

E-Government

*A submission to the Congressional Internet Caucus Advisory
Committee E-Government Task Force*

by

*Department of Government,
University College Cork,
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Department of Government

The Department of Government offers a dynamic teaching environment to political students and others. It has been a part of the commerce faculty at University College Cork for over 40 years. The Department delivers a wide range of courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level including; BSc in Government and Public Policy, BComm, Mcomm; MSc; PhD; DIHM; HiDip-CSPE; MBA, and PhD programmes.

Its teaching programme includes: Citizen Participation; Citizenship and Human Rights; Public Policy in Ireland; Politics of the EU; Public Management in Ireland; Public Management in Europe; Political Ethics; Local and regional Government in Ireland; Public Finance; Irish Political systems; International Political Systems; Political and Public sector Marketing; Issues in Irish Politics; State Enterprises; Voters, Parties and leaders.

The Department has an expanding research and publishing agenda. Staff members regularly publish in International journals. They have produced a number of books and are involved in EU and other externally funded research programmes.

Professor Neil Collins is Head of Department. He brings a strong academic profile to the Department deriving from his extensive experience in America, Britain and Ireland. He is the author of a standard text on Irish Politics, now in its third edition. He has also published in the leading political science and marketing journals in Europe.



Contributors to this paper

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Aodh joined the Department of Government staff in September 2000, having completed his doctoral thesis which examines the impact of new public management philosophies on local government in Ireland. Prior to his appointment he had worked for six years as a practitioner in local government, based in Cork County Council. Broadly speaking, Aodh's research work is centred on the implications of NPM for public sector management and the need for democratic accountability. His PhD thesis seeks to establish an analytical framework within which to accommodate the traditional public sector concepts of participation, accountability and equity with the critique offered by New Right and Public Choice theorists.

Aodh teaches courses on Government in Ireland, Local and Regional Government and Public Finance. He has lectured for three years on the Executive MBA Programme, teaching principles of public sector management. In addition, Aodh is an occasional lecturer with the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) in Dublin.

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Aodh's conference and publication details include the following:

"Taking Local Government into the Millennium"

Paper presented at conference of same name - National University of Ireland, Cork, September 1999

"The Evolving Role of the Local Councillor"

To be completed before end of 2000 for the Department of Government Working Paper Series.

"Local Government Bill 2000 - Another False Pregnancy?"

Paper presented at the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland (AMAI) Conference, September 2000

"Local Government Bill 2000 - Implications for Municipal Government in Ireland"

Administration, vol. 48, no.3 (Autumn 2000), pp.10-20

"Social Partnership in Ireland"

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Born in France, she completed, in 1995, a masters in European Political Science at sciences Po, Paris. she then graduated in European International law at La Sorbonne in Paris in 1997.

At present her research interests are the enlargement of the European Union, the European regional policy and the future institutional framework. However her most recent research has been on gender equality issues in Ireland. she worked on a project commissioned by the Department of Justice on the Development of Mechanisms to Monitor Progress in Achieving Gender Equality in Ireland. She followed this experience with consultancy work for PUMA in the OECD, which involved making recommendations on how to gender mainstream their programme of work for the next two years.

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Fiona Buckley officially joined the staff of the Department of Government in September 2000. However, her links with the department extend back to her student days, when she established a student society (Government and Politics Society). Fiona recently completed her Masters Thesis on non-voting in Ireland which explains the reasons why people do not avail of their voting franchise. Her research interests include:

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Issues of Citizenship
Other forms of Political Involvement
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At present Fiona teaches on the following courses:

Government in Ireland (GV1200)

Local and Regional Government in Ireland (GV1201)

Both modules are offered on the department's Government and Public Policy Degree Programme.

In addition, Fiona is Placement Officer for the department as the third year of the Government and Public Policy Degree includes a 14 week work placement period within public sector settings across the world.

Recent Conferences and Publications

'The Puzzle of Non-Voting in the Republic of Ireland' (October 2000) MSc Thesis (Commerce)

'Non-Voting in the Republic of Ireland' (December 2000) Paper delivered for public lecture at Trinity College Dublin

'Cork Churchgoers are the best voters' (November 2000) Article in the Irish Times Newspaper

'Non-Voting in Ireland :Who is the Non-Voter?' (June 2000) Paper delivered at the Political Studies Association of Ireland (PSAI) Postgraduate Conference, Trinity College Dublin

'Elite Participation in Ireland' Department of Government Working Paper Series (forthcoming)

'Different Forms of Democratic Involvement' Paper for Political Studies Association, UK (forthcoming - April 2001)

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Publications ‘Aliens and their rights under the Schengen Agreement’
‘Consociationalism in Northern Ireland’
Anglo-Irish elite co-operation and the peace process;
the impact of the EU Enlarging the European
parliament: continuity or change?

Research interests:

1. Northern Ireland: History, political parties, peace process, Belfast Agreement
2. European Union: History, institutions, policies, Agenda 2000, Central and East European enlargement
3. West European Politics: Constitutions, institutions, political parties and elections in France, Italy, Germany and Spain.

Transforming government, but what price the revolution?

The scope and potential of e-government is enormous. Symonds (2001, p.52) comments that **“it will be the beginning of a revolution that will profoundly change the relationship between citizen and state: a more efficient more humane more responsive system of government ”** The

use of the term 'revolution' is an interesting one for many reasons. The Concise English Dictionary informs us that a revolution is:-

Rotation; a turn; circuit

A cycle of time

A radical change

Overthrow of existing political institutions

Is e-government merely a fad, reflecting a certain point in time on a continuous cycle of change? Will it lead to radical change? Will it cause destabilisation and ultimately lead to the overthrow of political institutions?

This paper seeks to address some of these questions under the general chapter heading of "Elements of Transformation." The reality, however, is that questions flow more easily than answers. For example, in the context of government reform, Ferlie *et al.* (1996) ask the fundamental question – "how does one define transformation?" Digital technologies provide the opportunity to more easily access and re-use the wealth of information held in the public sector. There is a basic irony though which is highlighted by Morris (1999) who notes that in America the people who are most tuned in to new technologies, the Internet and computers in general are the least likely to vote on election day.

The freedom to express views and to participate directly in government are very attractive elements of electronic revolution but elections will still be run by government bureaucracies and the organs of the state will continue to be

operate very much as before. Morris asks, **when will voters be consulted on important issues?** The simple answer under an e-government regime is “whenever they want to be.” Basically anytime enough Internet-literate users want to have a referendum they can simply have one. There will be hundreds of referendums during the course of any one year. The majority will be meaningless, irrational and boring. The danger is that the worthwhile issues may not be recognised amongst the torrent of information and data overflow, In other words the everyday, mundane issues may crowd out the strategically important ones which will still be decided by the politicians and bureaucrats at the strategic apex of the state.

We feel it is crucial to locate the e-government debate within the wider global discourse which is taking place about public sector reform and re-inventing government. As such e-government is a strategy (albeit a fundamentally important one) and an element in modernising government. It does not and should not exist in a vacuum.

E-Government can help to transform old public sector organisations and provide faster, more responsive services. It can increase efficiency, cut costs and speed up standard administrative processes for citizens and businesses. Electronic access can make a major contribution to accelerating the transition to the information society by stimulating Internet services. Information technology (IT) has until recent times been regarded as the preserve of private business but now IT vendors have spotted an opportunity to replicate the e-business revolution (it's difficult to avoid using the term) in the sphere of government. Government replicating business, the public sector replicating the private sector, e-government replicating e-business - jaded management theory being re-invented for a new gullible audience within the public sector?

Essentially e-government is merely one strand of a new public management paradigm which is replacing the traditional model of public administration. Public administration has traditionally struggled to carve out an individual academic niche for itself because it has been content to borrow from others. It is now being replaced by "a proliferation of concepts, frameworks and theories" (Lane, 1995, preface).

One such example is new public management. As similar restructurings began to take place in different public service settings across the world in the 1980s it became apparent that something new was emerging. This followed on from a growth in interest during the 1970s in organisation theory, public policy and management (Gray and Jenkins, 1995). New public management was coined as a catch-all phrase incorporating all the initiatives which were taking place. Organisation theorists, public administration academics and

public service officials are divided on the significance of NPM. Laughlin (1991) is critical and sees NPM as a market-led ideology invading the public sector. Others, such as Ashburner (1994) argue that NPM is a management hybrid with a continuing emphasis on core public service values. Hood (1991, p.4) comments that NPM has aroused strong and varied emotions among bureaucrats:

at one extreme were those who held that NPM was the only way to correct for the irretrievable failures and even moral bankruptcy in the 'old' public management. At the other end were those who dismissed much of the thrust of NPM as a gratuitous and philistine destruction of more than a century's work in developing a distinctive public service ethic and culture

The question of whether or not NPM represents a short-term fad is addressed by Dunleavy and Hood (1994). Based on past experiences of administrative reform they claim that there are two potential scenarios. The first is the 'incubated mode' in which reform ideas do not come into full effect until long after their initial introduction (example: 1854 Northcote-Trevelyan Report on the Civil Service in Britain). The alternative is the 'acute' innovation pattern in which reform programmes peak early and then break up quickly. The verdict by Dunleavy and Hood (1994, p.10) is telling, and typical of NPM:

NPM seems to have elements of both styles. While individual initiatives may have followed the acute/rapid break-up pattern, the movement as a whole looks like a case of the lagged-effect incubated model.

A more simple truth perhaps is that there is nothing particularly new in NPM as most of the ideas were put forward in the 1960s in various forms, including

the Fulton Report. At that time however, there was not such a receptive audience.

Riddell (1983) points out that the performance in 1980s Britain did not match the rhetoric. Milligan (1995, p.xi) also warns of the dangers of ascribing to NPM by citing an observation made by Petronius in 210 BC, concerning the Roman army:

We trained hard but every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by re-organising; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusions of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation.

It is premature to claim as Osborne and Gaebler (1992) have done that NPM is a glorious, global revolution. Painter (1997) has been consistent in his contrary views and claims that there has been an uneven diffusion and adoption of associated doctrines. Perhaps Streeten (1993, p.235) is correct in his belief that we should not focus on the abstract notion of whether NPM is right or wrong but “ask in what contexts is the NPM likely to achieve performance improvements”. Logically these contexts may vary from country to country. The call for more business-like management of government has been an American and Anglo-Saxon one supported by what Premfors (1998, p.142) describes as “a dominant story teller”, namely the public management programme within the OECD. He notes (p.143):

the PUMA story (as many or most stories do) also identifies heroes and villains or leaders and laggards in the march to the land of the plenty. The heroes are in general the Anglo-Saxons, but in particular New Zealand, followed quite closely by the United Kingdom.

Kickert (1997, p.731) expresses no surprise at the prevalence of NPM philosophies in the United States, depicting it as the motherland of business management. His analysis of the UK however, is quite different (p.732):

Quite remarkably, Great Britain, with its long unique tradition of a highly esteemed civil service, populated by traditional Oxbridge educated 'gentlemen amateurs', an administrative culture markedly different from the United States, forms a much more 'loud and clear' example of 'public managerialism'.

The OECD interpretation emerges from its surveys of 1990, 1993 and 1995 which show that managerial reforms in the public sector are dominant amongst almost all of its 22 member countries. The 1995 report, *Governance in Transition*, confidently claims that a new international paradigm for public management has emerged. Comparative studies by others in the field though tend to dispute this analysis. Olsen and Peters' (1996) research from eight nations concludes that NPM has not been universally accepted and that there is no general wave of reforms. They note (p.13):

across the eight countries studied, there were significant variations in the discontent with the public sector and in the perceived need for radical, administrative reform.....ideas about generic management, private business and competitive markets were not adopted with the same ease in the eight countries.

Such a view is supported in the comparative work of Savoie (1994); Laegreid and Pedersen (1994); Naschold (1995); Kickert and Jorgensen (1995) and Flynn and Strehl (1996). This body of work contradicts the OECD/PUMA version which stresses uniformity.

There is no doubt that individual country factors are significant. Premfors (1998, p.157/158) demonstrates that the Swedish (and Nordic) trajectory of reform is centred on “radical decentralisation of politics and administration, but within a still large public sector and an unchanged or only modestly reduced welfare commitment between government and citizens”. Rhodes (1999) compares the application of NPM in Britain and Denmark and identifies markedly different policies under the public reform label. This leads him to conclude (p.365):

there is no such thing as NPM. The need to domesticate public sector reform, to make it orderly and comprehensible, may be understandable but it does not mean that there is an essentialist account of such changes; there are only competing webs of interpretation.

Kickert (1997, p.70) reaches a similar deduction and, through a case study of administrative reforms in the Netherlands, argues that it should be possible to develop alternatives to the dominant Anglo-American managerialism - “historical and international awareness might provide a keener awareness not only of the distinctiveness of public management but also its long-standing virtues”.

NPM has many appealing characteristics, not least of which is its vague nature which makes it applicable to all political settings and bureaucracies. Holmes (1992, p.472) notes, “one can only be amazed by the commonality of not only language, but also, more importantly, purpose across a whole range of different cultures”. According to Clarke (1996, p.6) this language is misleading - “it suggests that there was a single paradigm of public

management and that, for some reason, we have moved to a new one. Neither is right". Hood (1998, p.195) is also pre-occupied with the claim that NPM is a new revolutionising global paradigm and commences his discussion by claiming that "the idea of world-wide convergence on a single 'modern' form of organisation is a beguiling and recurring one" and remains at the heart of the current debate. DiMaggio and Powell (1991), as quoted by Hood (1998, p.202), conclude that "organisations in general are subject to 'isomorphic' processes which cause them to resemble one another". Public sector organisations are not immune to this phenomenon and NPM changes are heavily driven by 'mimetic' processes. Metcalfe and Richards (1990) contend that NPM and its concentration on managerialism is not advancing public management but is in fact a throwback to the 1950s by crudely promoting the virtues of private sector organisational management practice. Ferlie *at al.* (1996, p.251) admit the overall significance and scale of development of NPM is still unclear and that academics need to be wary of the "dangerous and ethnocentric assumption that the rest of the world is converging onto the Anglo-Saxon model". This is a warning which reinforces the claim made by Dunleavy (1994, p.472) that the world is witnessing "the decoupling of public services production from a single-country context". Dunleavy is referring to Britain but there are significant lessons to be learned from America, one of the initial 'Big 5' advocates of NPM. Naschold's (1996, p.41) research suggests that, "the story of public sector modernisation in the USA is the story of a large number of reform initiatives, introduced with gusto, but all, in the final analysis, unsuccessful".

NPM is essentially an umbrella term or convenient acronym. In itself, it means very little but encompasses the concepts of 'managerialism' (Pollitt, 1990); 'market-based public administration' (Lan and Rosenbloom, 1992) and 'entrepreneurial government' (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). NPM is a mass of contradictions. For example, Pollitt (1990) regards the stress on the control of expenditure, the decentralising of management responsibilities and the application of target-setting and performance monitoring as neo-Taylorism. Such a revival of the scientific management philosophies of Frederick Taylor represents the antithesis of the Osborne and Gaebler NPM vision.

Ultimately e-government may suffer from its position within a movement which has yet to prove itself. Administration is important. While the 'Information Age' has created a world fuelled by cyberspace, the Internet and an increasing stream of techno-driven products which radically change living and working environments, this remains also an administrative age. McRae and Pitt (1980, p.2) correctly state, **"with some exceptions, we are born in organisations, educated in organisations and we die in organisations. Even if we escape membership of organisations, we are unlikely to escape their influence as part and parcel of our society."** Administration in both the private and public sphere is concerned with the accomplishment of identifiable purposes. However, the establishment and understanding of these identifiable purposes is significantly different. Denhardt (1990, p.43) states that **"public administration is concerned with managing change in pursuit of publicly defined societal values."** Let's reflect on this for a moment.....

Q: WHO DEFINES THESE VALUES?

A: TRADITIONALLY THIS HAS BEEN THE ROLE OF ELECTED POLITICIANS THROUGH THE BUREAUCRATIC ORGANS OF THE STATE

Q: WHAT WILL E-GOVERNMENT MEAN FOR THIS RELATIONSHIP? WILL THERE BE A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN THE POWER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRINCIPAL AND AGENT?

A: ?????????????????????????????????

Foucault describes the technologies of power whereby both the exercise of power and the structures of power utilise and incorporate both hard and soft techniques. Goverde *et al.* (2000) rejoice in turning the perceived understanding of e-government on its head. In a telling paragraph of their book, *Power in Contemporary Politics*, they assert the following:-

Most recently, of course, the development of digital information and communications technologies enable states to monitor their citizens more closely than ever before, whether for purposes of control or in order to more efficiently provide public goods, welfare etc. It must be remembered of course that such technologies are at the beck and call not merely of states and political actors, but also of firms, crime syndicates and other organisations. Furthermore, such hard technologies only operate through the soft technologies or structured practices of organisations and institutions themselves: they are the backbone of micro-circuits of power as much as of

the macro-structures of political, social and economic institutions. Nevertheless, as the elite theorist, Robert Michaels, famously quoted, "Who says organisations says oligarchy." Again, normative and empirical dimensions are inextricably intertwined.

Power and knowledge are two sides of the one equation and as we know power corrupts so..... ? Will e-government provide the public with **knowledge** or with incomprehensible jargon-clogged bureaucratise manifesting itself as open and transparent release of information?

These issues and other critical ones are addressed by a colleague in University College Dublin, Dr. Lee Komito, who presented a detailed paper to the *Exploring Cyber Society Conference* in 1999 on the effects of IT on the political landscape. The paper is re-produced here to illustrate some key questions on this draft submission about e-government and cannot be re-produced without the permission of the author.

Political Transformations: clientelism and technological change

Exploring Cyber Society Conference Proceedings Volume II, John Armitage and Joanne Roberts, eds., University of Northumbria at Newcastle, 1999.

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I. **Information and Politics**

New information and communications technologies are expected to transform political systems as part of a move to an 'Information Society'. A Utopian view of this transformation is often reflected, not only by some who write about cyber-democracy, but also in government policy statements. For instance, in Europe, the 'Bangemann Report' (High Level Group on the Information Society, 1994) expected that the Information Society would lead to a "more efficient, transparent and responsive public services, closer to the citizen and at lower cost" in Europe. The High Level Expert Group on the Social and Societal Aspects of the Information Society (1996) noted that "ICTs create new opportunities for greater public participation in and awareness of the political process". Thus, new technologies are expected to improve political participation and administrative efficiency, as long as appropriate policy decisions are taken.

These changes could manifest themselves in a number of ways. One policy direction has been to encourage greater participation in policy formation by citizens, local communities, and special interest groups. This may happen through electronic town halls, as well as other mechanisms, which will generally improve civic life (e.g., Tsagarousianou, Tambini, Bryan 1998; Raab, Bellamy, Taylor 1996). In addition, a second direction has to provide more 'public' government, through government web sites, which will make government decision processes more transparent and thus accountable.

In tandem with these policy directions has been the use of information technology to improve the delivery of government services, just as it has been used to improve delivery of other 'products' by organisations using new technology. This has involved greater co-ordination of activities within organisations and improvements in administrative efficiency. It has also been linked to better access, by citizens, to the services which they require from government. As the state becomes a more efficient, and voracious, information consumer, the danger of the state abusing this information also grows. This threat has been addressed by Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation in many jurisdictions. These provide safeguards against abuse of the state's store of information about citizens.

All of these developments have been well rehearsed in public policy discussion fora in many countries. Underlying much of the debate has been a general assumption that many of these changes will only take place as a result of intentional policy decisions. Without such policy intervention, the outcomes of technological innovation will be the negative ones of invasion of privacy, abuse of data stores on individuals, and so on. Phrased in this way, the debate becomes dualist: positive policy outcomes due to intervention in governmental processes on one hand, versus negative outcomes if there are no policy interventions on the other hand.

However, social and political changes are not always intentional and planned, they may arise as unanticipated consequences. In the remainder of this paper, I would like to explore the radical political change taking place in Ireland, partially (though not wholly) as an unanticipated consequence of technological investments designed to improve the administrative efficiency of the state.

II. **Clientelism and information**

In many Western societies, the administrative system is seen as separate from the political system. In Weber's view of bureaucracy, further elaborated by Parsons and other political philosophers, and widely accepted throughout Western society, the state provides services as universalistic benefits; if individuals fulfil the criteria, they receive the benefit. The bureaucracy is non-political and should not be subject to personalistic or political interventions. To receive benefits for particularistic reasons such as the particular qualities of the individual, or due to the personal intervention of someone else, is seen as a corruption of the administrative system.

In practice, informal and personal networks exist as addenda to the universalistic and formal systems in all societies (c.f., Eisenstadt, Roniger 1984). In some political systems (especially post-colonial states), these informal networks are so pervasive as to blur the distinction between politics and administration, and benefits are the result of political or personal forces, rather than universalistic entitlements. Such systems are often described as 'clientelist'; webs of informal and personal links are used to circumvent or subvert the formal system, so that individuals receive benefits that they may not 'deserve' by universalistic criteria.

integral parts of the communities, although they had not previously received much attention. Often, individuals of unequal status provided resources to which the other party had no access. When such exchanges were the basis of long-lasting personal bonds between the parties, they were called patron-client relations. The patron provided necessary services which were otherwise unavailable and the recipient became the patron's "client". In the patron-client exchanges of peasant communities, landowners provided land to farm, crisis insurance, physical security or protection and, in return, received crops, labour, military service, and gratitude (Scott and Kerkvliet 1977:443-444). The recipient of patronage benefits acknowledged his dependence, and stood ready to assist the patrons in whatever way the patron desired. Symbolic acts of deference or subservience were the client's acknowledgement of his debt, and the fulfilment of the patron's requests was only a partial repayment of a recurring debt. Vertical exchanges were often enveloped or enshrined with special moral values, suggesting a non-economic bond between the parties. Fictive kinship, or "godfatherhood" gave an added moral dimension to the personal relationship, which served to disguise the inequality which created the need for such exchanges. Such relationships exist in many parts of the world: the Mediterranean, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. All of these relationships exhibit some common characteristics: they are between people of unequal socio-economic status, they are personal and face-to-face, they are voluntary, and they persist over time (for a sample of various definitions and descriptions, see Eisenstadt and Roniger, 1984; Powell, 1977; Clapham, 1982; Scott, 1977; and Graziano, 1975). Pitt-Rivers' (1961) characterisation of them as "lop-sided friendships" evokes the mixture of economic transaction and moral value which seems to separate such relations from simple economic domination and exploitation on one hand, and egalitarian aspirations of reciprocity on the other.

Local notables derive power from two kinds of resources: either the direct control of scarce and valued resources, or access to others who control them. One who provides valued goods because he controls them himself is a patron; the resources are in his "giving". One who does not directly control the resources, but has special influence over, or contact with, those who do, is a broker. The resource which a broker provides is his special influence or contact (Boissevain 1974; Paine 1971). While the same person might control both kinds of resources, the resources can be separated analytically. In both cases, the element of monopoly is crucial. It is a broker's or patron's exclusive access to valued resources which makes clients depend on them and which permits brokers and patrons to "charge" for their services (cf. Silverman 1965).

It has been suggested that, over time, brokerage supplants patronage; patron-client links tend to become broker-client links as the national system intrudes into the local community (Silverman 1965). As state intervention increases, local power begins to depend on access to external resources. Those whose special control over local resources made them patrons will probably also have special access to state resources, but there is an increased chance for others to become brokers. Landowners may find themselves competing with local teachers or priests, whose literacy enables them to provide an alternative access to state resources, and at a lower "cost" to the client. As more individuals have access to the state, the monopoly is lost and there remains little power or profit for the broker. Over time, clients' dependence on brokers and patrons diminishes, and "patron-client ties have tended to become more instrumental, less comprehensive, and hence less resilient" (Scott 1977: 138). The duration of the link shortens, and begins to resemble market exchanges, and, as the overall structures which support and encourage clientelism crumble, so clientelism decays.

Electoral clientelism is a special case of clientelism and exists when the exchange between patron/broker and client becomes part of the political process (Clapham 1982). In many urban areas, for instance, clients have had little to offer anyone in return for assistance other than their vote. However, such a resource was of value to politicians, who could use this to develop a secure electoral base. In electoral clientelism, then, the clientelist exchange is between the citizen, whose main resource is his or her vote, and the politician, who can provide access to a wide range of state benefits. Urban political machines, especially in 19th Century United States, flourished on such a basis. A change in electoral clientelism will have significant

vested interests in a country, and is likely to be maintained as long as possible. It is sometimes presumed that clientelist politics results from certain economic or political conditions, often associated with under-developed or post-colonial societies and, as modernisation progresses, clientelism will inevitably decline. This is not the case; clientelism is not simply a result of underdevelopment and a phenomenon that will disappear inevitably (Eisenstadt, Roniger 1984; Komito 1984). It can exist, in a state of equilibrium, and not wither away or atrophy. The slow evaporation of clientelist politics in Ireland, partially as an unintended consequence of pragmatic and non-ideological investments in administrative efficiency is of particular interest.

-21. *Irish Politics*

Clientelism became the dominant descriptive model for Irish politics after Chubb (1963) described politicians as local men who looked after their constituent's interests by "going about persecuting civil servants". Chubb suggested that the Irish politician's primary task was to mediate between his local constituents and the state's administrative apparatus. Voters wanted state services, and politicians helped or appeared to help people obtain those services. Voters believed, incorrectly (according to Chubb), that the "intervention or good offices of a "man in the know" (1963:273) was needed to obtain state services. This tacit exchange of political support for special personal preference has been a cornerstone of Irish politics since independence in the 1920's (Komito, Gallagher 1993).

Often, politicians claimed credit for providing benefits which citizens deserved as an entitlement. However, politicians' interventions often achieved results which the voter could not achieve. This was because many people did not understand the bureaucratic system well enough to obtain all that they were entitled to, while politicians were experts who could navigate the bureaucratic maze, and so obtain a state service that might otherwise be denied, or not even requested. Politicians' ability to monopolise and then market their specialist knowledge of state benefits provided a strong political resource (Komito 1984, 1989, 1993).

The state has helped maintain this market for political brokerage. Bureaucratic procedures were slow and inefficient, so it was difficult for citizens to obtain information about their entitlements, redress in the event of incorrect decisions, or proof that their case was being fairly decided. Yet, while civil servants responded slowly, if at all, to voters who approached civil servants directly, they responded quickly to politicians who intervened on behalf of voters. In the 1960's and 70's, the degree of state intervention in Ireland increased, and citizens' dependence on state assistance grew, yet civil servants provided little public information about services or entitlements. Delays in providing this assistance, lack of information about new benefits provided, linked with existing patterns of distrust, further accentuated clientelist patterns.

These are, essentially, information issues. That is, clientelist politics in Ireland does not derive from private control over resources, or even control over decisions about resources, it derives from control over information -- information about resources and information about decision processes regarding resources. Politicians were the only sources for information about entitlements, the procedures for claiming entitlements, the criteria for successfully obtaining entitlements, or the progress of applications for entitlements. Since there was no direct access to civil servants, there was no mechanism by which claims by politicians could be evaluated (except in so far as other politicians made competing claims of influence). Politicians were able to garner electoral support by virtue of their position in the information chain.

To summarise, clientelist politics in Ireland results from specific circumstances. First is the need, by citizens, for government benefits. Second is the slow provision of such benefits. Third is citizens' inability to obtain information directly from civil servants, regarding either the progress of applications for benefits or the reasons for decisions regarding applications made. Fourth is the ability of politicians to get information from civil servants regarding the progress of cases. Fifth is the knowledge that politicians possess regarding civil service procedures and processes. The final circumstance is the lack of any other mediating organisation to provide similar services. These, in combination, have been the foundation for clientelist politics in Ireland. Almost all of these can, and have been, changing as a result of new information and communication technologies.

• **Changing Administrative Practice and Information Technology**

-19. *Office Automation*

With the increase in state intervention in Ireland in the 1960's came an increase in the amount of work in government departments. Government departments were dealing with more individuals and organisations, as well as new programs and schemes. There were increases in the number of 'clients', an increased number of new programs, increasingly complex eligibility criteria for new and existing programs, and greater amount of data needed about individuals to apply the eligibility criteria. As with many other organisations dealing with increasing amounts of increasingly complex information, office information systems were introduced in the Irish civil service. It took some time before the increased work load led to technology investments. It wasn't until the 1980's that Pye (1992) noted a dramatic increase in IT-related expenditure, in both equipment and staff. For instance, from 1982 through 1987, expenditure was 74 percent greater in real terms than the previous six years; on a per capita basis, there was an increase of 180 percent (Pye 1992: 28). Staffing levels showed equal growth; despite a net drop in civil service staffing by 15 to 20 percent in various government departments during the 1980s, IT staffing increased by 37 percent in the same period (Pye 1992: 115). The IT section of the Irish civil service has been encouraging the use of Lotus/IBM NOTES since the early 1990's, making the Irish civil service one of the early adopters of groupware technology.

-18. *Changing the clientelist market*

The justification for IT investment was to improve the efficiency of service provision, and indeed the speed of processing cases increased, as did the ability of civil servants to deal with more complex eligibility criteria, using ever more information about applicants. Generally, ICTs do not alter political behaviour or administrative practice (Kling 1996), and Pye found this to be the case in the Irish civil service, noting that "IT has been primarily a conservative force within government departments, serving in the main to reinforce the status quo" (1992: 113). This may be true, in terms of the internal structure of departments, but there has been an unanticipated impact on the way citizens relate to government and the clientelist exchange of perceived favours for votes.

Administrative delays previously helped create the market for political interventions, since people needed to monitor the progress of applications that might provide them with significant economic benefits, such as a grant or a house (Komito 1989). This was the market in which politicians 'sold' their ability to provide information. With the introduction of office information systems, the processing of cases has speeded up (despite increases in the actual number of cases being processed); with less delay, the need for intervention to discover the status of a case has also lessened.

Furthermore, the direct monitoring of the progress of cases is now easier. Under the previous system, it was difficult, on a practical level, to find out exactly what was happening with a particular case, as the answer might only be found on a particular piece of paper on a particular desk. It might not be clear on whose desk the case was, and, if the person was away or busy, a report might be slow in coming. Direct queries by citizens produced either no answer or an answer only very slowly, because it was so costly to assemble the information. Due to the nature of parliamentary democracy, however, civil servants had little choice but to put other work aside to find the answer if a politician inquired, despite the cost. This has now changed; with new technology, it is less costly, in time and money, to provide a progress report on a case, and a departmental information officer (or even a receptionist) can easily trace the progress of cases. Citizens no longer need politicians, they need only post a letter or make a phone call (often free of charge) to the relevant department to monitor an application's progress. New technology has even reduced the demand for progress reports on cases, because cases are now processed faster.

In addition to politicians' control over access to civil servants, has been their control over access to information. In Ireland (as in other jurisdictions), the use of new technology in data acquisition, storage and manipulation has fuelled concerns about the use of information by governments. This, in turn, has led to Freedom of Information legislation which requires civil servants to make available, to the public,

an obscure process, enabling politicians to make claims that can be neither substantiated or disproved. While the legislation has, so far, been used largely by journalists and opposition party spokesman, it has, even so, increased the amount of information now available about decision making procedures. This has lessened the scope for claims by politicians regarding their influence over particular decisions. Finally, the number of mediators or brokers which individuals can ask for assistance has increased. As noted, politicians were originally the only providers of mediated access. The first change was the introduction of the Office of the Ombudsman in the mid 1980's. Previously, there was no external mechanism by which citizens could appeal against decisions made by civil servants. In such cases, citizens had no choice but to go to politicians, in hope that political pressure might provide solutions to administrative delays or errors. The Ombudsman provided a mechanism by which citizens can appeal decisions made by civil servants, without having recourse to politicians. Although the number of citizens using the Ombudsman has been relatively small, it none the less exists as an alternative to politicians and was initially feared by politicians for that reason.

Voluntary agencies provide additional alternative information sources, in addition to politicians. Community Information Centres function as mediators or brokers, not only providing information but also acting themselves on behalf of citizens. For a number of years, Community Information Centres have existed to provide advice on entitlements and procedures by which entitlements could be applied for. Up to this point, many citizens have tended to rely on politicians, rather than the information centres, believing that influence was more important than information. Growth in the use of the Community Information Centres by citizens suggests this may also be changing. According to National Social Service Board Annual Reports, queries have risen from 39,000 queries in 1979 to 107,011 in 1984 (when Community Information Centres were formally established under the National Social Service Board), to 147,206 queries in 1997. Also changing is the Centres' ability to provide an efficient information resource. In the early 1980's, Community Information Centres maintained social welfare information in paper binders. When regulations changed, new information sheets were produced, the sheets were distributed to the Centres, out-of-date pages were removed from the paper binders and new pages inserted. This process was slow, labour-intensive, and subject to error. Recently, some Centres have been experimenting with electronic updating of files and regulations. The next step is to make such electronic information accessible to the general public, so that intermediaries, whether Social Welfare officers or CIC volunteers, are no longer necessary.

-17. *Infrastructure*

It is not enough to use ICTs to provide general information services, it is also necessary to provide means by which citizens can inquire about their particular cases, whether it be a social welfare application, housing query, or employment grant. As others have noted (see, especially, Loader 1998), the technological facility of access is of little use if most of the population don't have access to the necessary technology. In Ireland, access to personal computers, modems, and Internet Service Providers remains restricted to the middle-classes, who, in any event, have never depended on politicians for informal access to civil servants anyway. In aid of this, the Irish government is considering a number of measures, including the possibility of providing email addresses and internet access to for all citizens (Ireland 1999: 7), as well as certification and encryption techniques "to permit secure electronic transactions between the citizen and the public service" (p. 8). Although many citizens cannot afford access to electronic information, whether via electronic mail or the World Wide Web, inexpensive access via public access points in libraries, social welfare offices, third level institutions is under active consideration. According to a recent government action plan (Ireland 1999), work will commence immediately to provide high speed internet access in all public libraries, and further consideration will be given to "extending access to those who do not have PC/internet access at present" (p. 7), including dedicated kiosks and use of schools, post offices, and so on.

One should not presume, however, that access to the bureaucracy requires computers. At the moment, inquiries are in person, by post, or by telephone. Even

government departments have free phone numbers for queries, and many have FreePost addresses so that citizens can post without cost. There are also increases in the number of outlying one-stop shops, where citizens can walk in and make queries about a range of government services. The significance of technological innovation has been the reduced cost of accessing civil servants, even if by phone, the reduced cost, for civil servants, of accessing information about cases, and the reduced processing time of those cases. Being able to access information via electronic mail or the World Wide Web is an added bonus, but not a necessary requirement.

Conclusion

Office automation thus has, at the very least, altered the basis of Irish political clientelism and, at the most, undermined its very foundations. It must be noted that ICT investment is not solely responsible for changes in political clientelism. In conjunction with technological changes, changes in bureaucratic culture have encouraged Irish civil service to respond to direct inquiries by citizens. This change has been slowly taking place over the past twenty years, beginning in the 1980's with the requirement that decisions should bear a civil servant's name, instead of being made, anonymously, by the department on behalf of the relevant Minister. However, such changes would have had far less impact, had it not been for the technological changes already described. As a result, the foundations of clientelist politics have been undermined. Firstly, the need for intervention is less, because decisions are made more quickly, lessening the need for political influence to speed up the process. Secondly, citizens can now directly monitor the progress of an application, instead of needing political intervention to get answers from civil servants. Thirdly, citizens have more knowledge about procedures, both lessening dependence on politicians' knowledge and also reducing the scope for exaggerated claims. Finally, there is an increasing number of other brokers who can achieve the same results as politicians, thus reducing the 'price' which politicians can 'charge' for their services. These were not the reasons for technology investments in the Irish Civil service, but they have been the very important consequences of those investments.

Clientelist behaviours may diminish, but will not disappear, as a result of technological changes in the Irish government's administrative practices. Inevitably, some government decisions remain subject to private political influence and thus clientelist exchanges. As in all states, there are arenas in which private and informal decision making remain important. However, open information can make it difficult to conceal such private influence and this may itself be a powerful restraint. It certainly can ensure that such privatisation of public resources does not extend to the everyday decisions of administration that citizens are directly concerned with.

More importantly, there are also limits to the political impact of technology solutions. A greater variety of mediating organisations, enhanced by provision of easier direct access to the state by citizens, has meant a decrease in the monopoly over information by political brokers. However, these changes do not necessarily mean a shift to direct (as compared with mediated) access. Indeed, although direct access is an ideal espoused by some proponents of electronic democracy, it is important to realise the limitations of technology to provide such a mechanism. The Irish case demonstrates that it is not sufficient to simply provide information, the information must be both meaningful and trusted or else it is not effective, and it is not clear that an electronic system will be as effective as human mediation.

Irish politicians' power derived not only from their control over information, but also from their expertise in the application of that information. Politicians capitalised on their knowledge of all the different schemes and programmes -- they knew which scheme was relevant for a particular person. Equally, they knew how to fill out forms in 'civil service' language, making certain that any information that might advance a person's case was provided. A direct access information system must be able to provide equally relevant and meaningful information. Whether this be civil service information officers, or sophisticated government web sites, the information system must assist people in finding services that they can benefit from, and must also elicit any information that might advance their application for those services. Individuals are not always aware, themselves, of what they need, much less able to express that need and, at the moment, experienced and knowledgeable individuals remain more effective at matching citizens needs with state services than electronic information systems. Electronic information

the person's actual problem is totally different, much less be able to suggest a particular service that might address that unfelt and unperceived need, and even less ensure that the person's case is presented in the best possible way.

Additionally, the information system must be trusted by the citizen/consumer. People go to politicians, amongst other reasons, because they trust that politicians will work on their behalf, and this trust has not previously extended to either civil servants or voluntary agencies. Citizens, for instance, often experienced civil servants as preventing citizens from getting benefits, rather than acting as advocates on their behalf. If an information system is not trusted by the citizen, there will remain the perceived need for an advocate to make sure that the person has received all the benefits to which they are entitled.

Thus, the Information Society is expected to transform political relations in industrial societies, but the extent to which transformations only result from conscious policy decisions is often underestimated. In the past, Irish politicians provided real or imagined patronage in exchange for the electoral support of citizens. Politics in Ireland has been conditioned by restricted access to information, and this is changing, although these changes have largely been unintentional consequences of efficiency-driven ICT investments. The introduction of office information systems into the Irish civil service has lessened politicians' monopoly on administrative information. This increased public access to information has altered traditional politics in Ireland and enhanced democratic participation. Additional information about procedures and more rapid accountability has enhanced the trust which citizens have in the system. Improved communication has widened the range of mediators that citizens may use, as well as provided easier direct access to civil servants. These changes have not (and perhaps should not) remove the need for human mediators between citizens and the state. Nor will such changes necessarily increase public participation in politics or improve accountability in decision making. Providing more information through technological innovation is not a guarantee of either better services or more direct participation in the state. However, a lack of information has helped clientelist politics to flourish, and the technological changes, by altering the nature of clientelist exchanges in Ireland, has altered a fundamental tenet of Irish politics.

***NOTE: This paper is available on the worldwide web at the following address:-**

<http://www.ucd.ie/-lis/komito/transform.htm>

As noted by Komito, Ireland is attempting to climb on board the e-government bandwagon, jumping from the back of the Celtic Tiger economy. Under a freshly-launched REACH programme customers (i.e. citizens who are now being re-categorised) will have a single Personal Public Services Number which give them access to all government services and which will enable REACH to maintain all relevant customer details on a single centralised

database accessible by all relevant agencies. In fact, Ireland now leads the world in terms of online taxation services through the ROS (Revenue On-Line Service).

To conclude with some general comments....

Advocates talk of bridging the digital divide but the notion that e-government gives power to the powerless is delusional...and potentially dangerous. Can you have an effective revolution if a large proportion of the revolutionaries are not adequately armed? Solomon (2000) argues, **“No matter how much officeholders vow to level the digital playing field, the barriers will loom**

much higher for some than for others. Ability to take part in government should not be determined by economic resources. Imbalances in access to state-of-the art computers and the latent software just exacerbate the kind of chronic inequities that the Internet supposedly alleviates.”

Yes, e-government offers the hope of more effective direct participative democracy but it does not necessarily follow. The jargon and complex terminology of the brave new world of IT can create the illusion of progress and of ultra-modernity without disrupting the existing elite power relations.

The enormity of the required cultural transformation necessary within government and public sector institutions should also be borne in mind. This is likely to be much more challenging than in the e-business market place as resistance to change is embedded in the cultures of many public bodies. Re-invention sounds nice. Revolution sounds bloody. Stagnation sounds safe.

The placement of e-government within the NPM debate should be respected. Side by side with NPM, the concept of ‘informatisation’ in public services has been developed by Frissen and Snellen (1990). The term ‘informatisation’ is used in recognition of the fact that public sector organisations (and accordingly the administrative apparatus of the state) are becoming strategically and centrally dependent upon the changing flows of informational resources which are made possible by powerful combinations of information and communications technologies. Bellamy and Taylor (1992, p.29) note, **“As with NPM, informatisation leads to insights about organisational development, about new bureaucratic forms, about new styles and**

techniques of management, about new relationships with customers and new conceptions of performance.”

The limitless possibilities for e-government are exciting and should be explored. However, as in all revolutions, there will be casualties along the way. The purpose of this paper has been to provoke thought, and hopefully debate. It has sought to raise questions, confident in the knowledge that answers are not readily at hand. We hope it has succeeded in these aims.
