

innovations

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Center for Technology in Government

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The First Stop for e-Government Resources

In March 2001, 79 representatives from 43 organizations representing state and local government and the private and nonprofit sectors met in a roundtable event to discuss the key aspects of e-government development in New York State. They identified 45 topics of concern and selected 17 of them for small group discussions. Eight themes emerged from the roundtable discussions, and cover the full scope of the e-government challenge.

Among the themes developed was the need for ways to tap into the expertise, experience, and knowledge available across state and local government. Roundtable participants talked about creation of a repository of accumulated knowledge about e-government expertise, tools, projects, and results.

In response to the roundtable's results, and after a yearlong process of research and development, CTG introduces *e-Gov FirstStop*[™], a knowledge-sharing resource. The Web-based resource includes a wide variety of e-government material including executive-level briefings, research and best practices reports, case studies, and organization Web sites. All resources included in *e-Gov FirstStop*[™] are reviewed and selected by e-government practitioners and scholars for high quality and practical value.

The *e-Gov FirstStop*[™] site was launched as part of CTG's "e-Government: Creating Tools of the Trade" research program. "Creating the Tools of the Trade" was designed to support e-government planning and initiatives at all levels of government by offering practical advice, successful models, and well-grounded guides.

"Readily accessible and high quality resources on e-government topics are high on the government manager's wish list," notes Sharon Dawes, director of CTG.

"We are confident that *e-Gov FirstStop*[™] will be a valuable resource for individuals at all levels of government.

It provides the capability to be one click away from selected and practical advice on e-government issues."

As the resource grows, it will highlight the best and most current e-government reference material available. In addition, the site's review board will also evolve to include a distinguished and multidisciplinary panel of e-government experts. Visit *e-Gov FirstStop*[™] online at www.ctg.albany.edu/egovfirststop.



Action research focus of CTG learning

Action Research. It sounds like field work undertaken by Professor Indiana Jones. But in actuality, it is a type of inquiry that concentrates on “learning by doing,” and it was the focus of a day-long CTG internal workshop that explored the methodology and its various applications.

Action research can be described as a family of research methodologies that pursue action (or change) and research (or understanding) at the same time. Applied under titles including participatory action research, action learning, soft systems methodology, and process consulting, it therefore has components which resemble consultancy or change agency, and some that resemble field research.

What separates action research from general professional practices, consulting, or daily problem-solving is the emphasis on scientific study, where the researcher studies the problem systematically and ensures that intervention is guided by theoretical considerations. Much of the researcher’s time is spent on refining the methodological tools to meet the necessities of the situation, and on collecting, analyzing, and presenting data on an ongoing, cyclical basis.

Action research traces its roots to the social psychology theories of Kurt Lewin at MIT in the mid-1940’s. His contributions to change theory, action research, and action learning earned him the title of the “father of organization development.” In addition to the groundbreaking work of Lewin, the CTG workshop also included perspectives of such social science luminaries as Gerald Susman, Edgar Schein, Chris Argyis, Donald Schön, Stephen Kemmis, Shirley Grundy, Peter Checkland, Richard L. Baskerville, and William F. Whyte.



In order to study the full range of the action research continuum, CTG staff and invited guests divided into 10 research teams to explore specific areas and report back the salient points of their topic to the rest of the staff. The resource material was divided by theme and/or discipline into groups titled: the Classics, the Consultants, the Action Learners, the Australian Educators, the Psychologists, the System Thinkers, the IS Researchers, the Methodologists, the Critical Theorists and the Philosophers. Guest participants included Dr. Francois Cooren from the UAlbany Communication Department, Giri Tayi, UAlbany professor in Management Science and Information Systems, Luis Luna and Ignatio Martinez from Rockefeller College, Dr. David Hakken, Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Policy Center at SUNY Institute of Technology, Utica, and Barbara Andrews who is currently doing action research on educational transformation in the Utica area.

“The workshop allowed us to be exposed to the many variations of action research methodology and explore how we might even more extensively and systematically utilize these concepts in our own applied research projects,” explains Hans J. (Jochen) Scholl, CTG Project Support Manager, who devised and coordinated the workshop. “Just as importantly, we employed a knowledge acquisition and diffusion process (which is the collaborative workshop format with distributed, complementary tasks and assignments) that gives us tremendous leverage and gets us beyond what would be achievable by a single individual in such a short period of time. In other words, apart from the topic of Action Research, we found and used a process that will enable CTG to collectively jumpstart into many topical areas where we want to broaden, deepen, and synchronize our understanding in both an effective and efficient way.”

Policy Panel Tackles Timely Issues

How do government agencies decide what information to make public and how? How do they determine what information to include or exclude from their Web sites? How can they best use information technology to give people the information they need? How do they protect personal privacy and try to ensure personal and national security?

These questions were among those addressed at a policy panel hosted by the Center for Technology in Government on January 17, 2002. Held in the Assembly Parlor at the State Capitol in Albany, the panel discussion, entitled “Information Access in an Electronic World,” examined the difficult balance among competing information policy goals.



Policy Panel moderator (l-r) Sharon Dawes stands with panelists Alex Roberts, John Sennett, Julie Leeper, Debra Cohn and Ari Schwartz.

“The tensions between the right to know and the need to know are always with us, but today they are more visible to everyone,” notes Sharon Dawes, director of CTG, who served as moderator for the panel. “Policy-makers and government managers are re-evaluating and redefining information dissemination, security, and privacy policies that balance important--but often competing--policy goals. Our policy panel provided a valuable forum to consider the options.”

The policy panel involved representatives from a broad range of disciplines including government agencies, academic institutions, citizen-access groups, and IT and homeland security experts. Panelists included Debra Cohn, Deputy Attorney General for Public Policy, NYS Department of Law, Julie Leeper, Assistant Director of Strategic Policy, Acquisition & e-Commerce, New York State Office for Technology, Alex Roberts, Assistant Director for IT Services, Office of Systems, New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, Ari Schwartz, Associate Director, Center for Democracy and Technology and John Sennett, Special Agent, FBI.

Panelists offered insight on a number of information policy and security issues. Among their observations:

On Web site content policy:

I think maybe a rule of thumb is a Web site should contain all of the information that a reasonably diligent citizen could get by other means. – John Sennett

So I guess, to echo the other comments, it's common sense. You have to weigh the good to society against the possible use by the outlaws in society. That's never very easy. – Alex Roberts



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On Web security:

... I think the key is absolute diligence, constant care and watching; you can never stop looking at the logs. It's a tedious job and that's what the security officers need to do. You don't put a security officer system in place and move on to the next project; it's constant. — Julie Leeper

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On policies that react to 9/11:

... we can draw on what has happened in the past when we approach this crisis now. And I think that our country has in the past often faced terrorist and other kinds of threats...and have reacted in a variety of ways, sometimes in ways that we have regretted. — Debra Cohen

On national identity cards:

I think the question before you say do you need a national ID card is what is the problem that we're trying to solve with a national ID card and will a national ID card be effective in solving that problem? So before...you can get into the privacy concerns, the question I would ask is what exactly are we trying to do here and why? — Ari Schwartz

The discussions of the policy panel have been recorded as a summary transcript, available on the CTG Web site at www.ctg.albany.edu/egov/results.html, as part of CTG's "e-government: Creating the Tools of the Trade" research program. The yearlong program will produce practical resources to assist in the innovative and effective use of electronic programs and services. The program responds to the expressed needs of governments who are engaged in planning, designing, and implementing e-government initiatives. "Creating Tools of the Trade" is designed to support that work at all levels of government by offering practical advice, successful models, and well-grounded guides.

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Granting organizations of the future focus of new research

Two of the most prominent research organizations in the country—the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health—have combined to fund a \$236,000 grant to work with the grants-making community to develop an information technology and organizational design research agenda for evaluation and management of research proposals.

Together, NSF and NIH handle more than 80,000 funding requests and award more than \$25 billion in grants each year. These grants support the vital scientific and medical research of scientists, physicians, and engineers across the country. As NSF and NIH start to fund more multi-disciplinary research that involves partnerships among business, education, and government, they realized a thorough reflection and visioning process related to the grants-making process was integral to fulfilling their goals.

“These organizations’ ambitious goals for the near future demand a more fundamental re-thinking of their way of working,” notes CTG Director Sharon Dawes. “This analysis must consider institutional, organizational, legal, and financial factors that, along with technology itself, shape the grants-making process.”

CTG is involved in this effort by investigating how federal and private grants-making organizations can best use e-business technologies and e-government principles to support grants-making in the future. CTG researchers are using a variety of methods to

identify the characteristics of an ideal grants-making enterprise.

“We are identifying current and best practices among grants-making organizations of all kinds, identifying the information policy and management challenges that lie ahead, and creating a research agenda to address both the technological and organizational transformations that will be necessary for granting organizations to perform at the highest level in the future,” says CTG Project Director Theresa Pardo.

Work on the project began over the summer of 2001. CTG researchers conducted a number of group interviews with members of the university, medical, and private-sector research communities, with private grants-making organizations, and with staff from NSF and NIH. Results from those interviews were shared with the participants in a day-long meeting on December 17 in Washington, D.C. The participants reviewed and responded to a draft vision statement and a set of ideal characteristics of the granting organization of the future. Five themes emerged from these discussions and were used to frame a two-day workshop.

The workshop, held on March 6-7, 2002, in Alexandria, Va., involved a distinguished group of researchers and practitioners from a variety of fields in an effort to develop a research agenda for the granting organization of the future. The workshop focused on specific themes:



- ◆ Defining, measuring and communicating what we value in the grant-supported research process
- ◆ Managing workflow in grants-making organizations
- ◆ Capturing and managing knowledge in the grants-making and proposal creating process
- ◆ Collaborating across boundaries
- ◆ Assessing the full costs and benefits of investing in, managing, and supporting technologies in grants-making organizations

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Specific objectives for the workshop involved the generation of:

- ◆ Proposed criteria for investing in research activities that will have the greatest positive impact on grants-making
- ◆ Issues, opportunities, and themes for cross-disciplinary research to foster the creation, adoption, and diffusion of innovative and effective grants-making IT applications
- ◆ Recommended criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the research program
- ◆ Recommended ways to build mutually beneficial links between researchers and the information services and grants-making communities
- ◆ Specific multidisciplinary research proposals which represent new partnerships among the participants

“The research agenda crafted by the workshop participants addresses the ability of grants-making organizations to adopt advanced technology applications and to deliver effective information-based services to the communities they serve,” Theresa explains. “We applied a variety of disciplinary lenses to this picture in order to recommend research topics, criteria for project selection, and criteria for evaluating research results.”

The context, issues, and results of the project will be summarized in a report and recommended research agenda for grants-making agencies and researchers.

Redesigning an entire system...one process at a time

It takes dozens — sometimes hundreds — of business processes to operate one organization. One of the greatest challenges to organizations is the fragmentation of these processes. Fragmentation results in a lack of integration of data, workflows, systems, and services.

Remedying this fragmentation was at the heart of CTG’s project with the Office of the New York State Comptroller (OSC). CTG worked side-by-side with OSC’s central accounting system redesign team to model and analyze selected business processes. This work was part of a larger initiative to redesign OSC’s almost 20-year-old statewide central accounting system which handles 17.5 million transactions each year.

One of the key aspects of the ground-level work on the central accounting system redesign was a thorough analysis of the business processes it supports. CTG worked with the Comptroller’s Office to build capacity in the art of business process analysis using two processes—revenue and contracts—as examples. This work involved field visits and interviews with a number of agencies. CTG and OSC staff identified the differences and similarities in the data and processes employed by the agencies using the system.

“Very often the critical step of modeling how processes currently work is overlooked, and as a result, key characteristics that inform system design, development, and implementation decisions are overlooked,” notes Donna Canestraro, CTG project support manager. “In this case the CAS team recognized this critical step, invested in their own capacity to do the modeling and analysis, and began to reap the benefit of doing so.” The Comptroller’s Office plans to apply this practice to the remaining business processes to establish a core set of process models as a major step toward a fully redesigned system.

“We are on a very long journey with our redesign effort, and are laying down some vital infrastructure through the work CTG has provided,” says Ruth Walters, Assistant Deputy Comptroller. “We joked about the formula that too often comes into play: $OP + NT = EOP$ – old processes plus new technology equals expensive old processes. But our experience with CTG has proved the old equation wrong, and their expertise has been invaluable in helping us get identification and implementation of efficient new practices on the right track.”



JANUARY

A paper entitled *Trust and networking: Knowledge sharing in the public sector*, was submitted for presentation at the annual Academy of Management conference in Denver.

CTG co-chaired the e-government mini-track at the annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences and presented a paper entitled *Modelling intergovernmental collaboration: A system dynamics approach*.

While at HICSS, we met with numerous participants from inside and outside the U.S., including representatives from UT Sydney, Australia; the CIA; University of Hamburg, Germany; University of Zurich, Switzerland; University of Indiana; Erasmus University, The Netherlands; University of Basel, Switzerland, and our co-chair colleagues also from Switzerland.

In organizing minitracks for the 2003 HICSS conference, we met with colleagues from the University of Hawaii, MIT, Eindhoven UT in The Netherlands, and the University of Mannheim, Germany.

FEBRUARY

A series of CTG workshops with the theme *Making a case for local e-government* were held regionally across the state. Workshops were held in Albany, Saranac Lake, Cortland, Batavia and Purchase, and attracted a broad range of county, city, village, and town government officials.



(l-r) Bradley Birge, City of Saratoga Springs Executive Director of Community Development and Cohoes Mayor John McDonald III, were among the government officials who attended CTG's Local E-government workshops.

Mark LaVigne and Meghan Cook attended the New York State Association of Towns annual convention in New York City and made presentations on *Untangle the Web* and *Delivering Services Through the Internet*, and moderated a panel on Pioneers in Local E-Government.

"The Strategic Implications of Information Strategy & Management" was the topic of a CTG session taught at the Governor's Office of Employee Relations (GOER) Leadership Classroom.

Sharon Dawes facilitated the annual strategic planning meeting of the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO).

We participated in an NSF-sponsored workshop in New York City on "Dealing with the Unexpected" and chaired the policy research discussion.

MARCH

A two-day workshop, *Granting Organizations of the Future: Developing an Information Technology and Organizational*

Design Research Agenda for Evaluation and Management of Research Proposals was held in Alexandria Va. The workshop, held as part of the NSF/NIH project, involved public granting organizations, private foundations, university grants administrators, researchers, and technologists from across the country.

We taught the "Information Strategy & Management" session of the New York State Public Management Intern Program.

Sharon attended the National Science Foundation's Business and Operations Advisory Committee as a newly appointed member.

E-Government Trends and Issues was the topic of a presentation to the Westchester Library System.

Derek Werthmuller attended the *All Hands Meeting* of EOT-PACI in San Diego where the latest in information management technology was displayed.

Tony Cresswell attended the SEARCH conference held by The National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics.

Making a Case for Local E-Government

The Center for Technology in Government, in collaboration with the New York State Office for Technology and the New York State Forum for Information Resource Management, continues to work with New York state localities to raise awareness and understanding about e-government. To gather the information necessary to produce executive briefings on the topic, CTG hosted five regional, facilitated workshops in February that brought together “pioneers” in local e-government to share their experiences, lessons, and insights.

Many localities spearheading e-government initiatives indicated that building support for their projects within all levels of local governments was key. The workshops gathered those carrying out government business electronically and documented their lessons, tips, and techniques. It provided a venue for local governments to share their e-government experiences and in turn help their counterparts in other parts of the state.

Although there are numerous e-government initiatives, common types include interactive web sites, implementing e-records retrieval systems, using GIS for planning purposes, and establishing new financial transaction processes.

“It is the experiences and insights of those who are planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating e-government initiatives in their own localities that will be at the heart of our report, and serve as an important resource for those wishing to embark on similar programs,” explains Meghan Cook, CTG local government project lead. The local government executive briefing is scheduled for release this summer.