



# Reconfiguring Government–Public Engagements: Enhancing the Communicative Power of Citizens

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## Overview

In a speech to the Labour Party Conference in September 2006, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair highlighted the potential benefits that networked digital technologies could bring to government–citizen engagements:

Millions of people are ordering flights or books or other goods online, they are talking to their friends online, downloading music, all of it when they want to, not when the shop or office is open. The Google generation has moved beyond the idea of 9 to 5, closed on weekends and Bank Holidays. Today's technology is profoundly empowering. Of course public services are different. Their values are different. But today people won't accept a service handed down from on high. They want to shape it to their needs, and the reality of their lives.<sup>1</sup>

The OII/Cabinet Office workshop 'Engaging with the Google Generation' on which this report is based sought to identify ways in which such innovations could help government to connect more effectively with citizens in consultative democratic processes and the design and delivery of public services. Participants in the workshop included Pat McFadden, Minister responsible for e-government, and members of the UK Cabinet Office and 10 Downing Street Web team, together with researchers studying the social and governance implications of digital networks and technologies.

The authors of the report are indebted to all participants, and particularly to Gloria Flowers, Ian Johnson, Saverio Romeo, Jo Twist and Jonathan Zittrain for their comments on an earlier draft. The expert, lively and questioning contributions of all participants provided a rich source for the paper. However, the meeting was held under 'Chatham House rules' and specific individuals have not been credited. The authors take sole responsibility for the interpretation of this material.

The workshop was organized by Oxford University's Oxford Internet Institute (OII) and the Cabinet Office.<sup>2</sup> It was held at the OII on 19 December 2006. Suzanne Henry, Adham Tamer and Arthur Bullard of the OII events and technical teams enabled its smooth running.

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[www.labour.org.uk/index.php?id=news2005&ux\\_news%5Bid%5D=primeminister&cHash=7e84d2fbb8](http://www.labour.org.uk/index.php?id=news2005&ux_news%5Bid%5D=primeminister&cHash=7e84d2fbb8)

<sup>2</sup> The workshop and paper was supported in part by the Breaking Barriers to e-Government Project, a MODINIS study for the European Commission's eGovernment Unit, Directorate General Information Society and Media (see: [www.egovbarriers.org](http://www.egovbarriers.org)).

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## Executive summary

### **The workshop's aims**

The OII/Cabinet Office workshop 'Engaging with the Google Generation' sought to explore how the latest Internet, Web and related digital information and communication technologies (ICTs) could help to produce better government to meet the diverse democratic and public service needs of all citizens. The main broad questions addressed were:

- Is there something distinctive about the emerging generation of Internet users and their digital environments?
- Is there a set of fresh ways of applying Web advances to help bring people together, create new spaces for constructive democratic interaction, and enable government to deliver public services that meet personal, family and community choices?
- What are the key policy implications of these developments?

### **Is the 'Google generation' a significant concept?**

The use by Tony Blair of the term 'Google generation' helped to shape the workshop's initial focus. A useful debate about the term's precise definition and appropriateness indicates its limitations and value. Being named after a popular branded information search engine appears to fail to take account of other more recent popular advanced Web capabilities, such as online social networking and user-generated content. In addition, the composition of this 'generation' is ambiguous. Although it could be seen as being represented by a core group of younger people, there is a growing number of older people who are equally at ease in cyberspace. A more general, neutral term like 'digital generation' might be more appropriate—but less appealing as a catchy label for an interesting phenomenon. At the workshop, this term proved to be a rich focal point for workshop discussions when it was characterized as representing certain broad cultural and social attitudes and behaviour, rather than a specific age group or product type. It is from this perspective that the term is used in the remainder of this report.

A flavour of the spirit in which the term is used was captured by Time magazine when it nominated 'You' as its 2006 Person of the Year (Grossman 2006):

It's a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It's about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people's network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes. The tool that makes this possible is the World Wide Web. Not the Web that Tim Berners-Lee hacked together (15 years ago, according to Wikipedia) as a way

for scientists to share research. It's not even the overhyped dotcom Web of the late 1990s. The new Web is a very different thing. It's a tool for bringing together the small contributions of millions of people and making them matter. Silicon Valley consultants call it Web 2.0, as if it were a new version of some old software. But it's really a revolution.

The desire for individualized, tailored services nurtured by Web 2.0 has been symbolized by Cass Sunstein (2002) as the 'Daily Me'. John Naisbitt, author of futurology works such as *Megatrends* and *High Tech/High Touch*, has vividly described the social and psychological impact of such communicative empowerment: 'The really powerful networks are those where every member of it experiences that they are in the centre, and all the information is coming and going through us: we are the nexus, we are the centre' (Nash and Peltu 2005: 20). Figure 1 summarizes some key social, institutional and conceptual characteristics of this Google generation spirit.

**Figure 1: Social characteristics attributed to emerging Internet cultures**

Enthusiastically risk taking, playful, creative and technologically innovative. Motivated by self-discovery of interesting new niches, communities, playgrounds and stores of the cyberworld.

Socially active and suspicious of central control and external gatekeepers, with each user communicatively empowered from the centre of their own personal network to exercise choices, influence outcomes and generate and distribute their own content.

Willing to accept community governance processes, provided clearly articulated rules of engagement are accepted as being fair by the community and the governance processes are informed and shaped by their individual and collective contributions (e.g. the Wikipedia online encyclopaedia created by individual users).

Encompassing communities with diverse values, such as those based on for-profit principles or committed to public service values, extending across the full spectrum of opinion and (mis)information generated by users from diverse political, cultural, religious and other perspectives.

People born after 1980 are at the heart of this broad 'Google generation' characterization. They are also likely to be particularly influential in attempts to use Web innovations to energize democratic processes as they are among those most accustomed to instantaneous communication in a digitally saturated environment, ranging from mobile phones, iPods and game stations to Web social networking and online information seeking. They are also generally among the groups most politically disaffected or uninterested in voting and other formal political engagements. At the same time, it is important to offer multiple offline and online channels to meet the diverse needs of all citizens, including those who do not have effective regular online access or choose not to use the Internet.

## How can emerging Web technologies support better government?

Web 2.0 is a current buzzword that draws together various strands of a new generation of multimedia broadband online development and associated social dynamics. It is the latest in a continuing stream of ICT digital innovation to which many profound and mundane sociotechnical changes are tied. No sooner is one wave upon us than new tides are being spotted on the horizon, such as talk of ‘m’ for mobile communications replacing the ‘e’ in terms like ‘m-government’.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 2 summarizes the broad landscape of Web 2.0 genres.<sup>4</sup> The examples cited in it, and elsewhere in this paper, are not intended to provide a comprehensive survey, but to indicate some significant instances of the types of capabilities involved (with relevant Web links in Appendix II). These types are discussed in more detail in the next section.

**Figure 2. The most significant Web 2.0 application types for government**

Type	Key activities enabled	Examples
Social networking	Immediate online communication, interaction and sharing of activities and information with individuals, groups and much larger communities.	MySpace YouTube SecondLife Facebook
User-generated content	Changing media producer–receiver relationships by allowing users to create and disseminate multimedia content across the Internet.	YouTube, MySpace, etc. RateMyTeachers Blogs Forums
Mashups	Websites or applications combining content from multiple sources into an integrated experience.	Overmixter Chicago crime TheyWorkForYou.com
Citizen journalism	News and information sources that bypass traditional media gatekeepers.	OhMyNews Global Voices Online
Information searching and retrieval	Rapid searching, finding and delivery of information and Web links.	Google Yahoo!
Collaborative production	Websites enabling collaborative work, such as co-authoring of online books.	Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia online encyclopaedia)

<sup>3</sup> See Castells et al. (2007) for more on the significance of multi-modal mobile communication, including m-government (on pages 100–101).

<sup>4</sup> OII postgraduate students Martin Dimov, Tobias Escher, Marcelo Thompson and Shefali Virkar gave presentations on indicative Web 2.0 applications.

Open access and open source	Widening access to creative content by enabling creators to vary copyright terms (e.g. allowing free access).	Free Software Foundation Creative Commons Overmundo
New forms of social network self-governance	Governance rules for online social networking based on direct user participation.	Wikipedia eBay digg
Political engagement	Supporting citizens' direct involvement in political debate, policy consultation and other political processes.	E-petitions HearFromYourMP Citizen Calling

### The main policy implications

#### *Facing new virtual realities*

The ways in which online decentralized social networks and user-produced content are bypassing traditionally powerful communication gatekeepers suggests that the status quo may no longer be a realistic option for government engagements with the public. However, it is also not yet clear what should be done, as citizens grasp the powerful new communicative empowerment opportunities afforded by the Internet. This is enabling Internet users to reconfigure their access to other people, information, services and technologies,<sup>5</sup> including reshaping their relationships with government. As a result, expectations are being created for government to provide the 'Internet time' responsiveness that is the norm in cyberspace.

For instance, foreign affairs and diplomacy has been transformed by what has been called the 'tyranny of real-time'—round-the-clock, round-the-world news and opinion from a multitude of sources (Grant 2004: 5), as was graphically illustrated by the availability of unofficial images of the hanging of Saddam Hussein in December 2006 shortly after the official Iraqi government video was released. The online polity can also mobilize mass support quickly, for instance through email and mobile phone contacts to organize online lobbying or to form 'flash mobs' who assemble at short notice.

These developments are putting pressure on slower, more deliberative governance processes. Meeting this new demand requires the establishment of administrative, legal and technological infrastructures that are agile enough to react in Internet time and in the Internet space, such as through teams to respond rapidly to (mis)information disseminated online. A prime challenge to 21st Century government in this environment is to keep risk-taking within manageable bounds, while innovating enough to ensure that successes outweigh any failures. For example, joining the growing online mashup in effective and imaginative ways—some as simple as providing a Web link—could help government to forge fresh connections with citizens.

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<sup>5</sup> See Dutton (1999) for a description of the 'reconfiguring access' concept in information politics.

### *Taking a holistic view of e-government and e-democracy*

The delivery of online public services ('e-government') has generally been treated separately from 'e-democracy' engagements between government and citizens and within civil society. The most developed aspects have been in e-government, for example with recent advances in online transactions (e.g. income tax returns and driver licence applications), access to information (e.g. departmental and agency websites, the UK Prime Minister's 10 Downing Street site and evidence submitted to Lord Hutton's Inquiry into the death of Dr David Kelly), and real-time controls (e.g. Transport for London Oystercard and congestion charging systems). However, much less has been achieved in using e-democracy capabilities for citizen empowerment.<sup>6</sup>

The need to address both dimensions within a coherent framework is highlighted by findings from the European Commission's Breaking the Barriers to E-government project (Eynon 2006). Three of the seven key blockages it identified span both areas: failure to meet the diverse choices of citizens across digital divides, lack of trust, and inadequate technical design (e.g. of user interfaces to public services). The other five barriers relate to management and administrative factors, but also have important e-democracy impacts: poor public sector leadership, financial inhibitors, poor coordination, and workplace and organizational inflexibility.

The 'Daily Me' culture poses challenges for both areas by raising citizens' expectations about communicating with others instantaneously and making their own choices directly, at the times and places most convenient to them. A similar trend is evident in the 'real world', as in UK government policies to extend choice in public services and to bring some services closer to where people are (e.g. more health services delivered through primary care and by NHS Direct telephone and online health advice). The independent ethos of the emerging digital generation, such as its preferred engagements outside formal processes, also typifies a generally less deferential attitude to government and other institutions. This could be more significant than the perhaps unwarranted assumption that there has been a recent fall from a 'golden age of participation'.

### **Ten key themes**

Discussions at the workshop reflected a range of views on the topics discussed, leading to sometimes conflicting and frequently inconclusive outcomes. However, there was also much common ground. The following are ten key themes that emerged as broad advice on how to make the most of Web 2.0 capabilities:

1. Government should seek to harness the already unleashed e-energy of the Google generation to support better government. Substantive changes in the status quo in government–citizen relations are taking place because government no longer has a monopoly on creating systems for citizen participation. Individuals and groups are realizing their own online

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<sup>6</sup> For more background on e-democracy and e-government developments, see for example Chadwick (2006), Margetts (2006) and the Government on the Web research project sponsored by the National Audit Office and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

communicative power to reconfigure their engagements with government and enhance their capacity to work with others on issues of common interest.

2. In order to avoid exacerbating barriers to effective engagements with its citizens, government needs to be open to learning from—and building on—the flow of social and technological innovation and risk-taking tied to the continuing waves of digital innovations.
3. Government should use new media like the Internet to reach out to where citizens are already active, including their preferred cyberspaces, rather than only waiting for citizens to come to government, as has previously been done through mass media.
4. The creativity of Web innovators and users should be tapped to develop e-services that are appealing enough to make people want to use them, enjoy using them, and from which they receive tangible benefits.
5. There is not a single ‘digital divide’ relating to access to the Internet, but a range of different needs requiring diverse online and offline channels from which citizens can choose. Trusted intermediaries can assist those unable to go online or those choosing not to do so, who are often the most in need of access to government assistance.
6. Digital literacy improvements within civil society and among politicians and civil servants should be supported, to create more informed understanding of the potential and limitations of digital technologies.
7. Give as much priority and resources as business does to making government’s online presence visible, usable and effectively marketed to reach relevant audiences.
8. Avoid oversimplifying the role of activities in cyberspace in addressing problems that have deep real-world roots, such as social inclusion.
9. Do not present a monolithic centralized online government face to citizens. Instead, encourage creativity and visibility through cross-boundary cooperation among a federation of distinct entities (central, regional and local government, schools, hospitals, etc.), each engaged in its own connections with citizens.
10. Ensure legislation and regulation balances flexibility in supporting online creativity with the need to protect citizens and governments from malign uses of the Internet.

## Web 2.0 and its implications for government

### Evolution towards transformation

The Web 2.0 ‘revolution’ referred to by Time magazine and the desire of the Google generation to shape services to ‘the reality of their lives’, as highlighted by Tony Blair, are evident not just in cyberspace. In addition to this use of the Web itself, similar trends are manifest in the attempts by other media to innovate to allow for similar interaction and content shaping (e.g. interactive digital TV, phone and texting votes for TV programmes like Big Brother, listeners choosing subjects for radio phone-ins, websites with associated message boards, and online forums run by newspapers, radio and TV enterprises).

In these ways, expectations for a new approach to decision making and the delivery of public services and information are being extended beyond the digitally literate. This indicates that government cannot resist or stand outside the ‘march’ of changing social dynamics tied to Web innovations. While it should also not expect to be a leader in Web 2.0 innovation, other than in some special areas of competence, government should be open to incorporating relevant Web creativity originated by users exploiting their online communicative empowerment to generate applications and content. This Internet ‘generativity’ (Zittrain 2006) could support powerful social transformations (e.g. Benkler 2006).

Key Web 2.0 capabilities on which these advances are based, and the predecessors from which they evolved, are summarized in Figure 3. The main types of Web 2.0 applications are summarized in Figure 2 above and discussed in more detail in the subsections following Figure 3 below.

### Figure 3. The evolution of Web 2.0

#### Web 1.0

Basic Internet 1.0 capabilities (open end-to-end connectivity, largely text-based applications usable primarily by professionals and technical experts, such as email, bulletin boards and discussion groups).

Key Web 1.0 tools: websites, browsers and search engines accessed via narrowband dial-up from wired personal computers, workstations and laptops.

Hierarchical server-based structure on the Web, with content ownership and control largely by website owners (mainly in business and government).

Flagship applications: information provision via websites and e-commerce transactions (e.g. Amazon.com).

#### Web 2.0

All of Web 1.0 plus:

Key tools: broadband-supported multimedia; wireless and mobile technologies for anytime, anywhere instantaneous communication; growing real-time interaction; Web development and design tools (e.g. Adobe Flash).

Democratization of Web spaces (e.g. MySpace and YouTube, user-generated content, blogosphere, citizen journalism, peer-to-peer networks).

An even more powerful role for search engines in an increasingly crowded and competitive cyberspace, where gaining strong visibility is crucial but difficult to achieve.

Flagship applications: Social networking; user-created content; Daily Me customizations and mashups, often driven by user-generated applications appealing to younger people (e.g. music, multiplayer games, gossip, friend networks).

## **Social networking**

New forms of instantaneous social networking offer potentially one of the most distinctive and valuable Web innovations to support new forms of democratic engagement. These include:

- YouTube: Marketed with the slogan ‘broadcast yourself’, allows free sharing of video and other content uploaded by anyone, including amateurs and professionals.
- MySpace: Based on user-generated personal material, such as individuals’ profiles, blogs, photos, music, videos and friends’ groups.
- Facebook: Smaller cousin of MySpace, with access based on a recognized educational address.
- SecondLife:<sup>7</sup> Real-time 3D virtual worlds in which users are represented as animated ‘avatars’. Includes an online campus, ‘town hall’ and sport, fashion, music, games and many other worlds. These are based on a private land ownership model, with specialist avatar characteristics paid for, such as advanced skills in a football world.
- Miniclip: Primarily a games site, with 34 million users at the end of 2006.

## **User-generated content**

Most of the Web 2.0 features mentioned in this paper involve some form of user-generated content, from the personal profiles of MySpace to the creative content of YouTube and the crowded, often noisy arena of the ‘blogosphere’ where individuals post regular Web logs of their thoughts and activities. Various discussion forums also rely on user-generated content. Some of these are associated with a website or offline activity with a specific focus, such as a special interest group, a political party or a sports or show business site. Of special interest to government are forums

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<sup>7</sup> SecondLife achieved wide publicity in January 2007 when the World Economic Forum (2007) announced that its participants would be interviewed in one of its virtual worlds.

seeking to offer informed advice (e.g. on health or tax), in which civil society experts in a topic can join with government officials and specialists in consultations with the wider online public. A risk of liability for outcomes to those following the advice in such forums needs to be carefully considered.

User control over information can challenge traditional hierarchical structures and roles. For instance, the US-based sites RateMyTeachers and RateMyProfessors enable students and (for RateMyTeachers) parents to indicate and share their ratings of educators' performance and popularity. Previously such scrutiny was the preserve mainly of officials, inspectors and managers of educational institutions.

## **Mashups**

Joining Web mashups is a key way of tapping into Google generation creativity and reaching out to the sections of the population who have been disengaged from formal political processes, or who may be in need of public services but have not been aware of their availability or have been unable to access them in a convenient way. Effective mashups depend on adherence to open standards to facilitate sharing. Mashup sites include:

- [Chicagocrime.org](http://Chicagocrime.org): Enables crime statistics in Chicago to be broken down to individual street level in easily understood forms by mashing up already available statistics with maps.
- [TheyWorkForYou.com](http://TheyWorkForYou.com): Mashes up information from Hansard and other sources to help UK citizens monitor the activities of their local MP and others in both Houses of Parliament, and in regional assemblies.
- [Overmixter](http://Overmixter): Brazilian initiative enabling users to listen to, create and re-create music in a legal and free manner using a Creative Commons licence. Developed in partnership with the South African ccMixer.

## **Citizen journalism**

The ease of creating an online newsletter or blog and disseminating it without going through traditional communication gatekeepers provides a global space where anyone can become a journalist or their own news editor. Such citizen journalists often raise serious and trivial issues not initially reported in mainstream media. Some are picked up by the mainstream media, such as the views of Vietnam War colleagues of John Kerry that hampered his 2004 US Presidential campaign. Citizen journalists have a relatively wide leeway because the application of libel laws in cyberspace is less clear and more difficult to implement than those relating to traditional jurisdictional boundaries. Citizen journalism examples include:

- [OhMyNews](http://OhMyNews): A pioneering South Korean open-source online newspaper.
- [Global Voices Online](http://GlobalVoicesOnline): A global team of regional blogger-editors who find, aggregate and track output from citizen journalists in many countries.
- [Wikinews](http://Wikinews): A free-content news source based on wiki tools.

- Who's Your Baghdaddy?: Blog by a serving US soldier in Iraq.

### Information searching and provision

The continuing escalation of digital content and the resulting information overload has allowed search tools like Google and Yahoo! to gain a fresh impetus in the Web 2.0 innovation wave (see Figure 4). In e-commerce, for instance, the use of online searches to compare offerings has had a profound impact on the retail industry. If citizen choices are to be extended, they should be provided with easy to find and readily understandable information relevant to their needs. This requires government's online presence to be highly visible on popular search engines, including some government links as advertisements on search engines.

#### Figure 4. The continuing importance of search engines

Only one in five Internet users in Britain in 2005 said they 'primarily go to specific pages'; the rest go to a search engine or use both interchangeably, according to the OII's Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) of Internet use in Great Britain (Dutton et al. 2005: 33).

About one-third of visitors to the UK government's Direct Gov Web portal come from search engines (Direct Gov Usage report, 6–10 October).

When asked how they find information online to undertake activities like renewing a passport or obtaining a state pension forecast, 75% of the subjects in a small-scale study went first to a search engine rather than Direct Gov, although they knew about that site (Escher et al. 2006).

In December 2006, the BBC was the only public institution in Google's top 20 sites most visited from the UK.

### Collaborative production

An archetypal Web 2.0 application is Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia that broke expectations about the necessity for the quality of such a reference work to be controlled by a small team of professional editors. It employs a technique known as 'wiki' to allow a visitor to the site to add, remove and otherwise edit and change available content, easily and quickly.<sup>8</sup> Other wikis in a variety of areas are blossoming around the Web, such as one for the latest World Economic Forum (2007) in Davos, Switzerland.

Before the emergence of Web 2.0, computer-supported collaborative working systems were available mainly to closed or specialist communities, such as in business or through the advanced Grid distributed computing systems used in e-sciences research. Wikis and related Web innovations have made collaborative production a much wider, lower cost and easier to use reality.

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<sup>8</sup> The term 'wiki' is based on the Hawaiian word meaning 'fast' (see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>).

## **Open access: free content, licensing and open source**

'Open access' is a basic Internet design principle that allows the end-to-end unmediated data flows that have stimulated user generation of applications and content (e.g. see Dutton and Peltu 2005). Some locks are being placed on this openness by the growing commercialization of the Internet and attempts to control access to content protected by intellectual property rights (IPR) and copyright. An illustration of how developments like user-generated content and social networking raise significant new IPR-related issues in cyberspace is the action for \$1 billion in damages brought in March 2007 by Viacom, owners of media outlets like MTV and the Comedy Channel, against YouTube and its owner, Google. In this, Viacom contends that almost 160,000 unauthorized clips of Viacom's programming have been made available on YouTube by user uploading, and that these clips had been viewed more than 1.5 billion times (see Viacom 2007).

Initiatives like open source software and the Creative Commons movement seek to allow creators much freedom in deciding how to exercise rights over their creations, for instance by offering certain content free or at low cost to particular user categories (e.g. for research and education; poorer developing nations). Examples of such initiatives include:

- Free Software Foundation: Promotes what has been called Free, Libre and Open Source Software (FLOSS) based on licences that offer users the freedom to: run the program for any purpose, study and adapt its source code, and redistribute and improve it. A price may or may not be charged for the software.
- Creative Archive Licence Group: Collaboration between the BBC, Channel 4, Open University and British Film Institute to make their content available for download under the terms of a Creative Archive Licence. This provides a single, shared user licence for the downloading of moving images, audio and stills.
- Creative Commons: A non-profit organization providing a flexible model of public licences and related tools and support to allow creators to share their work in the ways they choose.
- Overmundo: A project of Creative Commons Brazil, a comprehensive attempt by the Brazilian government, led by the Ministry of Culture, to nourish a Creative Commons approach (see Figure 5).

### Figure 5. Brazilian open commons initiatives

Creative Commons Brazil is coordinated by the Centre for Technology & Society in Rio de Janeiro. It grew from a meeting in Brazil in 2003 between a group of American cyber-rights activists and leading figures in the Brazilian government and cultural and intellectual life. They included the newly appointed Brazilian Minister of Culture, the popular musician Gilberto Gil. His commitment to the Creative Commons movement has led his Ministry and other government bodies to sponsor many initiatives in book publishing, music, film and other cultural activities.

A popular Ministry of Culture project is Overmundo, a collaborative website and cultural database (Banco de Cultura) that allows users to upload content. The Overmixer music sharing and sampling site is one of its projects. Another was the simultaneous release in movie theaters and online of the film Cafuné by award-winning director Bruno Vianna, who also encouraged online audiences to create new conclusions for the work.<sup>9</sup> An Overmundo social networking project is a website enabling police officers from across Brazil to discuss rights and other issues.

Sources for more information: Lemos (2007) and Dibbell (2004).

### New forms of social network governance

A novel Web 2.0 avenue of particular interest to government is provided by the kinds of user-empowered governance models that have supported spontaneous organized structures in Web social networks. These have proven to be resilient in scaling up from small communities to ones involving millions. Key elements in their success include clearly specified governance procedures that are judged to be fair by the community affected, together with the ability for users to help shape governance policies. Three of the most promising approaches are:

- Wikipedia's self-correction collaborative authoring, supported by some light-touch hierarchical overall structure.
- The reputational model used by the highly popular online auction and shopping eBay service, which allows people to put up for sale and buy goods in a way that many thought would not be possible because of the difficulties of trust between sellers and buyers in virtual space.
- The 'digg' system of ranking and organizing user-generated content, in which votes of the online community on content submissions are weighted according to the accumulated popularity of each member (e.g. used by Overmundo, which calls a digg reputation 'karma').

Experiments by government in exploring such 'peer-produced' (Johnson et al. 2004) governance approaches could generate fresh ideas about rules of engagement in online consultative forums. This could be important in addressing problems of trust between citizens and government.

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<sup>9</sup> For more on Cafuné see: <http://icommons.org/2006/11/22/cafune-breaking-the-limits-for-open-business-models/>

## **Political engagement**

Digital democracy proposals have been developed since the emergence of concepts like the ‘public information utility’ in the 1970s and ‘electronic city halls’ in the 1980s (Dutton 1999: 173-193). However, it has only been the wide availability of Web 2.0-type capabilities placing sufficient communicative empowerment at citizens’ fingertips that has begun to make the early visions a widespread reality.

Most social networking and other websites mentioned above offer some form of political engagement, even if it is only at the level of Miniclip’s humorous animations of politicians dancing and doing aerobics. An example of more substantive political engagement on such sites is the way many politicians and others seeking election (e.g. student union candidates) have posted profiles and statements of policy and belief on popular online social networks. For instance, Mark Warner, a Democratic 2008 US Presidential candidate, created an active Facebook profile and bought space in SecondLife, where he held a meeting in its virtual town hall.

A small but growing number of politicians have found such an online presence techniques useful in widening and staying in touch with their support base, encouraging attendance at events, fund raising and activating their voters at election time.<sup>10</sup> A multitude of political, religious and other activists also participate in social networking sites, as well as having their own websites and blogs. Much politically related activity also takes place through websites originating from government, political parties and politicians. UK government initiatives to explore how it can better engage with citizens using the Internet include:

- **E-petitions:** A site launched in November 2006 to enable online petitions to the UK Prime Minister’s Office attracted much interest when nearly 1.8 million supporters signed its most popular initial petition (on road pricing), leading to a major debate in the mass media about the role not only of online petitions but also of wider government–public consultations (e.g. see BBC News 2007). This form of e-petitioning has similarities with paper petitions and aims to avoid becoming a form of quasi-referendum or unrepresentative opinion poll. E-petitioning to the Scottish Parliament is more directly integrated into the formal parliamentary process, with a Public Petitions Committee deciding which are formally presented.
- **Web TV:** Visitors to the 10 Downing Street website have been asked to send in questions they want the Prime Minister to answer, with the journalists conducting an interview by Webcam choosing which to ask.
- **Digital Dialogues:** Funded by the UK Department of Constitutional Affairs to conduct case studies of government–citizen dialogues, such as Web forums run by the Food Standards Agency on safer food and the Department for Work and Pensions on welfare reform. Its overall results (Fergusson 2006) indicate that many participants had not previously been active in such political discussions, with some attracted by the new opportunity to deliberate directly with policy makers on a subject of much personal interest or by the technology itself, as most participants were

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<sup>10</sup> Reported by Shefali Virkar at the OII/Cabinet Office workshop based on comments by politicians who have used these approaches.

already experienced online users. Other research indicates that those who are most politically active online are generally also the most active offline (e.g. Curtice and Norris 2004; Lusoli et al. 2006).

Civil society groups are also developing support for citizen empowerment using networked ICTs, such as:

- HearFromYourMP: Allows cumulative interest by an MP's constituents to combine to put online pressure on MPs to respond to emails, with an ability to check response rates and share replies and comments with other constituents.
- Citizen Calling: A Hansard Society project supported by the Electoral Commission that enabled young people to use mobile phones to submit evidence on the criminal justice system to a Home Affairs Select Committee.
- Neighbourhood Fix-It: Developed with the Young Foundation for reporting and discussion of local problems (e.g. relating to road and street maintenance).

## Improving government–citizen connections

As already highlighted, Web innovations discussed in this paper have implications for both e-democracy and e-government. The following subsections identify key factors affecting both areas, followed by brief summaries of specific issues in each.

### **General guidelines**

#### *Risk-taking and experimentation*

Risk taking is a distinctive characteristic of online social and commercial innovation. The proven ability of emerging Web tools to scale up successfully from initially small systems is a helpful indicator for equivalent government experimentation. The emergence of the Internet and Web themselves showed this trajectory (e.g. see Berners-Lee 1999; Leiner et al. 2003). They have been followed by numerous Web 2.0 examples, such as the growth of YouTube within twenty months of starting in February 2005 to become large enough to be worth \$1.65 billion when it was bought by Google Inc in 2006.

An important potential break on digital innovation in government can come from possible institutional and staff resistance to the associated organizational and workplace changes needed to support a new network governance model effectively. This is most acute where anxieties about the future are triggered by the prospect of an e-innovation that works against traditional processes in which much personal and organizational learning has been invested, such as e-networks that cross previous

organizational boundaries or result in outsourcing and/or the elimination of particular job positions.

Some of these kinds of changes could be seen as ‘scary’, in the sense that they primarily create psychological anxieties about what change will bring rather than posing a direct financial, security or other practical risk. Distinguishing between ‘scariness’ and risk could help government take relatively low risks in initiatives opening significant new institutional, group and personal opportunities that break with previous organizational and career structures, such an incremental opening out of access to, and analysis of, official data to create new forms of engagements with the public in helping them to understand what those statistics mean to citizens in their own particular contexts.

### *Meeting citizens’ needs and choices across digital divides*

Discussion of inequalities in Internet use has generally focused on the divide in physical access to the technology. However, many other divides also exist, such as in skills and patterns of use across age, gender, education and other segments of society (e.g. see di Gennaro and Dutton 2006). For instance, OII Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) research found in 2005 that 98% of people at school leaving age have Internet access, but only 30% of those of retirement age (Dutton et al. 2005: 51). However, for many young people this access is found mainly at school. As the household is the primary arena of Internet use, this leaves significant divides within this age group.

Some divides arise from choices made by individuals who are contented with that decision, for example in households where older people decide not to use available Internet access. Others who would like more appropriate access are unable to obtain it, for example because of a lack of adequate financial resources, digital literacy skills or availability from home. The life chances of children growing up without access are particularly diminished.

Support for enhancing digital literacy is important in closing divides, including through trusted intermediaries who offer advice and training (e.g. to help people distinguish trusted sources from trivial ones). Each segment of society and the individuals within it, has its own online and offline comfort zone. A variety of channels should therefore be available to satisfy their diverse needs (e.g. print or telephone call centres as well as online services; support for an appropriate mix of languages and user interface styles for particular social contexts). All citizens also need to be given tangible ‘value-added’ reasons for going online (e.g. saving money or time; better information provision; more responsive interaction with politicians).

Cyberspace could broaden divides between the politically engaged and the disconnected if the most politically active online are generally also those who are active offline (e.g. Lusoli et al. 2006). However, this is also true for books, TV and other media, and the Digital Dialogues evaluation (Fergusson 2006) indicates how— at the margins—those previously politically inactive can be attracted to online

politics.<sup>11</sup> Although there seems to be a plateau for the overall level of Internet access at around two-thirds of the population (e.g. Dutton et al. 2005), with variations between nations, differences in quality of online experience and access could be more important than the overall figure. If official online referenda or similar e-democracy moves become a reality, universal access becomes more significant.

Examples of initiatives to close digital divides include UK Online Centres in poor communities, and local area network (LAN) houses in Brazil (Lemos 2007), self-sustaining community entrepreneurial small businesses (e.g. kiosks and street stores) filled with digital technologies offering low-cost Internet access.

### *Trust between government and citizens*

The Internet's communicative empowerment of its users can alter the relationship between the governed and those who govern; producer and consumer; old and young; and many other traditional notions of hierarchy and authority. This is creating new pressures on establishing two-way trust in the public sphere: not only citizens' trust in government, but government's trust in citizens' ability and motivation to behave as a responsible and engaged 'demos' rather than the anarchic and often extremist cyberspace 'zoo' perceived by some (e.g. see Wheeler 2006).

Building such trust is essential in moves towards more deliberative e-democracy processes in which citizens use online facilities to help understand and address the difficult trade-offs involved in meeting diverse, often conflicting, stakeholder requirements. In this respect, one of the most promising developments discussed above has been the successful evolution of community self-governance processes. However, publicity about major government IT failures has undermined trust in large-scale digital network projects.

Expectations play an important role in building or undermining trust. Over-expectation about what the use of ICTs can actually achieve could lead to disillusionment, for instance if it is suggested that the technologies alone can overcome problems whose roots are embedded in real world experiences of public services and the impacts of government policies. On the other hand, many citizens could see benefits from a system offering a lesser but more realistic depiction of what to expect, such as making it clear that their voice will be heard and listened to, even if no promise can be made that their view will change specific policy outcomes. For instance, e-petitioning can help to build trust if it leads to visible impacts like getting relevant feed back through the new online channel and seeing an influence on the mass media news agenda. Tony Blair recognized the importance of this when he wrote an article entitled 'The e-petition shows that my government is listening' (Blair 2007) during the media storm sparked by the road tax e-petition. In it, he also argued that the government did not 'share the petitioners' views' but welcomed 'the focus on this issue that the e-petition has brought about'.

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<sup>11</sup> Such patterns have been evident since early digital democracy experiments, such as the PEN 'electronic city hall' developed in the 1980s in Santa Monica, California (Dutton 1999: 184–185; Dutton 2007).

If trust is to be strengthened, suspicions about the motivations of government and politicians who promote the use of digital networks also need to be understood and addressed, as they are often indicative of real underlying political struggles. For example, some fear government may want to undertake centralized surveillance of citizens through online databases or try to manage democracy top-down by using information gathered from e-democracy consultations and other opinion polling in a manipulative way. Many politicians also see the online world primarily as an opportunity to compile contacts for campaigning and fund raising. Such scepticism can be addressed by formulating appropriate legislation to safeguard citizens in cyberspace (e.g. data protection and privacy laws) and providing tangible democratic gains to citizens (e.g. by demonstrating that online consultations and other contacts result in timely and relevant responses).

### *Creating a flexible and relevant legal and regulatory framework*

Important legal issues are raised by the use of e-democracy and e-government systems.<sup>12</sup> These need to be addressed in ways that reassure citizens and public officials, as well as seeking to support the flexibility required to nurture innovations that could deliver real benefits to civil society and government.

### **Figure 6. Key legal issues in government digital networks**

Privacy and data protection: Legislation should guard against abuses of government's extensive authority over highly sensitive personal data collection and access to it, while allowing institutional data sharing that improves coordination and efficiency.

IPR and copyright: New forms of Digital Rights Management (DRM) need to be explored to balance fairly the needs of creators and audiences in cyberspace environments where traditional offline copyright controls are being challenged, including allowing citizens more control over rights to accessing their private data.

Liability: This can be a critical issue in the provision of information on government websites and in government-moderated discussion forums and online health, tax or other advice sites in which government officials participate, perhaps as part of a collaboration.

Authentication and identification of citizens online:<sup>13</sup> Regulations are needed to help manage appropriate levels of digital identification to foster online engagements, while protecting against fraud and other online abuses. While high levels of authentication are essential for some e-government transactions, such as tax returns and passport applications, trust in many e-democracy applications can be bolstered by allowing much leeway in personal anonymity, particularly when engaging with public officials.

Cross-jurisdiction processes: As cyberspace seamlessly spans physical borders, international cooperation is important, for instance within the EU where barriers to trans-European online services can be created when relevant EU Directives are interpreted in different ways within Member States.

<sup>12</sup> The Breaking the Barriers to eGovernment project has examined related legal dimensions in detail (see Eynon 2006).

<sup>13</sup> These issues are being studied by the ESRC e-Society project 'Personal Identification and Identity Management in New Modes of E-government'.

Protection of children: Cybercrime and anti-paedophile grooming laws are being widely established (Nash and Peltu 2005). In the US, the Deleting Online Predators Act (DOPA) of 2006 aims to prohibit schools and public libraries that receive federal funds from allowing young people to access social networking, chat and blogging sites. It has been criticized for being too specific to MySpace-type sites and difficult to implement as young people can find other routes to the sites they want to access.

### **E-democracy: enhancing citizen participation in policy making**

The key e-democracy issue discussed at the workshop was whether the user empowerment brought by Web-based social networking could transform government–citizen connections as substantively as some have argued (e.g. Jenkins and Thorburn 2003; von Hippel 2005). The hope is that a public discourse can be created online in which different stakeholders respect each other while expressing their distinctive viewpoints. The fear is that it could degenerate into destructive confrontations.

Politicians and public officials can facilitate civil discussions and debates by establishing public online spaces and the rules by which they are moderated, just as all other democratic forums have been governed by rules of order. Given government's special status in society, online forums for which it is responsible require particular attention and expertise in developing an appropriate 'netiquette' to moderate—and sometimes 'censor'—discussions (e.g. Dutton 1996). Unregulated forums tend to become boxing rings for the extremes of an argument. However, once a forum is moderated, its momentum can be dampened as the editor can then become legally responsible for its content and poorly designed moderation mechanisms could interrupt free-flowing debate.

In addition to facilitating the establishment of fair rules of order, promising roles for public officials in online policy forums include helping to lightly structure stages of discussion (e.g. fitting a policy development timetable) or to provide balanced summaries and relevant information as discussion progresses. It also helps to have an awareness of techniques used to sabotage and distort forum discussions, or which unintentionally have the same effect, including how to defuse flare-ups and disruptions with the support of the forum's wider community.

The stage at which an online consultation takes place must be carefully considered. E-petitions, for instance, are generally most appropriate for highlighting issues not yet widely debated. Consultations are particularly welcomed by politicians and civil servants when working through details after a strategic direction has been set, for example by placing online evidence received in response to a government White Paper.

High visibility in popular search engines is crucial to informing the public and countering misinformation. For instance, in some contexts a Google search for 'European Health Insurance Card' has shown higher ratings for sources charging to obtain the card, although it is available free from government websites. The appetite for official online information is shown by the downloading within 36 hours of three million copies of the UK government's second Iraq dossier of February 2003.

### *Support for e-democracy initiatives*

Appropriate support is important in creating and sustaining successful e-democracy initiatives. In addition to software and Web design tools, this could include advice to citizens on how to engage with government officials in non-abusive ways, while clearly making the points they wish to raise. Government representatives also need to understand how best to manage online consultations (e.g. in providing appropriate feedback). Organizations offering such support include:

- MySociety.org: Builds websites for civic and community activities (e.g. 10 Downing Street e-petition site; TheyWorkForYou.com; Neighbourhood Fix-It).
- The International Teledemocracy Centre (ITC), Napier University, Edinburgh: Applies expertise in software engineering and political and sociological analysis to e-democracy applications (e.g. the Scottish Parliament's e-petition system).
- Electoral Commission: Offers a portal to e-democracy resources.
- International Centre for Local e-Democracy: A virtual focal point for collaborative e-democracy initiatives in the UK and abroad, including use of the Centre's online resources by UK local authorities, community groups and citizens to help run projects in their own areas.
- Sunlight Foundation: Enables US citizens to learn more about what Congress and their elected representatives are doing by enhancing access to existing information, digitizing new information and creating new tools for shared information exchange and political action (e.g. mashing up databases and Google maps to identify Congress members' campaign contributions and votes).
- DEMO-net: A network of social, technological and scientific researchers studying the nature and impacts of e-democracy 'eParticipation' initiatives across Europe, sponsored by the European Commission.

### **E-government: rethinking the design and delivery of public services**

The use of ICTs in e-government has been evolving for many decades (e.g. Chadwick 2006; Margetts 2006). The main applications to date have been the provision of information on websites and the undertaking of some online transactions. However, research by the Audit Office's Government on the Web project, which started in 1999, indicates that the gap between e-government and e-commerce uses of online capabilities in business may be widening, after narrowing in 2002. A principal reason could be the failure of government to respond as quickly as the private sector to opportunities opened by Web 2.0 innovations.

To achieve the Internet's potential for being used to transform public services successfully, rather than just increase the productivity of traditional approaches, reasons for resistance within government to the necessary internal flexibility should be understood and addressed. For example, there can be perceived and real loss of status and power in departmental 'turf wars' or negative impacts on staff when processes are redesigned to support a network governance model. Motivating individuals and groups in the public sector to welcome online innovations that will benefit citizens is therefore a key policy priority.

Even though e-government and e-commerce have distinctive and often very different objectives and cultures, lessons learnt in business from more advanced online applications can be of much value to e-government—provided they are appropriately recast in the public sphere. For instance, digital networks have transformed firms' ability to know customers and treat them according to their particular requirements. In an e-government context, these online-enhanced customer relations management techniques could be of benefit in learning how to help tailor public services to individual citizens' requirements and to demonstrate tangible 'value-added' benefits of going online (e.g. saving time in reporting a problem like broken street lighting to a local council and receiving email feedback on progress in solving the problem, in an analogous way to the support for e-commerce transactions).

Some lessons from e-commerce experience cannot be transferred automatically to government contexts because business and government operate within different economic and incentive structures. For example, a website that generates more demand in business generally creates opportunities for increased profits, whereas an effective problem-reporting website for a public service (such as for road repairs) could add a strain to limited public finances. However, in this respect government can learn from e-commerce the importance of considering during the design and development of new e-government services the appropriate resource levels needed to support any changes in demand that the online move could bring.

## Conclusion: incremental paths to transforming the public sphere

This paper has sought to identify the degree to which Web 2.0 innovations, characterized around the broad concept of a 'Google generation', can help government to support, and benefit from, citizens' self-generated communicative power enhancements enabled by the Internet. A key conclusion was that many important answers to the main questions raised can already be found on the Web. More will emerge as a growing number of Internet users learn how to take advantage of their new levers of online communicative empowerment, such as social networking and user-generated content, to reconfigure social, political and commercial relationships. Government officials and politicians therefore need to learn how to participate in this virtual space, and in high-speed Internet time, and to no longer regard government as the prime source of tools and systems to support democratic participation.

In embracing these developments, government must obviously take account of the special needs of the public sector, for example safeguarding private data held by government and protecting citizens' online safety and security. The aim is to develop websites and online services for the public that attract people's attention and deliver tangible benefits. Incremental successes that enhance citizens' lives in some way

can help to build the trust necessary to move towards more fundamental transformations. However, enthusiasm for online interactions must not lead to the abandonment of older technologies and offline channels that remain important to particular groups.

### **Creating a ‘Wow!’ response**

Seeking a ‘Wow!’ response from users of government online services can help to generate enthusiasm for new forms of government–citizen relationships. This Wow! factor can come from relatively simply produced ‘pleasant surprises’ when dealing with government, as well from more startling high-risk, high-impact innovations. Such ‘Wow!’ examples could include:

- Breaking traditional expectations and perceptions of government by demonstrating significant improvements over offline services (e.g. making it click-easier, quicker, cheaper and more enjoyable to contact government, get relevant feedback and undertake transactions—or to generate a national debate, as for the road pricing e-petition).
- Making existing government data available in appealing forms for mashing up by citizens in ways that are most meaningful to them (e.g. providing national and local statistics that can be overlaid on local maps; presenting a government report with spreadsheet support for analyzing raw data provided; a website allowing a Bill’s progress through Parliament or a planning application through a local government process to be tracked, with links to related documents, meetings and contacts).
- Creating policy consultation spaces where the previously excluded can participate fully (e.g. exploiting the ability of cyberspace to dissolve status, age, physical, geographic and other barriers, such as forums giving a voice to those who may feel intimidated in a real-world meeting, as happened in consultations over UK legislation on domestic violence to women, when contributions were received from women who were unlikely to have been heard from otherwise).
- Applying proven Web innovations that could seem startling when deployed by government (e.g. having an avatar presence in a 3D Second Life World; experimenting with multiplayer games to build understanding of the dynamics and complexities of multi-stakeholder policy making, such as a local authority planning game with rules based on actual planning law; involving young people who understand the Web’s creative opportunities in the design of government sites, aimed both at their contemporaries and older generations; websites informing, communicating and getting practical responses on local issues, such as graffiti clean-up campaigns).
- Using business customer relations management techniques to enhance connections between citizens and government (e.g. targeting ‘special offers’ and information according to a person’s needs, such as e-loyalty cards for public transport or recycling facilities; email feedback on progress in responding to a public service request or transaction).

## Paying attention to detail

This report has highlighted many practical ways in which Web advances could support better government. Figure 7 recaps some of the main best practice pointers.

### Figure 7. Key steps to improving government with the help of Web innovations

#### Strategic

Manage risk to encourage incremental, containable experimental steps to Wow! and transformational outcomes, in ways that are appealing and productive.

Establish legal foundations that are flexible enough to support digital innovation and sound enough to protect citizens, public servants and government from abuses.

Don't separate thinking and planning about democracy and government and associated digital initiatives.

Recognize, understand and address institutional and workplace constraints.

Provide resources to improve and sustain better digital literacy within government, as well as in the wider population.

Establish more flexibility in licensing and digital rights management issues, enabling more open access and greater reuse of public sector information.

Consider regional, European and wider international legal and regulatory implications and engage in necessary cooperation with other countries and relevant NGOs.

#### Tactical

Take advantage of the enthusiastic contribution of the 'Google generation' ethos by involving creative individuals keen to build imaginative new applications.

Make online public services appealing, easy to use and offering tangible benefits.

Provide a mix of multi-modal online and offline channels to meet the diversity of user needs and aims.

Develop guidelines to assist government services and democratic initiatives to tap Web 2.0 creativity (e.g. in how to join mashups and the role of public officials in democratic e-forums, such as formulating appropriate 'rules of engagement').

Establish high visibility for government's presence on the Web.

Design and test website usability, navigability and wide accessibility (e.g. for elders, the disabled or people with special language needs).

Exploit the Internet's ability to provide efficient, tailored feedback.

Create a rapid response team within government to take account of ‘Internet time’ round-the-clock online flows of information and misinformation.

Use open standards and widely used products wherever appropriate (e.g. Adobe Flash for animation and video downloads; the RSS streaming standard for fast syndication of information updates between multiple websites)<sup>14</sup>

Embrace new media and technologies as they emerge.

## **Dilemmas and tensions to be addressed**

ICTs are two-edged: the same capability can be used for better and worse outcomes, such as the Internet’s openness to both welcomed and unwanted content. This makes it difficult for government to achieve an acceptable balance for all stakeholders, leading it sometimes ‘to be damned if it does and damned if it doesn’t’. For example, Tony Blair announced plans in January 2007 to use ICTs to help share information to improve public service delivery. In response, the main story in *The Independent* stated: ‘Moves to share people’s personal details across Whitehall have provoked a civil liberties uproar and accusations that the Government has taken another step towards “a Big Brother state”’ (Morris 2007). In the same issue, columnist Johann Hari (2007) put a counter argument: ‘If we assume all state action undermines human freedom, we will end up opposing smart measures that help people along with the ones that cause real harm.’

This privacy–trust tension is one of a number of dilemmas caused by underlying conflicts of interest and perception that need to be understood and addressed in developing policies relating to government–citizen relationships using new digital media. Another crucial area of vigorous debate relates to censorship versus free speech. This is particularly important in the context of the Internet’s open, unmediated ethos that has been a major factor in its growth.

Few inside or outside government want either of the extremes of strict government censorship or confrontational citizen outrage. Instead, the challenge for government is to gain the support and trust of citizens in online capabilities, while protecting the justifiable government need to maintain controls appropriate to its special position in society and to ensure that the facilities it manages are not abused in illegal or otherwise unacceptable ways. Another form of central control that is often disputed relates to attempts to present a coordinated ‘online face’ to government services by limiting the degree of independence of departments, agencies and local initiatives. The Direct Gov UK portal seeks to balance this tension by having a central team offering a coordinating framework supporting easy access to services on departmental websites.

Figure 8 summarizes these and other dilemmas raised by government use of digital networks and related technologies. Although no simple ‘fix’ can resolve the deep-

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, RSS is used by Euro Info Centres for small and medium enterprises in the EU’s Competitiveness and Innovation Programme.

rooted tensions they represent, their underlying social dynamics should be studied, understood and addressed.

**Figure 8: Policy dilemmas in applying ICTs to government**

Main tension	Description
Privacy–trust	The Internet’s open design that has enabled the user creativity fuelling Web innovations can also undermine trust, safety and security by opening virtual doors to malicious intrusions into citizens’ and government’s cyberspaces.
Control–freedom	Government needs to maintain some controls to ensure its special position in society is not abused. However, such controls are often seen as intrusive restrictions by citizens.
Central–devolved power	Fear of a loss of control could lead government to present itself as a monolith in cyberspace, rather than allowing each public service to create its own presence within a flexible framework. But devolution could lead to poor coordination, inefficiency and patchy results.
Experimentation–stability	Risk-taking is central to the ‘Google generation’ spirit, but government must be cautious about the impact of its experiments on citizens and public services.
Speed–deliberation	Instantaneous communication from almost anywhere at any time is accelerating many democratic and government processes in beneficial ways. However, speed can undermine policy making that requires more studied deliberation.
Efficiency–surveillance	ICTs can improve administrative coordination and public services by sharing access to information. But ‘Big Brother’ fears about abuses of that access can block such sharing.
Protective–enabling	Legislation and regulation aiming to protect against e-network abuses also needs to support as much Web innovation as possible, although that could create new threats as well as delivering new benefits.
Promotion–overhyping	Many citizens need to be encouraged to go online, but over-exaggeration of the benefits of new ICTs and underplaying of the continuing value of other channels can lead to resistance to some innovations.

**Key future research areas to be explored**

Given the rapidly changing overall social and economic environment and the diverse nature and impacts of relevant digital innovations, it was no surprise that workshop discussions revealed many important areas requiring further clarification. Some key related research topics where more investigation is warranted to assist policy and practice are summarized in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: Research topics to help government–citizen engagements**

The social dynamics underpinning the dilemmas and tensions illustrated in Figure 8.

Expectations of citizens when engaging in policy consultations (e.g. mainly recognition that their voice is being heard or a belief that their views should be seen to influence actual policy in visible ways).

Online consultations that are more deliberative than a ‘point-and-click democracy’.

Targeted studies of the ways younger people and other groups exercise particular choices to use or not to use online and offline media in the public sphere.

Best practice guidelines to assist politicians and public officials to participate effectively in online consultation forums, based on case studies of what works and what doesn’t in online government–citizen engagements, and the reasons why.

Ways of recasting commercial e-customer relations management approaches in public service environments.

The optimum points in policy development for using particular kinds of online consultation.

Improving political engagement through forums on websites with non-political focal points (e.g. message boards associated with music or sports sites).

Barriers to e-democracy and e-government, and how to avoid or overcome them.

Legal and regulatory requirements for government’s online activities.

Digital literacy training and support requirements.

Tools to assist wider take up of digital technology capabilities to improve government connections with citizens.

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## Appendix 1. Workshop participants

- Richard Allan, Head of Government Affairs for UK and Ireland, Cisco Systems
- Andrew Chadwick, Senior Lecturer in Political Science, Royal Holloway, University of London
- \*Cass Chideock, Assistant Director, Strategy & Policy Team, Delivery & Transformation Group, Cabinet Office
- Martin Dimov, Chevening Scholar, Oxford Internet Institute
- Bill Dutton, Director, Professor of Internet Studies, Oxford Internet Institute
- Tobias Escher, DPhil Student, Oxford Internet Institute
- Rebecca Eynon, Research Fellow, Oxford Internet Institute
- Ross Ferguson, Director, eDemocracy Programme, Hansard Society
- Gloria Flowers, Policy Advisor, Strategy & Policy Team, Delivery & Transformation Group, Cabinet Office
- Linda Frankland, Deputy Director, Oxford Internet Institute
- John Harrison, Eidentity Ltd
- Ian Johnson, Head of Democratic Engagement Department of Constitutional Affairs
- Jimmy Leach, Head of Prime Minister's Office Web team
- Miriam Lips, Research Fellow, Oxford Internet Institute
- Helen Margetts, Director of Research, Professor of Society and the Internet, Oxford Internet Institute
- Kieren McCarthy, Freelance Journalist
- \*Pat McFadden, MP, Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (including responsibility for e-Government and Direct Gov websites)
- John Naughton, Professor of the Public Understanding of Technology, Faculty of Technology, The Open University
- Joe Organ, Research Fellow, Oxford Internet Institute
- \*\*John Palfrey, Clinical Professor of Law at Harvard Law School and Executive Director of the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School
- Malcolm Peltu, Editorial Consultant

- William Perrin, Director, Strategy & Policy Team, Delivery & Transformation Group, Cabinet Office
  - Saverio Romeo, Consultant, Technopolis Ltd
  - Marcelo Thompson, DPhil Student, Oxford Internet Institute
  - Jo Twist, Senior Research Fellow, Digital Society & Media Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)
  - Shefali Virkar, DPhil Student, Oxford Internet Institute
  - Steve Ward, Research Fellow, Oxford Internet Institute
  - \*Ben Wegg-Prosser, Director of Strategic Communications, No 10
  - \*\*Jonathan Zittrain, Director of Graduate Studies, Professor of Internet Governance and Regulation, Oxford Internet Institute
- \* Participated via video link from 10 Downing Street
- \*\* Participated via video link from the Berkman Center

## Appendix II. Addresses for websites in the report

### Examples of typical Web 2.0 innovations

ccMixer: <http://ccmixter.org>

Chicago crime: <http://www.chicagocrime.org>

Citizen Calling: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/newsreleasecampaigns.cfm/news/581](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/newsreleasecampaigns.cfm/news/581)

Creative Commons: <http://creativecommons.org>

Creative Commons Brazil: <http://creativecommons.org.br>

Creative Archive Licence Group:

[http://creativearchive.bbc.co.uk/archives/creative\\_archive\\_licence\\_group/](http://creativearchive.bbc.co.uk/archives/creative_archive_licence_group/)

Digg: <http://digg.com>

eBay: [www.ebay.co.uk/](http://www.ebay.co.uk/)

E-petitions (to 10 Downing Street): <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk>

Facebook: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

Free Software Foundation: [www.fsf.org](http://www.fsf.org)

Global Voices Online: [www.globalvoicesonline.org](http://www.globalvoicesonline.org)

HearFromYourMP: [www.hearfromyourmp.com](http://www.hearfromyourmp.com)

Miniclip: [www.miniclip.com](http://www.miniclip.com)  
MySpace: [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)  
Neighbourhood Fix-It: [www.neighbourhoodfixit.com](http://www.neighbourhoodfixit.com)  
OhMyNews: <http://english.ohmynews.com>  
Overmixter: <http://overmundo.com.br/overmixter>  
Overmundo: [www.overmundo.com.br](http://www.overmundo.com.br)  
RateMyTeachers: [www.ratemyteachers.com](http://www.ratemyteachers.com)  
SecondLife: <http://secondlife.com>  
Scottish Parliament: [http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk/list\\_petitions.asp](http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk/list_petitions.asp)  
TheyWorkForYou.com: [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)  
YouTube: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)  
Who's Your Baghdaddy?: [www.uppermansblog.blogspot.com](http://www.uppermansblog.blogspot.com)  
Wikipedia: <http://wikipedia.org>  
Wikinews: <http://wikinews.org>

### **Other relevant websites and projects**

10 Downing Street (UK Prime Minister's Office): <http://www.number10.gov.uk>;  
petition on road pricing: <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/traveltax/>  
Breaking the Barriers to eGovernment: [www.egovbarriers.org](http://www.egovbarriers.org)  
DEMO-net: [www.demo-net.org/demo](http://www.demo-net.org/demo)  
Department for Work and Pensions forum: [www.welfarereformforum.net](http://www.welfarereformforum.net)  
Direct Gov: [www.direct.gov.uk/](http://www.direct.gov.uk/)  
Electoral Commission e-democracy initiative:  
[www.electoralcommission.org.uk/toolkit/theme-listing.cfm/45](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/toolkit/theme-listing.cfm/45)  
EU Competitiveness and Innovation Programme: [www.alg-europe.gov.uk/webroot/Policy/enterprise.htm](http://www.alg-europe.gov.uk/webroot/Policy/enterprise.htm)  
Food Standards Agency Web forum: [www.food.gov.uk/sfbbforum](http://www.food.gov.uk/sfbbforum)  
Government on the Web: [www.governmentontheweb.org](http://www.governmentontheweb.org)  
International Centre for Local e-Democracy: [www.icele.org/site/index.php](http://www.icele.org/site/index.php)  
International Teledemocracy Centre (ITC), Napier University: <http://itc.napier.ac.uk>  
Lord Hutton Inquiry: [www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk](http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk)  
MySociety: [www.mysociety.org](http://www.mysociety.org)  
NHS Direct: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)  
OxIS (Oxford Internet Surveys): <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/microsites/oxis>  
Personal Identification and Identity Management in New Modes of E-government  
(ESRC e-Society project): [www.york.ac.uk/res/e-society/projects/13.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/res/e-society/projects/13.htm)

RateMyProfessors: [www.ratemyprofessors.com/index.jsp](http://www.ratemyprofessors.com/index.jsp)

Transport for London Congestion Charge: [www.cclondon.com/](http://www.cclondon.com/)

Transport for London OysterCard: [www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/fares-tickets/oyster/general.asp](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/fares-tickets/oyster/general.asp)

Sunlight Foundation: [www.sunlightfoundation.com/about](http://www.sunlightfoundation.com/about)

UK Online Centres: [www.ufi.com/ukol/](http://www.ufi.com/ukol/)

World Economic Forum wiki:

<https://connect.weforum.org/display/openForum2007/Home>