

Introduction

Electronic infrastructure and network functionality are being adopted by governments around the world. The economic rationale for this is that it yields lower costs and speedier dissemination of information. The administrative justification is that it leads to more co-operation and better co-ordination. The political motivation is growing public expectations and a desire to emulate the successes of other governments. Electronic government and electronic governance are truly the wave of the future.

The history of co-operation among members of the Commonwealth provides a basis for sharing information and providing assistance on the design and deployment of e-governance systems and the lessons learned so far. The Commonwealth Secretariat has provided technical assistance when it has been needed or requested, and has created forums to enable knowledge to be shared. One such forum was a one-week course on e-governance held in Nicosia, Cyprus from 27 February to 3 March 2006 and attended by 29 public servants from Cyprus and Malta.

This book is a report of the context, content and outcomes of the course, which was organised by the Secretariat's Governance and Institutional Development Division. The course was facilitated by Devindra Ramnarine of the Commonwealth Secretariat and Thomas B. Riley of the Commonwealth Centre for e-Governance (CCEG), and supported by RoseMarie-Rita Endeley from the Secretariat. Background materials were prepared for course participants on the relevant issues, and participants developed proposals for their own organisations as part of the 'hands-on' exercises conducted throughout the course.

The book has several objectives. It provides an overview of the course and the lessons learned from it, a synopsis of e-governance issues and experiences, and an outline of international efforts in the field of e-governance. It compares experiences of e-governance in Cyprus and Malta and asks what steps can be taken to advance its use.

Chapter 1 presents an outline of the principles of e-governance. Various terminologies, such as e-government and e-democracy, are often used in conjunction with, or as a substitute for, e-governance. Depending on how these terms are defined, any one of them may be used. Considerable work has been done on this topic, and it provides a context for the various ways in which e-governance is practised by different countries and government departments.

Chapter 2 reviews best practices. The concept of *best practice* was first introduced in business to describe the best business processes that had been developed through the value-chains of comparable companies. The consulting firm Arthur Andersen was the initial champion of this method, which it used to recommend cutting-edge solutions to its clients.¹ Governments quickly adopted the concept and the American Productivity

& Quality Center (APQC) now lists one of its specialties as government best practices.² This chapter focuses on best practices that are most widely used in e-governance.

Chapter 3 provides a guided tour of e-governance from an international perspective. It looks at materials from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations and the World Bank. The Commonwealth's concern is primarily the sharing of experiences, methodologies and lessons learned. The OECD's perspective is to promote e-governance as a tool which can help promote economic development. The World Bank is particularly interested in the integrity of financial transactions and the transparency of government decision-making (because good governance sets the stage for viable commerce). This chapter will show how these concerns overlap and will identify distinctions between the various international approaches to e-governance.

Chapter 4 presents a case study of e-government in Malta. It includes a survey of projects presented to Maltese government officials, together with their answers. Chapter 5 presents a case study of e-government in Cyprus. It describes a similar survey presented to officials of the Government of Cyprus.

Chapter 6 presents two examples of ongoing e-governance projects, one in Cyprus (telemedicine) and the other in Malta (m-government.gov.mt).

Chapter 7 offers a comparative analysis of e-government in Malta and Cyprus, based on materials from government websites and the answers to the survey questionnaire. Both Malta and Cyprus have government websites that set out the history, mandate and progress of e-governance, and describe future plans. This made it possible to tabulate the answers given to the survey questionnaire and compare performance parameters to show both similarities and some differences in the e-governance experiences of the two countries. Based on this comparison, lessons that can be learned from the experiences of planning and implementing e-governance in Malta and Cyprus are shared with readers. It is hoped that they will also be useful to other governments which are considering enhancing their electronic infrastructure.