referendum, delivering a blow to the Rutte government. The UK referendum which gave the choice to remain or leave the EU, which is commonly referred to as 'Brexit', concerning EU membership can be seen as not just a comment upon the European integration process but on the political class in general as the public rejected the overwhelming level of pro remain propaganda.

Indeed Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) noted that trust can be affected by events or policies impacting upon the stability of a political system. Whilst Al-Omari and Al-Omari (2006) argue that: e-government through streamlining processes, particularly in relation financial processes can regain some notion of governmental competence and thus help to improve trust relationships.

Shapiro (1999) argues that changing expectations of information availability where citizens expect and increasingly demand access to information that may have previously been the sole domain of public officials is leading to contestation as Türksel (2001) has shown. Rainey (1997) cited in Welch et al (2005) observed the public does not have 100% perfect information and can be biased in their analysis of government performance. Governments need to overcome this.

There would however seem to be a distinct schism between two, not necessarily always mutually exclusive, notions of what e-government could and or perhaps should be about. One the one hand you have the notion of the internet being used within e-government as an information exchange, most normally top down but also requesting or, demanding information online; on the other you have the

notion of the internet facilitating a different type of government citizen relationship with increased two way dialogue, discussion and to some extent, in the most extreme of readings, a re-distribution of power from government to individual citizens.

2. MODELS, METAPHORS AND MOMENTUM

One way in which organisations have sought to simplify egovernment advances (though of course such simplification has its downsides) and at the same time to create a type of brand identity to aid the momentum of acceptance and adoption is through the use of models and metaphors which usually have an acronym as an identifier. Examples of such are SMART in S.Korea, Azerbaijan's ASAN (which stands for Azerbaijan Service and Assessment Network and asan also means 'easy' in Azerbijani , Turkey's ETKİN which is 'efficient' in Turkish ("Integrated (Entegre), Technological (Teknolojik), Participatory (Katılımcı), Innovative (İnovatif) and Qualified (Nitelikli)) in Turkey.

This paper builds upon some of the author's earlier work (e.g. Nixon 2010, 2011) and includes references to a model of 'e-government = SIMIT' (Nixon 2011) SIMIT uses the analogy of e-government being a Simit, an extremely popular and instantly recognizable type of Turkish bread, venerated by middle and working class Turks. The model differs from others in that the acronym is used to indicate more than one idea and a series of concepts to explain differing characteristics of e-government. For instance we can see a that *S*tate *I*s *M*arketising *I*ts *T*asks (ibid) through a hollowing out of its services, transferring services to other providers and stepping back from its role a sole service provider (Jessop 2002). At the same time the *S*tate *I*s *M*odernising *I*nternet *T*echnologies (ibid) and providing frameworks for the information society, a key component of which is the governmental sphere.

3. e-GOVERNMENT AND THE EU

The rhetoric around e-government has often been a buoyant one (World Economic Forum 2008) though as there are still challenges to be met. Evidence from the OECD (2003) appears to support this view and e-government was seen by many (e.g. Tapscott 1997: Clift 2000) as a potential way of re-forging the bond between citizens and governments. The European Union's approach can be characterised one in which digital technologies are an integrated part of governments' modernisation strategies. They have the potential to engender further economic and social benefits and the digital transformation of government is a vital

component on the road to a successful Single Market. Let us briefly examine the EU's efforts to achieve this.

The EU set out 5 pillars though with the benefit of hindsight one can see that further developments were under tighter fiscal scrutiny given the economic downturn that took place.

- *No citizen left behind***:** The Commission will work with Member States to make sure that by 2010 all citizens will have access to a wide range of technologies such as Digital TV, PCs and mobile phones.

- *Raising efficiency***:** Governments account for 45% of EU GDP, which has to be paid from taxes. Under the Action Plan, the Commission and the Member States will put in place a framework for benchmarking the impact of e-government in order get this process on track.

- *Implementing e-Procurement***:** Government procurement represents 15% of GDP or about €1.500 billion a year. The Member States have committed to achieving 100% availability and at least 50% take-up of procurement online by 2010, with an estimated annual saving of €40billion.

- *Safe access to services EU wide***:** EU governments have agreed to facilitate this process by establishing secure systems for mutual recognition of national electronic identities for public administration websites and services. The Action Plan foresees a full implementation by 2010.

- *Strengthening participation and democratic decision-making***:** 65% of respondents to the Commission's public consultation on e-government said that eDemocracy can help reduce Europe's democratic deficit. The Action Plan proposes to support experiments in the use of ICT for more effective public participation in policy making. (EU 2005)

However as the Austrian Presidency of the EU noted at the time:

"We could face a potentially embarrassing irony: that we erect electronic barriers to the exercise of those EU-wide freedoms of movement because of an exclusively national focus of our e-government strategies, and this, precisely in the one domain -Cyberspace- that knows no natural borders!" (Austrian Federal Chancellery, 2006) The creation of the Digital Single Market is designed to alleviate this potential stumbling block

The European Commission's eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015 (EU Commision 2010) included four political priorities designed to facilitate the

development of cross-border eGovernment services for citizens and businesses regardless of their country of origin, based upon the Malmo Declaration:

- Empower citizens and businesses
- Reinforce mobility in the Single Market
- Enable efficiency and effectiveness
- Create necessary key enablers and pre-conditions to make things happen

The Commission's own evaluation showed that the plan enabled the development of eGovernment at the EU and Member State levels. It allowed the exchange of best practices and the interoperability of solutions between Member States. However, it acknowledged that there was still much scope for improvement in terms of providing seamless EU-wide digital services to citizens and businesses.

The subsequent plan for 2016-2020 which was produced after an extensive consultation process pstulates that the EU aims:

- to modernise public administration,
- to achieve the digital internal market, and
- to engage more with citizens and businesses to deliver high quality services.

The Action Plan will be supported via coordination and collaboration at European Union level. Member States and the Commission will jointly attempt to ensure that the availability and usage of eGovernment services can be increased. They see this, as resulting in faster, cheaper and more user-oriented digital public services. Member States would pursue their own strategies and activities, following a number of principles that any forthcoming initiatives should encompass. They are:

- Digital by Default: public administrations should deliver services as the preferred option (while still keeping other channels open for those who are disconnected by choice or necessity). Those public services should be delivered through a single contact point or a one-stop-shop and via different channels.

- Once only principle: public administrations should ensure that citizens and businesses supply the same information only once to a public administration. Public administration offices take action if permitted to internally re-use this data, in due respect of data protection rules, so that no additional burden falls on citizens and businesses.

- Inclusiveness and accessibility: public administrations should design digital public services that are inclusive.

- Openness & transparency: public administrations should share information and data between themselves and enable citizens and businesses to access control and correct their own data; enable users to monitor administrative processes that involve them; engage with and open up to stakeholders (such as businesses, researchers and non-profit organisations) in the design and delivery of services.

- Cross-border by default: public administrations should make relevant digital public services available across borders and prevent further fragmentation to arise, thereby facilitating mobility within the Single Market.

- Interoperability by default: public services should be designed to work seamlessly across the Single Market and across organisational silos, relying on the free movement of data and digital services in the European Union.

- Trustworthiness & Security: All initiatives should go beyond the mere compliance with the legal framework on personal data protection and privacy, and IT security, by integrating those elements in the design phase. These are important pre-conditions for increasing trust in and take-up of digital services. (European Commision 2015)

Thus we can see significant technical efforts to ensure successful implementation of e-government services on a pan EU level. One of the intial worries about eGovernment was that *Success Is Measured In Trust* (Nixon 2011) There can be no doubt that the intial unease related to online engagement is vanishing and one can expect that future generations who have known nothing other than an information society will not question it as a form of government interaction.

4. THE CITIZEN AND TRUST

How does the citizen fare in terms of involvement with eGovernment? Little has changed from initial perceptions of need and requirements for success. Kolsaker and Lee-Kelley (2007) argued a successful e-government system must be citizen centric, from the design stage onwards, if it is to win trust and acceptance from its citizens based upon their needs Though as Bertot and Jaeger (2008) note this implies that the government knows what users want. Is there enough effort put into involving the public at the design stage? e-government is portrayed as attractive, modern and almost inevitable and people are blithely expected to be excited by its potential. What was once possible only in the minds of science fiction writers has now reshaped our lives aiding wealth creation stimulating intellectual development and redefining our leisure and lifestyle (Nixon, 2010). It is also important to note that such trust varies depending on the cultural setting in which e government is applied. (Navarrete, 2010).

As development has moved apace we have identified the existence of an information underclass, 'the information poor', excluded from reaping the benefits of such developments by a lack of skills. McNeal and Hale (2007) suggest that whilst some people are empowered through e-government communication channels, they can magnify existing inequalities. In their US based study they highlighted the lack of language and literacy skills, though similar problems exist in Europe particularly in areas of high ethnic minority density and in the countries experiencing high levels of incoming population movement with the EU 27.

EICTA (2005) also recognised the vital nature of trust in citizen/government relationships. As a response to the EU's i2010 proposals, they put forward guidelines for building trust and acceptance [in e-government] for citizens and business:

• Demonstrate that e-government solutions bring real benefits to citizens and business, ensuring inclusion of all citizens and improving their quality of life;

• Provide trust in e-government solutions, focusing on concerns over accessibility , relevance effectiveness and respect for privacy;

• Seek public-private partnerships, from planning to implementation of the e-government action plan; and

• Demonstrate that e-government contributes to increased citizen safety and security in Europe.

Clift (2004:7) puts trust and accountability at the top of his list of 7 goals "to connect to e-government efforts and practices." Clift's vision of an eDemocracy requires a working 'two way' system of e-government missing in many if not most e-government scenarios today. Why ? What barriers are there to a more interactive form of e-government? We can see the following:

• The technology is still in its early stages of development and we can identify greater use of the technology as it becomes more diffuse and also more user friendly.

• Government organisations are still not totally structured to deal with high levels of interactivity. Whilst there is evidence of organisational restructuring that can be attributed to eGovernance those changes appear to be incremental in nature. Aldrich et al (2002) noted that systems are developed individually per department and thus lack the integration to enable more effective use.

- There is an element of institutional and bureaucratic control guarded by professionals and officials. Keeping citizens at arm's length enables officials to, at least in part, determine how they work, on what they work and when.

- The burning desire for 'two way' e-government has yet to be fully established. Do citizens really want it? There is no discernible popular upsurge for participation that can be identified.

5. NOTIONS OF TRUST

The notions of trust and risk are important concepts when considering perceptions of eGov. Societies, on any level, need trust in order to operate successfully (Putnam 1994, Colesca, 2015). Trust is needed not just in the technical capabilities but also in the systems and kit required to operationalise it and the organisation and the people responsible for it (Camp 2000)

The problem, of course, is that building trust is a very difficult concept to grapple with. Although they can be interrelated we also need to separate out notions of trust in government from trust in egovernment.(Horsburgh et al 2011) It is quite possible to have one without the other. Why do we trust? Is there a magic formula for trust, if so, how does ICT use impact upon this?

Thomas (1998) identified three types of trust:

- *Fiduciary* - where the relationships between citizen and bureaucrat are unequal and asymmetric. Based upon the work of early principal agent theorists such as Spence and Zeckhauser (1971), and Ross (1973). Welch et al (2005:376) observe that "full scale electronic routinisation that reduces discretion ...may work against fiduciary trust."

- *Mutual* - relates to personal interaction between the agent and the citizen acting together can form mutual bonds of trust. This mutual trust of individuals can then also help to create fiduciary trust on behalf of the organisation. It can also lead to a strengthening of the third types of trust that Thomas identifies, *Social trust*

- *Social Trust* - a form of social capital that is created and maintained via numerous social interactions which in turn inform and influence individual transactions in a symbiotic and dynamic process. Thomas (1998) also saw social trust as supporting moral obligations inherent in fiduciary trust, as described above.

Parent et al (2005:730) argue that "Individuals with a priori trust in government and correspondingly high levels of internal self-efficacy, will have these reinforced through electronic interaction with their governments. The reverse also holds: distrustful, low self efficacy individuals will not increase their trust irrespective of the medium of interaction." Shah et al (2001:491) note that "[u]sing the internet for exchange of information is associated with higher levels of interpersonal trust and civic participation."

Many people's experiences with the Internet relate to private sector commercial sites that have a great deal of money and time invested in their design, maintenance and are updated to take advantage of new developments in software and hardware. The customer of course, pays for this level of service in the end. Therein lies the problem for government agencies as the pressure on them is to reduce costs and not to re-invest any potential savings in further cutting edge technological solutions (Nixon 2007) or to engage in costly and time consuming dialogue with the people that they serve. So whilst expectations and demand levels are raised by the perceptions derived from experiences with commercial websites, the resources to be able to deliver such interfaces are constantly being driven down by the citizens' often contradictory wishes for small government and less government intervention.

The costs of building trust in e-government through a partnership of government and the governed could be viewed as an investment which may well bear fruit in relation to subsequent stages or operations which may defer the transaction costs borne by organisations in undertaking campaigns to re-build trust following failure or perceived failure in order to reassure doubters that Fukuyama (1995) argues are a type of hidden tax. However there can be little doubt that there are winners and losers in terms of e-government adopters and that investment and the benefits (or losses) that accrue from it are not always distributed equally allowing Nixon (2007) to assert that " [it] may be said to resemble a type of 'virtual klondyke', with some early adopters never fully recouping their investment whilst others strike it rich first time."

6. MINIMISING MISTRUST OF eGOVERNMENT

Elaborating slightly on Weckert's (2005:105-8) four obstacles to online trust, one begins to see below the difficulties of easily creating acceptance and creating confidence and trust.

- Community Values- Shared positions and judgements are not always agreed

- Internet Context and Roles- a lack of clarity about the limitations of our roles and possibilities of free action

- Disembodiment   Lacking notions of identity and personality

- Security - a fear that somehow we will be compromised by engaging in ICTs and thus e-government

Whilst there is no space here to extensively examine these four, they do perhaps demand brief further investigation. It is often difficult for governments to find agreements on shared values in this context. As with other political spaces and concepts the idea of the information society, in which e-government is grounded, is as Webster (1995) notes a contested one. Technology is not a panacea; but "a tool that can aid us in improving society but it does not of itself provide solutions to questions such as inequality, power, democracy and justice"(Nixon 2000) As Agre (2002) suggests the internet tends to re-affirm existing offline political power and beliefs. McKnight et al (2002) point out that the trust given to online services has some correlation to the trust given to the institution promoting that online service in its offline 'persona'. Often such institutions only present one side of an issue, with citizens being given the notion that only one view is correct or acceptable.(Jaeger 2005) This can stifle debate and imply that only one viewpoint is socially acceptable. This is where our, almost primeval, fear of and reticence towards unknown situations lead us to distrust and/or be uncomfortable in using unknown systems and techniques such as those operationalised in aspects of e-government service provision.

Citizens want the same things from on and offline government in return for their trust. There needs to be both a transparency that engenders trust and privacy issues need to be resolved to the satisfaction of society at large. The fact that satisfactory levels of privacy would seem to differ from country to country and perhaps, across the generations, it would seem to be a fruitful area for future research. As the Austrian presidency of the EU concluded "A new privacy paradigm is required that reflects a realistic compromise between total privacy and total transparency." (Austrian Federal Chancellery 2006)

In the age of big data we can see that *S*ometimes *I*information *M*agnifies in value *I*f we work *T*ogether (Nixon 2011) but it also has perceived drawbacks in terms of security issues etc. Perhaps governments need to reassure people as to what data is held on them and to what use or uses this data is put. Most people are reasonably comfortable with data being used for the purpose for which they believe that they had given it particularly if they feel that they are getting something in return for

their disclosure of data (BCS 2008). Interviews confirmed that people were less happy for the data to be used across agencies for unstated purposes to which they had not knowingly consented. People trust individual professionals but are less trusting of systems, particularly those which centralise data storage. As one respondent said *" I trust my doctor to keep my information safe. I have a one on one relationship built up over 15 years but if he keeps electronic patient files on me and these are sent to hospitals or other agencies I don't even know who I am trusting and they may not have the same standard of care towards my information.*" There is a concern that function creep may occur.

The level of trust is based not just on real life experience of data loss but also on the fear of data loss. Just as in the realm of crime where an individual's fear of crime is often worse than actual crime statistics would justify whilst others in the same area and presumably under the same threat feel no real fear, so in the field of e-government some people are totally oblivious to the risks posed by data loss and potential abuse whilst others over exaggerate the dangers. Often that fear was fed by eye catching headlines and reports which sensationalise the impact of data loss and raise the fear of data misuse far above the actual danger adding to a public perception that the government cannot be trusted with data. One problem is of course that the media are drawn to stories that are deemed newsworthy, quite often those stories will be of a negative nature. "*No problems with e-government*" "*e-government working well*" are headlines that are unlikely to be seen reported in the media.

Concerns over digital data privacy remain although again the overarching span of the information society and peoples increased use of technology has removed much of that fear. Whilst organisations such as governments, health organisations etc. were amongst the most trusted organisations in terms of data protection with the public being much more sceptical about the private sectors ability to protect their personal data, there is some concern that data is being transferred, sometimes covertly, without the implicit agreement of an individual to a country such as the USA which offers less legal protection to foreign nationals than to its own citizens [1].

Earlier evidence from Europe seemed to suggest a rather heart-warming and positive tale of a desire for humanistic values and interactions rather than a deep-seated mistrust of e-government and ICT use. In a survey of e-government user

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[1] For more on this see http://www.statewatch.org/eu-dp.htm.

satisfaction (Vintar et al 2006) carried out in Slovenia it was found that even amongst those respondents who were internet users 32% of people did not use e-government services to access information or communicate with a public official because they preferred traditional offline relationships. As Kiesler and Kraut pointed out "...people generally feel less close to online communication partners than to those with whom they have formed real-world relationships" (1996 :783) Thus many people are loathe to trade in the traditional model of 'street-level bureaucracy', despite all its shortcomings, for interactions with via a faceless computer screen in what Bovens and Zouridis (2002) term 'screen-level bureaucracy'. Reddick's research also notes the change from "street level bureaucracies to system level bureaucracies" (2005: 54)

This was also borne out in the interviews referred to earlier where respondents said;

"*I would rather deal with a human being than a machine*"

"*I prefer to talk to someone. You can settle things without a constant exchange of emails or letters. .....Computers are fine for some things but when you have problems I find it just too impersonal.*"

However, Accenture's (2004) survey of American users suggested the opposite with respondents who were e-Government users preferring to deal with the government on line rather than in person or via telephones. This implies that there is both a cultural element and an experiential learning process which can impact upon citizen trust and satisfaction in relation to e-Government. It also shows us as Ebbers et al (2007) suggest that e-Government development and adoption speeds are assymetrical and thus problematic for organisations such as the EU to operationalise and ensure interoperability.

It is also true to say that the overarching acceptance of new technologies in recent years in other spheres of activity particularly in banking, airline ticket booking and other travel services has meant that we are more accepting of the notion of online interaction. This acceptance has a trickle-down effect to public administration activities and the earlier resistance to such moves is fading. It is not only direct trust through use that is increasing but also recommendation trust as users relay their positive experiences to others (Sherchan, et al 2013). We can see that complexity and ease of use are things that are priority areas to be tackled to encourage usage of e government opportunites as *S*imple *I*deas *M*odify and *I*mprove *T*he society we live in (Nixon 2011)

Clearly it is vital to include notions of human contact into any e-government process. People must be comfortable using it. Though as generations shift and most if not all citizens are instinctive and intuitive ICT users there may be a more widespread acceptance. e.g. mobile phone whereby most people, are comfortable with them, even if they may only utilise a fraction of their capabilities. However although new technology can aid Government service delivery there are times when human contact is a vital part of the system. For example in terms of passport applications in the UK whilst one can access the application form online in order to receive a new passport incorporating a chip which carries your biometric details you may still be required to attend a personal interview to verify your personal information and your identity.

7. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It is clear that e-government is here to stay for the foreseeable future until the next technological paradigm shape shifts government into a new form. The adoption and spread of social media which normalise online activites also mean that *S*ocial networks *I*dentify *M*oves in *I*deas/trends *T*hat we can develop (Nixon,2011). As more use is made of services, users are more confident not only to use them but to share their experiences. This may lead to the spreading of secondary recommendation trust messages across social media as well as being more likely to engage in consultative exercises or suggest improvements and upgrades to the service. Whilst trust in e-government is not as high as it could be, the level of public disquiet is perhaps overstated and lessened through repeated interaction with technology in other areas of a person's life such as personal social media use. Or in updated SIMIT terms repeated experiences of *S*haring personal *I*nformation *M*akes *I*nnovation more *T*rustworthy. There is little doubt that trust is an issue that governments are seeking to address.

One of the things we need to do to instil trust is to talk to people about how and who they trust. Often one hears of people's trust being in established relationships. If we think of shopping we often go back to the same shops as we trust one shopkeeper over another. Here is perhaps a radical though expensive idea. Perhaps the interface between e-government and citizens might be marketised and an element of competition brought in. Not, may one hasten to say, in anyway related to the democratic decisions of government but if one could choose from a range competing interfaces the one which best suited one's needs then this would allow users to choose the interface that they felt most comfortable with. The interface producers could be paid in relation to the number of people

using their particular interface or provide the service free and recoup their expenditure through niche targeted advertising.

Perhaps another way of increasing trust doing this is through better explanation and training of how citizens can interact with government both in terms of accessing information but also in terms of citizen input into service design and delivery as a form of partnership. This is vital if the acceptance of new forms of service delivery is to be maximised. The future is bright for e-government but it should be developed not just without a dilution of the existing level of democratic input but with vastly increased levels if trust is to be first restored and then maintained.

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