

Awakening the dormant potential of e-government

February 4 2013



New software enables secretaries or ministers to check briefing documents on the move from a tablet PC. Credit: Fraunhofer FOKUS

E-government holds the promise of gains in efficiency and satisfaction for case workers. In Denmark, seven government ministries have already undergone a full digital changeover. Now researchers have adapted the model for German government agencies.

[Electronic communication](#) has long been an everyday reality in offices across the German public sector. However, case workers often only use modern document management systems for recording digitized files, while going about their own "natural" work processes as if the new technology did not exist. This is a real shame when we consider that the concept of e-government promises not only large gains in efficiency but also greater [employee satisfaction](#). The Fraunhofer Institute for [Open Communication Systems](#) FOKUS in Berlin has now drawn up a scenario which shows how an ICT solution that was successfully implemented in Denmark can be swiftly adapted for [German government](#) agencies. The researchers are presenting the proposed approach at their eGovernment Laboratory in Berlin and also from March 5 to 9 at the CeBIT trade show in Hannover (Hall 9, Booth E08).

German government recommendations exceeded

"We have been investigating interoperable and cost-effective ICT solutions for German government agencies since way back in 2004," explains Dr. Michael Tschichholz from FOKUS. "One of our partners is cBrain, whose integrated solution is already being very successfully implemented in seven Danish government ministries. We took a close look at the technology and discovered that it would suit the needs of German [government agencies](#) very well." The German government set out its recommendations for such an ICT platform in its "Organizational Concept for Electronic Administration". Alongside electronic records management, the recommendations specify that the platform should be capable of modeling electronic workflows and electronic collaboration and integrating the various software applications for specialist processes that have grown up over the years. "These building blocks of e-government are supported by the Danish solution. As an option, managers can also be included in digital processes via mobile devices," says Tschichholz.

In Denmark, the Ministries of Social Affairs and Integration, of Transport, of Climate, Energy and Building, of the Environment, of Employment, of Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs, and the Prime Minister's Office have already fully digitized their records management, administration work, and casework. All written material – whether formal or informal – is managed in a standardized ICT environment. The core component is integrated knowledge management. Employees have immediate access to relevant information via a digital archive. Social media technologies such as chat forums are integrated into formal work processes and support informal communication.

"Users' experiences have been positive across the board," reports Tschichholz. "At the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, every employee saves 30 to 45 minutes a day. 81 per cent of employees at the Ministry of Transport are either satisfied or very satisfied. The most recent changeovers took only a few weeks in each case. Meanwhile, the time needed for training is kept within reasonable limits, as employees have recourse to user interfaces they are familiar with and receive individual support from "runners" who move from office to office during the brief introduction phase."

Accessing ministerial briefings on a tablet computer

Tschichholz and his team have developed specific application scenarios, and these are currently undergoing a field test in German ministries. In the FOKUS eGovernment Laboratory, the research scientists recreated sample workflows from the Federal Ministry of the Interior and analyzed how the Danish solution can be adapted to the ministry's work. "We showed, for example, how the solution can be used to draft briefing documents, which the permanent secretary or minister can then conveniently access on the move from a tablet PC," says Tschichholz, who also uses the ICT platform at FOKUS for internal processes.

Last year, the team successfully presented the laboratory scenario to Cornelia Rogall-Grothe, Federal Government Commissioner for Information Technology, and the Danish Ambassador Per Poulsen-Hansen. At the CeBIT trade show, FOKUS will demonstrate how mobile devices can be securely used for administration work with the aid of the Danish ICT platform.

Provided by Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft

Citation: Awakening the dormant potential of e-government (2013, February 4) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2013-02-awakening-dormant-potential-e-government.html>

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