
Guest editors' introduction: one-stop government

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In the literature, one-stop government has been associated with a number of appealing characteristics, including the following:

- integrated service provision i.e., the supply of services offered by one or many different public authorities or agencies from a single access point
- service provision follows the needs of customers (citizens, businesses, public authorities) rather than the functional decomposition of the public sector

- the number of interactions of the customer with the public sector is the minimum possible (one in the best case)
- the citizen has a selection of channels for the interaction with the public sector, which can also be used interchangeably (in case multiple contacts are necessary).

The concept of one-stop government is not a newly invented one. Several governments aimed to provide their services through a physical one-stop centre in the past. Hence, one-stop government refers to a certain approach towards service provision and not to a certain technology. This concept however was revitalised in the era of new Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Indeed, the potential of ICT has recently led to further broadening of the initial concept of one-stop government. In the literature, the one-stop government paradigm includes:

- electronic delivery of governmental information and services
- 24 × 7 access to governmental information and services
- use of multiple communication channels (e.g., counter, telephone, fax, portals, digital TV etc.) for obtaining information and service provision
- seamless use of communication channels
- integration of governmental information and services based on customer needs (e.g., life-events, business episodes, thematic areas, minority groups etc.)
- provision of personalised information and services.

At the same time, the potential of ICT has led to the introduction of the electronic government (e-government) concept. Currently, e-government is a political priority in an increasing number of governments worldwide including the European Union and the USA. The goals of e-government initiatives include the improvement of service provision to citizens and businesses. Improved service provision stands for increased quality, faster provision, accessibility of services anywhere and anytime independently of the government agencies offering them, and provision at low cost.

It is therefore evident that one-stop government fulfils all e-government promises related to service delivery. Therefore, one-stop government can provide a powerful guiding principle for e-government. However, realising one-stop government is a challenging task with a number of barriers which are not only purely technical. A summary of possible barriers follows.

First, one-stop government faces legal barriers. In many cases, the collaboration of different authorities in order to provide joined services is not explicitly stated in the relevant laws. Unlike private companies which are allowed to do anything unless strictly prohibited, public authorities can only perform actions as explicitly stated in the relevant laws. But even if the state has the political will to proceed with relevant legislation this has to be compliant with existing legislation, e.g., for data security and protection.

Legal changes are clearly related to culture. Indeed, in some countries the efficiency of the public administration takes some precedence over data protection. In these cases for example it is allowed for one public authority to have access to different types of personal data, e.g., financial, medical etc. if this enhances its efficiency in service

provision. In other countries however this is strictly prohibited. For the latter, each public authority is entitled to access only personal information that is absolutely essential for performing its mission and no more. This might hurt its ability to provide more efficient public services.

Organisational barriers are related to both legal and cultural barriers. In many cases, organisations have a tradition in working in silos and public servants show reluctance in adopting new methods of work, such as ones involving ICTs. In addition, efficient business models for one-stop government (including online one-stop government) are still to be identified.

Finally, semantic, syntactic and technological barriers should not be underestimated. In many cases, over the years public authorities have created their own terminology and have developed their own information systems based on such terminology. One-stop government suggests that consensus must be established as to the use of common terminology. In addition interoperability solutions need to be available for the information systems to be able to exchange information.

In this special issue on one-stop government some of the above-mentioned dimensions are investigated. More specifically, four papers are presented as follows:

- 'The user at the centre of the development of one-stop e-government', by Verdegem and Hautekeete studies the needs and expectations of citizens towards (new) electronic public services using both qualitative and quantitative methods.
- 'An active blackboard for service discovery, composition and execution', by Lepouras et al., presents a technical architecture that automates the task of service composition based on the semantics of individual services and the data dependencies amongst them.
- 'An inter-organisational perspective on challenges in one-stop government', by Axelsson and Melin, proposes a conceptual framework for analysing empirical data from an inter-organisational one-stop government project in Sweden and derives some interesting e-government challenges, barriers and problems.
- 'Considerations for commercialisation of e-government research solutions', by Chatzidimitriou et al., discusses the role of certain requirements that should be considered in the early stage of an e-government research project in order for the final results to have considerable commercialisation possibilities.