Chapter Title: Definitions, Distinctions and Approaches to eEngagement

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2. Definitions, Distinctions and Approaches to eEngagement

When developing a management approach for *eEngagement*, one of the most common barriers faced by public sector managers in New Zealand and Australia is the wide array of competing, contested and conflicting definitions employed to describe it.

Even an increasingly common term like 'electronic democracy' evokes an array of responses, from highly specific definitions (such as voting over the internet) to nebulous concepts (an information environment which is open, participative and free to access). These terms can be loaded and be a vehicle for a variety of implicit assumptions and norms, particularly around issues of *direct democracy*.

Exhibit 6: Direct Democracy – Definition

A form of democratic government whereby citizens have the right to participate in decision-making through referenda on legislative initiatives. Direct democracy can exist in parallel to representative democracy, for example, where ballot initiatives allow citizens to vote on legislative initiatives, or replace representative democracy. In practice, direct democracy is limited by the complexity of modern policy making and the capacity for citizens to deliberate issues in a timely and expedient manner.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, Parliament of Victoria, 2005

This emerging area of practice and study has generated a range of competing terms because the technology and its impact on political processes is so new. It may be many years, if ever, before scholarship and practice moves towards agreement on terminology. In addition, the complex and often ill defined nature of policy-making processes, combined with the highly dynamic nature of information technology, work against the establishment of a clear, unambiguous definition for *eEngagement*.

While this proliferation of terminology is confusing and sometimes only reflects the predilection of individual authors, some terms are carefully chosen and have distinct meanings based within a specific area of literature or practice. Readers need to take care when a term is deliberately employed because it may have a very specific meaning. A good example would be the differing use of the terms 'eDemocracy' and 'eGovernance'. The former commonly refers to a broader

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notion of equal participation throughout the political *system*,[1] while the latter can refer to an organisational or inter-organisational focus.[2]

Similarly, some authors use different terms in a nested, or typological, manner. Two examples would include:

- the use of 'eGovernment' to refer to the overarching application of information and communications technologies by government and 'eDemocracy' as those uses in government with a specific political focus; versus
- the use of 'eGovernment' to specifically refer to electronic and online service delivery and 'eDemocracy / eGovernance' to refer to policy-making processes utilising new technology.

Exhibit 7: The Confusing Terminology of eEngagement

Each of the following prefixes and suffixes has been used at one time or another to describe this area of practice (the list is not exclusive)

Prefix	*Suffix*
Electronic (e-)	Government
Online	Democracy
Digital	Governance
i- (as in information)	Engagement
Cyber	Commons
Virtual	Participation
Tele	Agora
Mobile (m-)	Rule Making

2.1. eDemocracy: A Conceptual Typology for Public Sector Managers

While there is value in separating the 'political' and 'technical' elements of public management, the investment in public sector infrastructure, electronic democracy initiatives and electronic service delivery are at once separate and complementary, activities.

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[1] Which may include activities outside of the scope of government intervention or control, such as the creation of democratic 'alternative media' (community media), electronic activities and protest and democratic actions aimed at non-government institutions (other nations, corporate actors, etc.).

[2] 'Governance' is itself used with various meanings by different scholars and practitioners. From the perspective of an organisational theorist it often refers to the regulation of an organisation as a system with internal and external feedback and information collection mechanisms ('cybernetics'). From a socio-political perspective, it refers to networks of interdependent organisations that engage in complex bargaining relationships.

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This separation results from a number of factors, trends and contradictions:

- there is often an explicit desire on the part of democratic theorists to separate service functions from democratic functions, due to a conceptual and philosophical delineation between notions of inherent political rights and the reciprocal and/or conditional relationships commonly implied in service provision;
- democratic participation has an emphasis on universalism (such as equal participation for all), whereas in developed nations there is an increasing emphasis on *selective* service delivery;
- there is often a managerial desire to maintain a separation of policy development from service functions, either due to the logic of purchaser-provider splits, or to separate payment functions from policy access;
- much of the overarching information technology infrastructure (the *technological* level) associated with electronic and online service delivery is of equal value in facilitating electronic participation and democracy: for example, encryption standards can be employed for *eProcurement* or for *online voting* (the *application* level); and
- the development and implementation of electronic and online service delivery systems is commonly undertaken by business process or customer service units, rather than policy development units.

A more useful way of conceptualising the relationship between the development of an electronically-facilitated democracy and the role of public sector managers as Moore's responsive entrepreneurs is presented in Figure 1. This figure associates different types of engagement activities with different management roles or 'approaches' to project implementation, based on two axes of classification:

- the *Nature of the Programmatic* approach: representing the expected role of government in programs which result from the engagement process (the degree to which project outcomes will be 'top down' or 'bottom up'); and
- the *Specificity of Outcome (Intention):* representing the degree to which eventual outcomes will be highly focused (with simple / singular performance criteria) or more diffuse in their objectives (resulting in more complex / perceptual performance reporting).

Figure 1: Conceptualising the Scope of eDemocracy
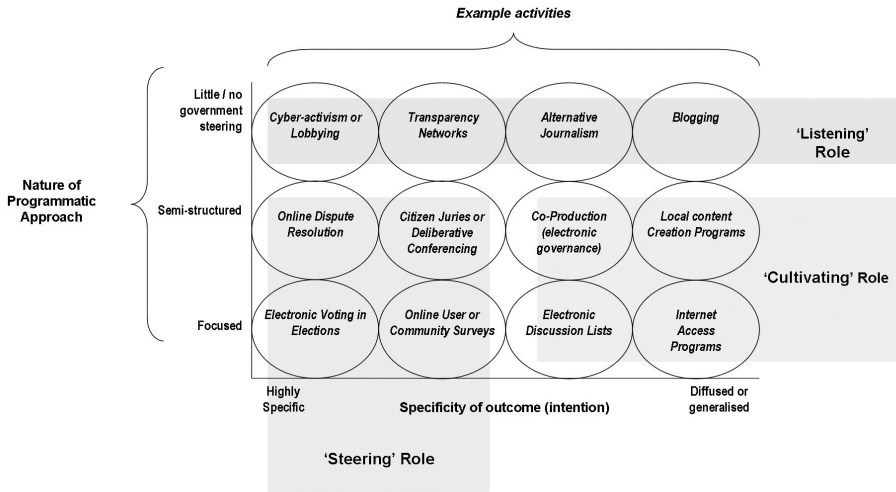
2.2. eEngagement as a Managerial Activity

Figure 1 shows how electronic democracy activities require different managerial approaches, depending on (a) the sphere in which primary activity occurs (state-centric versus societal) and (b) the objectives of the programmatic response of government. While all of the activities indicated in this figure have fundamental democratic outcomes and objectives, the role of policy-development units (and staff) in some of these areas is limited.

While activities like public access terminal placement programs provide democratic outcomes, the relationship between these programs and policy development activities is generally one-way. Public sector managers wanting to open up the policy-making process to public participation should clearly distinguish between the broad area of eDemocracy and particular applications of electronic engagement such as service kiosks.

In the context of this guide, 'Electronic Engagement' (eEngagement) is defined as:

The use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) by the public sector to improve, enhance and expand the engagement of the public in policy-making processes.

This definition is at once broad and narrow in its scope. It is broad in that it:

• does not specifically relate to any particular *methodology* of engagement, such as *direct decision-making* or *online consultation*. These are methods that fall within its scope;

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- focuses on the public sector (the bureaucracy) and its wide array of activities, needs and stakeholder groups; and
- includes an array of technologies, not simply the internet.

It is narrow in that it:

- does not include electoral processes and political campaigning (see Cornfield's 2004 *Politics Moves Online* or Browning's 2002 *Electronic Democracy);*
- excludes areas of public sector activity related to technological access (see Servon's 2002 *Bridging the Digital Divide)* or the development of an 'information society' (see Norris's 2001 *Digital Divide)*.

Exhibit 8: ICTs Defined

'Information and communications technologies (ICTs) is a term which is currently used to denote a wide range of services, applications and technologies, using various types of equipment and software, often running over telecom networks.

'ICTs include well known telecom services such as telephone, mobile telephone and fax. Telecom services used together with computer hardware and software form the basis for a range of other services, including email, the transfer of files from one computer to another and, in particular, the Internet, which potentially allows all computers to be connected, thereby giving access to sources of knowledge and information stored on computers worldwide.
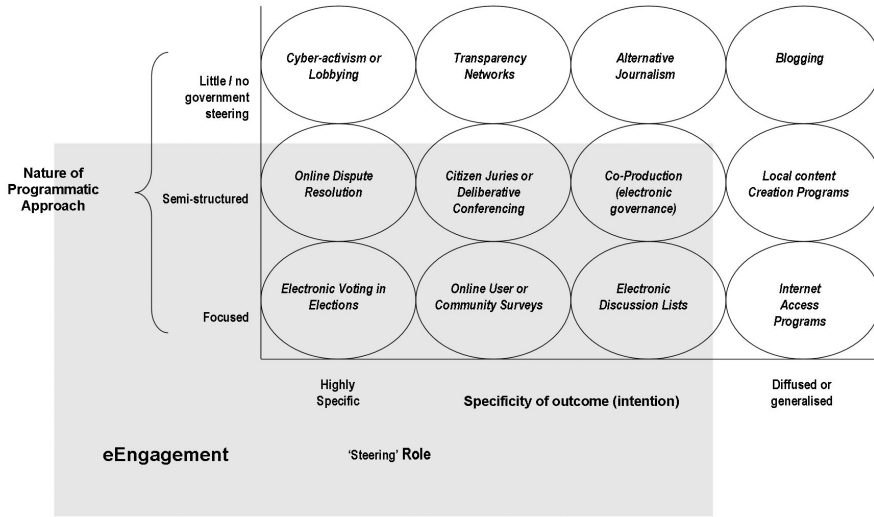
'Applications include videoconferencing, teleworking, distance learning, management information systems, stock taking; technologies can be said to include a broad array ranging from 'old' technologies such as radio and TV to 'new' ones such as cellular mobile communications; while networks may be comprised of copper or fibre optic cable, wireless or cellular mobile links and satellite links. Equipment includes telephone handsets, computers and network elements such as base stations for wireless service; while software programmes are the lifeblood of all these components, the sets of instructions behind everything from operating systems to the Internet.

European Commission, 2001

Placed within the wider context of eDemocracy, electronic engagement can be represented as a subset of a wider range of activities occurring at the intersection of public policy and new communications technologies (Figure 2). A wider range of case examples which fit within this area of activity (including relevant strengths and weaknesses) is provided in detail in Appendix B: Catalogue of eEngagement Models.

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In Figure 2 we see a distinct emphasis on community participation in established (or emerging) policy processes where specific outcomes (e.g. decisions or programmatic implementations) are emphasised.

Figure 2: eEngagement as a Subset of eDemocracy

	Highly Specific			Diffused or generalised
Little / no government steering	Cyber-activism or Lobbying	Transparency Networks	Alternative Journalism	Blogging
Semi-structured	Online Dispute Resolution	Citizen Juries or Deliberative Conferencing	Co-Production (electronic governance)	Local content Creation Programs
Focused	Electronic Voting in Elections	Online User or Community Surveys	Electronic Discussion Lists	Internet Access Programs

Nature of Programmatic Approach

Specificity of outcome (intention)

eEngagement   'Steering' Role

The advantages of this focus are:

- the instrumental nature of eEngagement is of direct value to policy managers – the investment of public resources is married with the objective of quantifiable outcomes in terms of improved policy development and greater community participation in decision-making;
- eEngagement activities often provide clearer means of program evaluation than the more diffused areas of eDemocracy activity, which either lie largely outside of government, or have multiple policy impacts that are often difficult to enumerate or measure (such as the democratic value of community content development policies);
- the approach focuses on issues of participation and public trust in government, allowing public sector managers a dedicated space for addressing the issues of democratic renewal through targeted activities that match their specific areas of policy responsibility; and
- it allows for a clearer delineation between different approaches to managing wider eDemocracy activities. In particular, capacity development and active listening approaches tend to have distinctly different management requirements than project-driven eEngagement activities.

2.3. Three Management Approaches

Based on these definitions, three different managerial approaches to implementation and management can be identified, each reflecting:

- different types of technologies involved;
- degree of complexity in program delivery;
- objectives (specific / diffused); and
- process timeframes and the transition from *project* to *passive* approaches to *eDemocracy* (see Section 2.3.4).

The approaches characterised in this guide are:

- the *active listening* role as a passive form of management;
- the *cultivating* role focusing on capacity-building and the stimulation of action by others; and
- the *steering* role, being a programmatic approach with high levels of management and control.

2.3.1. Active Listening

The desire by some governments to present themselves as technologically advanced and responsive to the community has tended to lead to situations where electronic democracy is interpreted as a 'thing' to be delivered to the waiting (passive and presumably grateful) public.

During the late 1990s this was reflected in a tendency for governments to formulate specific eDemocracy policy statements combined with a number of high profile activities. The best example of this approach can be seen in the United Kingdom under the early period of the Blair Labour government.

This can be beneficial in advancing the eDemocracy agenda. However, the approach can be seen to assume that ICTs are a 'push' (one-way) medium like television in which information is formulated centrally and then delivered to a passive audience.

The interactive nature of new digital technologies means that one of the important characteristics of the technology is the open participation by citizens and stakeholders in discussions of public interest. These discussions can include:

- unstructured conversation on email lists, through chat facilities, or on bulletin board systems (for example Yahoo! Groups; http://groups.yahoo.com/);
- expression of public opinion through alternative and non-profit online news publications (such as the OnLine Opinion magazine [http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/] or more specialist internet media); and
- the increasing number of 'citizen journalists' publishing on personal websites, blogs, or syndicated multimedia (podcasting or video blogging).

Listening management approaches are common throughout the public sector to allow for quick reactions to emerging issues or problems. This is particularly so amongst policy officers who are routinely tasked with monitoring mainstream media on behalf of their agency and Minister.

While this 'listening' is often undertaken in a relatively *ad hoc* manner, the inclusion of ICT-based listening approaches can be useful in that:

- information can often travel through electronic networks much faster than conventional media, thereby offering the potential for increased responsiveness;
- there is a range of commercial and free services [3] that automatically identify key terms and phrases from established media and alternative media and provide instant, or periodic, updates; and
- the introduction of RSS-type subscription services [4] allows for the customisation of news and information aggregation via desktop and mobile software.

While some might assume that a *listening management approach* is a euphemism for inactivity, an *effective* listening approach does require specific planning and management. Active listening requires:

- an investment in time to undertake *environmental scanning* to identify important sources of information. These sources need to be refreshed and renewed on a regular basis;
- a specific allocation of staff time to the collection of information (monitoring);
- establishing a mechanism by which information can be stored, searched, indexed, retrieved and interpreted in a meaningful way; and
- some means of establishing and assessing the value of the investment in active listening, either for the purposes of appropriately valuing and rewarding staff time, or as a mechanism for justifying this activity given its relative opportunity cost. One of the ongoing concerns associated with this form of eDemocracy activity can be the high 'noise to signal' ratio, being the poor return in terms of valuable information that can be gathered given the investment of time required to sift through irrelevant, uninformed, or misleading views and opinions.

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[3] For example Google Alerts (http://www.google.com/alerts) for online news or Technorati (http://www.technorati.com/search/) for blogs.
[4] RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is a type of Internet file format that allows for information to be aggregated through the selection of a range of 'feeds' that are often updated by online publishers. These could include formal news services (the New Zealand Herald, for example, offers standard and customisable RSS feeds from its website, see: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/index.cfm?c_id=1500921&ObjectID=10125125) and most blog providers offer RSS capabilities as a standard part of their online publication.

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Regardless of these concerns, listening approaches can be valuable precursors to the introduction of more structured eEngagement processes. They can provide the means for understanding the existing tenor of conversation, collecting useful background information and identifying elements of a policy issue that may be particularly engaging to the public.

It is entirely possible that key decision-makers in government will increasingly be as attuned to *blog* and website discussions of policy as they have traditionally been to television, radio and newspaper reporting.

Listening approaches are often employed *following* the conclusion of more structured eEngagement processes, either as a means of establishing popular views about the outcomes and impacts of policy decisions, or where the formal process has stimulated an active group of engaged stakeholders to oversight policy implementation.

Exhibit 9: 'Mass Listening' as Passive eEngagement Management

Elizabeth Richard of the Public Works and Government Services agency of the Canadian federal government notes that the internet provides public sector managers effective and interesting 'mass listening' tools. The proliferation of non-government, public email discussion lists on policy issues can give public sector managers interested in alternative views on policy and program implementation, avenues to undertake informal and unstructured listening to public views without necessarily engaging in formal consultative processes in the first instance.

The benefit of this approach lies in:

- the capacity to gather information informally, without the pressures of specific consultative timeframes;
- the ability to identify potential participants in formal consultative processes;
- hearing relatively candid points of view which may not be the same as arguments put in formal submissions – particularly where an issue is contested;
- the ability to absorb the level of debate (complexity, language used, degree of public understanding of policy issues) to allow public documents to be pitched at the right level;
- relative anonymity ('lurking'); and
- the ability to manage information gathering, particularly where there is concern that public consultation will lead to a large number of submissions (volume management).

2.3.2. Cultivating

Like the listening approach, cultivating or 'facilitative' management approaches rely on utilising existing skills found in civil society as the basis for successful community participation. Whereas active listening approaches can be valuable where there is an identifiable community of interest around the issue of concern, 'cultivating' recognises the need for outside assistance in stimulating participation.

In many policy areas, it may not be possible to identify existing communities of interest with which to engage. The public sector manager may find that the target audience lacks the technical capacity to use ICTs to participate in policy debate (where interested stakeholders are diffused through the society), or there has not been a recognition of a shared issue or concern that has given rise to mobilisation of interests.

Cultivation requires a number of activities:

- the identification of a specific and definable community of concern based on *locale* (such as a local community that has high levels of unemployment or crime) or non-geographic factors such as shared experience, or other identifiable characteristics (e.g. during 2005 the Victorian Office of Women's Policy undertook an online consultation associated with the experiences of working mothers across Victoria);
- definition of the characteristics of particular problems, which may be specific (lack of access to public transport, for example) or generalised (such as issues associated with school retention rates);
- determination of required inputs to address issue(s) of concern;
- development of participatory structures to deliver the required solutions;
- stimulation of collective activity; and
- development of the skills required to manage within the community (including appropriate governance and reporting requirements).

Depending upon the nature of the specific area of concern, the level of community involvement in initial planning and preparation may be limited or specific. This will depend on the nature of the problem and the existing capacity of local individuals or organisations to participate in early planning processes.

There are distinctly different approaches to 'cultivating' community participation, depending on whether:

- there is a clear recognition of a specific deficit which needs to be countered (the 'provision' model); or
- the community (geographical, policy, or community-of-interest) is active in defining the need, for example, customising a specific response to a social concern (the 'partnership' model).

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The exact character of the response by the administering agency or agencies (cultivating models often necessitate partnerships across government) can be highly programmatic in character, or may be more intangible. Some programmatic examples include:

- the provision of ICTs (hardware);
- skills development;
- community training programs; and/or
- volunteering schemes.

It is also important to consider that less formalised activities can also fall under this approach. A good example is capacity-building in community groups that results from their inclusion in consultation and management processes. Inclusion enhances the position of organisations, thereby encouraging growth in membership and enhancing their representativeness. The result can be a stakeholder group of greater value to the public sector manager.

While these approaches can be used cynically,[5] they can be powerful in stimulating active organisations outside of government. Developing long term relations with formative groups can be important for the public sector manager with a medium term objective of creating a future partnership.

Given the nature of this type of management process, cultivation generally focuses on 'before and after' comparisons to determine measures of public value. For some projects this can be quite crude (e.g. percentage of free access terminals *per capita*) and others more complex and sophisticated (e.g. measures of social inclusiveness or similar 'social capital' metrics[6]).

Often, the key issues associated with *cultivation management* relate to the capacity to assess changes over time, particularly where programmatic activities have concluded, but there is an expectation of ongoing value creation.

2.3.3. Steering

In contrast to the above approaches, the final type of management response – steering – reflects a far more instrumental project management approach to policy delivery. *Steering* management approaches are common in developing eEngagement projects because of the emphasis placed on delivering short-term, specific and instrumental (policy development, acceptance testing and decision-making) outcomes.

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[5] Such as 'licensing' a passive or supportive stakeholder group to the exclusion of more critical organisations.
[6] Defined by the OECD as 'networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups'.

Exhibit 10: Cultivating Approaches to eEngagement Management

Cultivating management approaches can yield powerful outcomes in the areas of community development, capacity building and the stimulation of active communities of interest.

Examples of this type of approach include:

- The Argyll and Bute Council of Scotland introduced a number of community telecentres in three remote island communities (Islay, Jura and Colonsay) offering personal computers with internet access and videoconferencing. The services have been highly popular, particularly during harsh winter months, with the services used to facilitate business operations, provide personal access to medical consultations (eService outcomes) and have been used extensively by the farming community to lobby the European Union over farm tenancy issues. While some of these applications were planned and expected by project managers, the use to which the videoconferencing service have been employed have been wider than expectations, leading to a multiplier effect of the technological investment.
- The New South Wales government established the *communitybuilders.nsw* website as a centralised clearing house for information associated with social, economic and environmental renewal through community-based organisations, non-profit groups and *volunteering* projects. The website provides information about organisation and management, financial assistance and planning and includes an extensive online discussion forum where people involved in these areas can exchange information and advice. While the Department of Community Services hosts and manages the website, the real value gained is through the interaction between citizens and citizens groups to solve local problems. See: http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au
- A variation of the communitybuilders model has been introduced by the British Broadcasting Corporation as its *Action Network* website (http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork/). While *community builders* focuses on local renewal projects, *Action Network* has a more overtly political focus, allowing citizens to chat about political issues, start campaigns and network with like-minded individuals.

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While steering approaches generally include participatory design elements appropriate to the anticipated stakeholder community, (either through the establishment of formal reference groups, or *ad hoc* consultation and negotiation), *steering* management approaches tend to be *agency*-driven.

This is due to the agency having:

- the capacity to develop a comprehensive engagement strategy;
- the resources to develop or acquire the appropriate technologies; and
- the ability to provide a 'hook' (access point) into the formal process of policy development in government.

Effective steering requires detailed preparation for the development of the eEngagement process, with clear process planning and well-defined timeframes. Flexibility in this approach is normally accommodated through reflective management and contingency planning. This is often important where the engagement process forms part of a specific policy initiative associated with the *executive*, or, where the consultation must meet the necessary timeframes for parliamentary reporting or legislative drafting.

The key aspects of appropriate steering management are:

- the integration of project development within wider strategic planning processes;
- the development of clearly articulated project deliverables, checkpoints and delivery timeframes;
- the need for specific program evaluation and reporting; and
- the tendency for these processes to be assessed against very specific outcome requirements (commonly expressed in terms of numerical metrics, such as numbers of participants, or output-based performance criteria).

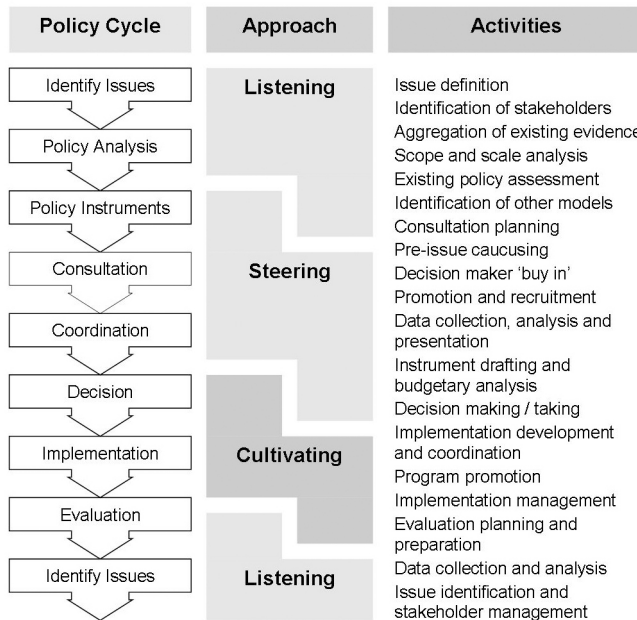**Exhibit 11: The 'Electronic Discussion List' Model as eEngagement**

The City of Darebin *eForum* pilot project in Melbourne reflects a conventional 'steering' approach to eEngagement management. The Council undertook to develop a structured online discussion forum which included Council staff and members of the community to discuss a range of local issues over a set period of time. Using basic email management technology, the council developed an engagement and promotional plan. A project officer recruited from local community groups moderated and summarised discussions and fed information collected back into the policy-making officers and Councillors at the end of each structured discussion. This approach was highly programmatic in character, with clear timeframes for action, close management of activities and control of interaction through the process of moderation.

2.3.4. Relationship Between the Three Approaches

While eEngagement activities tend to focus on *cultivating* and *steering*, [7] it is highly likely that a single project may require a number of different management approaches at different points of the planning and implementation process. A clear recognition of the relationship between project initiation, development, implementation, evaluation and closeout stages of any eEngagement activity can be extremely valuable in allowing the management group to recognise the appropriate management style for the particular phase of activity.

In addition, some reflection by project team members on their particular strengths and preferences can be useful in managing the transition between management approaches appropriate for different phases of project implementation.

Figure 3: Managerial Approaches Over an eEngagement Implementation Lifecycle

Policy Cycle	Approach	Activities
Identify Issues	Listening	Issue definition
		Identification of stakeholders
Policy Analysis		Aggregation of existing evidence
		Scope and scale analysis
Policy Instruments		Existing policy assessment
		Identification of other models
		Consultation planning
Consultation	Steering	Pre-issue caucusing
		Decision maker 'buy in'
Coordination		Promotion and recruitment
		Data collection, analysis and presentation
Decision		Instrument drafting and budgetary analysis
		Decision making / taking
Implementation	Cultivating	Implementation development and coordination
		Program promotion
Evaluation		Implementation management
		Evaluation planning and preparation
Identify Issues	Listening	Data collection and analysis
		Issue identification and stakeholder management

Adapted from: Bridgman, Peter and Davis, Glyn 2000, *The Australian Policy Handbook*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards.

[7] For a more detailed discussion of different public service responses to the information age, see *Public Policy Forum 2003*, 'Archetypes of the Network Age: Articulating the New Public Service Reality', *The Public Policy Forum*, Ottawa, <http://www.pwgsc.gc.ca/archetypes/text/publications/report-e.pdf>

Managers who can recognise their preferred approach, or particular area of competency, are more effective at managing complex project implementations where a range of management styles are required. In some cases this may necessitate different members of the management team taking the lead role at different points in lifecycle of a project.

For example, Figure 3[8] presents a hypothetical eEngagement process that conceptualises the relationship between stages of the policy cycle and the range of different management approaches.

2.4. eEngagement and Electronic and Online Service Delivery

One of the ongoing debates within the literature on electronic democracy and engagement relates to the relationship between government electronic and online service delivery projects and political participation activities. Authors in this area consistently observe a *lag* between the work undertaken to place government services online and the use of ICTs in facilitating democratic participation.

Three hypotheses have been offered to explain this gap:

*   *evolution:* that 'simple' transactions will be developed and implemented first (such as payment systems, bookings services and the like), with complex or 'messy' transactions and processes following;
*   *anti-democratic:* that this reflects a lack of willingness on the part of government to be open and participative and is part of a broader malaise in liberal democracies. Authors in this area point to developments outside of government as better indications of the 'popularity' of the notion of electronic democracy, such as online protest movements and non-mainstream media; and
*   *incompatibility:* that the processes are distinctly different and little can be gained comparing developments in one area with developments in the other.

All of these perspectives have some value and we can point to examples that illustrate each of them. However, it must be recognised that a simple delineation between the 'political' and the 'administrative' is an analytical fallacy that is undermined by observation of practice. A classic example is the provision of departmental and agency information online: a public sector activity that provides a useful public service (allowing greater access to government programs by members of the public) and also allows for greater transparency for democratic oversight.

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[8] Adapted from: Bridgman, Peter and Davis, Glyn 2000, *The Australian Policy Handbook*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards.

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Exhibit 12: mGovernment

mGovernment' or 'mobile government' is the use of telecommunications technologies in the administrative process of government. With the growth of wireless telephone and internet access, increasing numbers of citizens are conducting their business, personal and government transactions using devices like mobile telephones, 'smartphones', wireless laptops and personal digital assistants (PDAs). These devices can be employed to access information services (such as telephone information lines or internet browsing) or conduct transactions online (book and pay for services, make appointments, complete forms and other regulatory requirements) and reflect the growing flexibility of people's employment and work / life balance. The next generation of mobile telephones (3G), for example, feature high-speed internet access that allows for the transmission of video (send and receive).

Like eGovernment, mGovernment has both internal and external applications. Inside the Public Service, techniques like teleworking allow greater employment flexibility, or the provision of portable computers allows for:

- 'smart' fieldwork which optimises time spent in the community and reduces the need for a return to base (such as in the areas of Policing, Community Services and some regulation and licensing areas); and/or
- home-based employment arrangements that allow for greater employment flexibility, staff decentralisation and reduction in the need for work-related commuting.

Externally, governments are looking at ways that these devices can be used to transact business with government (such as in remote service delivery) or means to 'push' information to members of the public (such as the use of SMS notification services).

The benefits of mGovernment are:

- increased flexibility of employment;
- greater reach of government information and service functions into the community;
- increased convenience of access to government; and
- increased choice of interaction.

The risks of investing in mGovernment lie in:

- further loss of interpersonal contact within the public service and between government and the public;
- telework 'bleeding into' personal life;

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- reduced professional contact for teleworkers; and/or
- unclear development path for mobile technologies (questionable levels of uptake of advanced devices).

2.4.1. eGovernment Catalysts for eEngagement

While it is clear that the introduction of electronic and online service delivery infrastructure within the public sector provides a useful platform for developing eEngagement activities, it is useful to reflect on the relationship between these two areas of activity across four dimensions.

First, service recipients' experiences with electronic and online service delivery applications using ICTs closely resemble eEngagement projects associated with highly focused data collection. There is negligible difference between this and normal market research undertaken by government. The defining characteristic is the selection of participants based on their use of a specific service channel.

Second, where the objectives of an eEngagement activity are diffuse and the process of engagement is either semi-structured, or un-structured, in nature, it is possible to recognise a significant difference between these types of online transactional systems and conventional electronic commerce technologies, which tend to be based on highly specific and relatively rigid transactional process models, with limited capacity for members of the community to vary from the imposed structure.

Third, the electronic service programs of government can provide opportunities to expand eEngagement. This can be achieved through ensuring that the development of new service channels have the capacity to include consultation and participation activities. A good example of the possibilities here can be seen in the use of service delivery terminals for public consultation, particularly where the consultation focuses on issues of place.

Fourth, there can be opportunities for policy managers to provide significant input into the development of service delivery technologies to provide more policy-oriented user information from these systems. Electronic and online service delivery systems are commonly developed with the intention of introducing efficiencies or extending the reach of public services and these projects can focus only on highly 'rational' outcomes (for example, new systems are developed only to introduce cost efficiencies in existing business practices). Given the often considerable investment of public money in the development of these technologies, consideration of system development that allows for the capture of information for policy analysis can provide significant benefits to policy outcomes. These benefits can include:

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- the identification of specific user groups (and, by extension, under-represented groups);
- uptake rates for new programmatic offerings (such as time taken browsing basic information regarding service offerings versus time spent undertaking transactions);
- recruitment of participants for ongoing consultation processes or subscription to news and information services; and/or
- polling on issues related to the specific transaction, or of relevance to the type of user (e.g. associated with a different policy issue).

In addition, it must be recognised that one of the most powerful aspects of electronic and online service delivery is the capacity for information to be captured, analysed and presented in *real-time*. This aspect of eGovernment can represent one of the most powerful opportunities for public management.

2.4.2. Difficulties and Tensions

Public sector managers with an interest in eEngagement can play important roles in the development of electronic and online service delivery activities. However, it is also important to take into consideration the *business culture* of the business units tasked with developing the systems. Indeed, business units will require considerable persuasion to incorporate 'fuzzy' or 'soft' processes and capabilities within their business systems.

Where the eEngagement team is attempting to *piggyback* on a hardware installation, (e.g. accessing participants via a service kiosk, where access may be rationed due to scarcity), the justification required to argue for the integration of an eEngagement initiative may be considerable. These difficulties can be particularly acute where:

- the business units are culturally or structurally removed from policy staff and engagement activities or priorities; and/or
- where the transactional service is built on a highly secure platform (such as one based around a payment gateway).

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Exhibit 13: Relationship Between mGovernment and eEngagement

mGovernment is compatible with eEngagement, but has implications for public sector managers investing in these concepts:

- Public servants need to consider the range of devices used by members of the public to interact with government information services. The appropriate design of websites, for example, can allow for ease of access by members of the public with devices that have small screens and low-speed internet access. Alternatively, information stored online can be re-purposed for use in Interactive Telephone Services;

- Information-on-demand permits timely participation in government consultation processes. The Queensland Government's *Generate* youth service allows for SMS messages to be sent to subscribers notifying them of new consultations; and

- Portable ICTs permit a range of possibilities, from simple participation to remote data collection. For example, the increasing prevalence of Global Positioning System (GPS) location data has been used in the United States to encourage the creation of local pollution maps by volunteers.

2.5. The Digital Divide: An Absolute Barrier?

A common concern regarding the adoption of eEngagement initiatives is the limited use of ICTs in the wider community. With approximately three quarters of the New Zealand and Australian populations using the internet relatively frequently[9] the level of use of this technology is far from the near universality of other communications appliances like telephones.

The gap between universal access and the current penetration of ICTs is commonly referred to as the *digital divide* and represents a real concern for policy makers as it represents a different form of non-participation, namely, non-participation in the information society/economy.

It can be argued that this divide limits the value of new channels for engaging the public in policy processes. As specific segments of the community are excluded from these technologies, the results of using eEngagement are systematically skewed, particularly excluding people who are considered to be generally under-represented in conventional policy processes, such as the poor,

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[9] Up to date statistics on Internet use, particularly by location and frequency, are not presently available and these figures are based on estimates only. During 2006, both New Zealand and Australia held their national censuses, the data from which should be systematically released by both national statistical agencies from early 2007.

migrants, indigenous people and those with limited educational backgrounds. eEngagement can be seen as anti-democratic leading to increased access by people in the community who are currently 'well served' by existing democratic structures.

2.5.1. Nature of the Divide

While this concern has relevance and is worthy of serious consideration at the initial stages of eEngagement project development, it does tend to promote a simplistic view of the average user of new communications technologies as:

- white
- male
- urban
- 25 to 40 years of age
- professional
- university educated

While this might have been an accurate portrait during the 1990s, the uptake of ICTs throughout the community has developed in unexpected ways. These include:

- the rise of 'silver surfers' – retirees who find email and the internet an interesting and rewarding past time and means to maintain contact with children and grandchildren;
- the use of ICTs in some migrant communities to access international news in their preferred language and maintain familial and business contacts in their country of origin;
- the use of the internet in rural communities, either through the emerging area of 'teleworking' (remotely working from home) or farm-based ICT use to engage with world markets and use advanced sensing technologies (such as digital dam level indicators and remote cameras);
- different usage patterns for similar technologies between age groups (e.g. youth versus business mobile telephone use); and
- the significant narrowing of the gender gap.

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Exhibit 14: Mobile Phones Buck the Digital Divide [10]

While the rate of internet adoption has slowed over the last five years, the penetration of mobile telephones in Australia and New Zealand continues to be strong. Both nations approach near 100 percent penetration of this technology and users are increasingly comfortable engaging with interactive services using mobile telephones.

In 2004-05 it was determined that 38 percent of Australians over the age of 16 had used their phone to participate in a competition via SMS.

Telephones exhibit a faster adoption curve (both market penetration and uptake of new features) because:

- they have a short lifecycle (they are replaced more frequently than computers);
- their total cost of ownership is low and their cost can be deferred over their operating life (the handset cost is often integrated into service costs); and
- they are comparatively simple to use.

In addition, a large number of government and not-for-profit programs exist to improve access to ICTs by under-represented target communities, either through subsidised purchasing schemes, or through the provision of public access terminals in community centres, public housing estates, schools and job service organisations.

Despite these initiatives, the problem of the digital divide persists. During the initial popularisation of the internet in the mid-1990s, when growth rates for ICT usage were very high, the digital divide was characterised simply as an effect of the combination of technological diffusion speed and cost barriers to adoption. The assumption was, at this time, that as the number of users embracing the technology increased, more commercial vendors would be encouraged to enter the market, resulting in an easing of cost barriers. Although increased demand has driven costs down, this has not been enough to close the digital divide. In fact, adoption rates have slowed and some communities have shown limited uptake of ICTs.

The reasons for the digital divide are complex and not easily addressed by policy makers. They include:

[10] Niesche, Christopher 2006, 'Government Must Free Mobile Market', *New Zealand Herald*, 24 July; Fisher, Vivienne 2005, 'Australians Embrace Mobile Phones', *Australian PC Authority*, 31 May; Nielsen//NetRatings 2005, *The Nielsen//NetRatings Australian Internet and Technology Report 2004-2005*, Nielsen//NetRaitings, New York.

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- a higher price 'floor' arising from the need to acquire and maintain both ICT equipment (with rapid replacement requirements due to obsolescence) as well as access accounts (often *in addition* to existing communications costs);
- lower levels of competition for some data services than anticipated, due to limited competition in the provision of network infrastructure (particularly outside of urban areas and in the wholesale market);
- difficulties in moving some parts of the community online (particularly those without full-time employment, with poor English language skills and older citizens);
- 'transitional' delays, as users move between older and newer technologies, or basic versus advanced services (e.g. dial-up to broadband, 2G-3G mobile telephony); and
- higher than expected barriers to entry. This is due to a combination of low technical literacy levels in parts of the community and the rapidly changing technical environment (making the 'cost' of maintaining accurate technical literacy high – this has been particularly exacerbated by socially-undesirable activities online that are not well regulated by national governments[11]).

2.5.2. Implications of the Divide

The use of eEngagement systems will include (or be included within) a broader strategy that includes conventional 'offline' means of participation. For simple engagement approaches (such as the solicitation of submissions or surveying), this may simply require the provision of paper versions of discussion documentation and postal response mechanisms, whereas, for more complex processes (particularly deliberative ones or where specific sampling rules are applied) this may mean running parallel processes.

Where parallel processes are conducted, the managerial implications may be significant. These can include:

- issues of timing: often on- and offline processes work on different timescales and synchronising parallel processes can be difficult to manage;
- issues of comparability: for parallel processes to work they need to be similar in scope and interactivity. Where complex ICT applications are employed, determining how the richness of online eEngagement can be mirrored offline may be difficult; and/or
- separate or integrated discussions: if there is a desire for 'cross talk' between the on- and offline communities, then consideration is required about how this will be managed. This may be a significant issue where there is a conscious desire for information, or experience, sharing between these two

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[11] Such as the proliferation of *malware* (*virus*, *spyware*, or *Trojan-horse* software) requiring user vigilance and the growth of *SPAM* and online fraud (*phishing*, identity theft).

groups (especially where the composition of the on- and offline groups is distinctly different).

2.5.3. Beyond the 'One Divide'

While these issues can be seen as daunting, it is important to conceptualise the digital divide as one of many different and overlapping, barriers to participation. While ICTs can provide enhanced access to policy processes for *some* (and can, therefore, be seen as democratically problematic), they also can be used to overcome other access problems.

Figure 4 illustrates a range of divides that overlap and provides insight into how a mix of ICT-based engagement and conventional approaches can create better overall outcomes in the reduction of barriers to participation.

Figure 4: Digital Divide or Multiple Divide?

Divide	Description	ICT Implications
Bandwidth	Access to ICTs, but slow access speeds. May be because of poor infrastructure, old equipment, remoteness, basic ISP account, or the use of technologies like 2.5G mobile telephony	Necessity of design of eEngagement for low-bandwidth environments
Digital	Lack of access to ICTs, either because of cost, skills, interest, language, or infrastructure	Importance of offline complementary processes, or provision of ICTs as part of eEngagement strategy
Educational	Limited education can limit access to policy processes through limited capacity to engage with briefing materials, low understanding of government processes / structures	Use of ICTs to education (primers, simplified language, etc.)
Linguistic	Poor / no English which limits access to formal consultation documents	Provision of translations or spoken equivalents
Mobility	Limited capacity to travel to physical venues, either due to poor transport infrastructure, limited financial resources, career status, or physical impairment	ICTs to overcome distance issues
Motivation	Lack of interest in issue, limited belief in value of participation, disenchantment with process	Use of engaging content, demonstration of commitment through activity
Time Poor	Limited ability to commit blocks of time to ongoing processes. May be due to career commitments, working hours (long, non-standard, erratic or on-call), or parenting	Use of asynchronous communications to manage time constraints
Vision Impairment	Vision impairment can be a barrier to participation where process is conducted via printed mail, are advertised in conventional printed matter only (newspapers) or where participatory forums make heavy use of visual aids (PowerPoint-type presentations)	Provision of material in digital form, use of spoken word versions, distribution of printed matter equivalents prior to physical meetings

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Through a broader conceptualisation of the community's access difficulties, we can achieve a better understanding of the appropriate role for ICTs in engagement processes. In addition, where ICT access barriers can be seen as disproportionately associated with some groups in the community, we need to be cautious about *universalising* this assumption. Where the approach taken to the eEngagement process is based on sampling to develop a representative section of the wider community (a cluster or quota sampling methodology) lower levels of ICT uptake in some areas of the community can be recognised and addressed through the use of appropriate quotas and additional recruitment in areas of under-representation.

Recognising areas of low uptake through eEngagement program design and implementation can be a catalyst for partnering with other community access programs. One of the key lessons learned during the last decade is that digital divide issues are often most effectively addressed through a combination of technical access provision, training and the incorporation of relevant compelling content. eEngagement activities can be seen as a highly effective way of motivating participation in the information economy.