“The implications of innovation in e-government and communication strategy in Australian Local Government organizations: An investigation of current and emerging practice.”

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Declaration

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ABSTRACT

For over a decade, local government in Australia has recognised that innovative technologies present the opportunity to communicate and engage with residents, provide information and services online and enable participation in council decision-making (Berryman 2004; Thomas 2004; Shackleton, Fisher & Dawson 2005). The literature also suggests that e-government continues to present challenges for local government, and that this has less to do with the continuing rapid evolution of relevant technology than it has with the functional, organisational and systemic capabilities required, and the many different and competing elements involved in creating and sustaining these.

This research intends to assist further development of e-government in Australian councils. It reviews the available literature and suggests a framework for articulating the functional capabilities required for effective e-government. This framework is intended to assist both researchers and practitioners as they navigate their way through the rapidly developing literature and the complexities it identifies. The research also presents a benchmarking study of publicly available council websites, measuring 30 features of e-government online, across 100 councils in New South Wales and Victoria during 2009/10. The study adapted the audit tool developed by West (2000, 2001) and used annually in the United States (USA) for eight years. This study represents one of the first systematic studies of the development of e-government capability in Australia and as such provides a valuable benchmark against which subsequent development in this field can be assessed. It offers a transparent account of the methodology used, in order to make replication straightforward in future research studies, as well as to provide individual councils with the means to profile and compare themselves with others internationally and in Australia. The findings of the benchmarking study are interpreted with assistance from 13 qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with a range of industry representatives and academic commentators. These interviews offer further insight into the diverse conceptual and practical dimensions involved in building both requisite functional capabilities and the organisational and systemic capabilities needed to support them.
Some basic functional capabilities in interactive service delivery had been taken up by many of the councils studied. However, those associated with interactive dialogue, participation and decision-making; integration of services and information across and between agencies; and governance capabilities that balance the protection of citizens with transparency, accessibility and managerial accountability, are proving to be more challenging. The findings suggest that realisation of the full potential of e-government has significant implications for the organisational capabilities of local government, including business models, culture, processes, systems, skills and structures. They also point to the systemic complexities involved in inter-agency cooperation and in any consideration of e-democracy. Stacey’s (1992) framing of complexity is offered as a means to understand and engage with this territory, together with Hernes’ (2004) concept of the unbounded organisation which reflects the whole-of-organisation effort required. These ideas suggest why so many of the challenges of e-government involve a continual engagement with tensions that are difficult to resolve, including tensions between good governance and the freedoms of citizens. Arguably, these are tensions that are always in play in democracies, but become more apparent in the context of e-government.

Against this background, the strategy for the adoption of e-government by any individual local government organisation is not at all straightforward. In addition, the demographic, geographic, cultural, economic, industrial and wealth profiles of local governments vary enormously in Australia, demanding great insight into stakeholder needs to match user requirements with available resources. The crafting of leadership and transition strategies required to realign the requisite organisational and systemic capabilities presents significant issues, and the notion of distributed and adaptive leadership (Heifetz, Linksky and Grashow 2009; Clawson 2009) is drawn on as a source of insight in this respect.

The findings of this study focus on assisting those who are taking up the continuing challenge of realising local e-government.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The context

For over a decade, academic commentary and administrations at different levels of government around the world have recognised the possibilities for e-government presented by rapidly changing electronic communication technologies (see, for example, Baum & Di Maio 2000; Wescott 2001; Ronaghan 2001; Hiller & Bélanger 2001; Layne & Lee 2001; Wohlers 2009). Thomas (2004, p. 259) presents a definition of e-government that encompasses three key functions: ‘The distribution of public information on the web is a form of electronic publishing; websites enabling citizens or businesses to do things (like pay bills) or deal with routine legal matters online are examples of transactional electronic services; communications between governments, politicians and citizens, enabling consultation and feedback in both directions, are forms of electronic democracy’. The IAP2 Spectrum, developed by the International Association for Public Participation Australasia (2004), describes five levels of public participation and engagement that are enhanced by electronic democracy: informative, consultative, involving, collaborating and empowering. In addition, Almarabeh and AbuAli (2010) further define e-government, not only in regard to its broad external applications but also in relation to organisational processes, as:

Government use of information communication technologies to offer for citizens and businesses the opportunity to interact and conduct business with government by using different electronic media such as telephone touch pad, fax, smart cards, self-service kiosks, email / internet, and EDI. It is about how government organises itself: its administration, rules, regulations and frameworks set out to carry out service delivery and to co-ordinate, communicate and integrate processes within itself (Almarabeh & AbuAli 2010, p. 30).
It was suggested that the development of e-government would proceed through several stages. The first would be the provision of basic information on the web; the second would be the institution of innovations that would enable interactivity, increasing the ability of citizens to contact government officials online and search databases; the third would be a transactional stage in which citizens could conduct business online with governments; and the final, transformational, stage would allow the seamless flow of information amongst government agencies, allowing a single point of contact for services and producing more citizen-centric and responsive government. (Baum & Di Maio 2000).

The international literature in this field began to accumulate in the late 1990s, and is now challenged to keep pace with the rapid development of sophisticated practices that have the potential to be taken up in e-government. Early literature focused on state and Federal agencies in the United States (USA), Canada and the United Kingdom (UK), and as previously indicated, reflected aspirations and possibilities for e-government. Other studies explored emerging practice: for example, West’s (2001) audit of the interactive capabilities of State and Federal government websites in the USA; Musso, Weare and Hale’s (2000) content analysis of 270 municipal websites in California; the Pew Internet and American Life Project survey of American adult users of government websites in 2002 and 2010 (Larsen & Rainie 2002; Smith 2010); Fraser’s (2007) investigation of the success of an online initiative by the Canadian Federal government; and Pina, Torres and Royo’s (2010) study of 75 local government websites in the European Union.

Arguably, a major driver of e-government across the world is the development of community expectations and experiences through the use of private sector websites: beyond online banking and paying bills, to customised multimedia sites, social media interaction, news blogs and subscriptions, virtual experiences, online bookings, interactive help desks and consultations, mobile applications and other innovations to connect with customers and improve services. It is not unreasonable that these capabilities are increasingly expected of government (Bushell 1997; Mitchell 2001; Tymson, Lazar & Lazar 2006; Pina, Torres & Royo 2010).
In Australia, the integration of electronic communications became a key goal of the Federal government in 1999. The aim was to link together different services, agencies and information systems in order to make it easier for customers to access them via a ‘one-stop-shop’ (Institute of Public Administration Australia 1999). Over recent years, the Commonwealth government has put in place a range of policies, resources and action plans to advance e-government. The Department of Finance and Administration’s (2006) dedicated Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO), commenced implementation of an e-government strategy entitled Responsive Government: A New Service Agenda in 2006. More recently, the Australian Federal Government launched the Government 2.0 Taskforce in 2009 to investigate how the government could improve services and engagement. The taskforce released a report to the government titled Engage: Getting on with Government 2.0 (Government 2.0 Taskforce 2009) which provided 13 recommendations for online practice. The Federal government responded to this communication, supporting most of the recommendations without modification, including the most important central recommendation: a declaration of open government by the Australian government. The declaration was subsequently issued in July 2010, demonstrating the commitment of the government to greater participation in democracy through an open culture of engagement with better access to, and use of, government information, through innovative technology (Department of Finance and Deregulation 2010b). The Victorian State government established an online E-government Resource Centre in 2002, while its Department of Premier and Cabinet Victoria (2010) published the Government 2.0 Action Plan.

While the Federal and State governments have a number of strategies, action plans and dedicated taskforce resources the picture at the level of local government is less well developed. There is little evidence of any comprehensive council strategies or action plans to guide the development of e-government, and local governments have been slower than their counterparts at higher levels to realise the potential of e-government in relation to interactive online participation (democracy), transformation and seamless service delivery, concentrating more on information management (Reddick 2004; Berryman 2004; Musso, Weare & Hale 2000).
As a senior communications manager for an urban local government in Melbourne, and with a history of working in similar roles over the previous decade, at the outset of this study this writer had a good working knowledge of what was available in Victorian local government. Her estimate was that, while there were a growing number of services online where people could complete a transaction from start to finish, local government websites were still predominantly about information delivery, with few allowing for fully interactive communication, consultation and discussion via the internet. She became keen to translate her own subjective estimates into systematic data that would not only inform her, but would provide leaders, planners, practitioners, researchers and commentators involved with local government in Australia with a reliable benchmark of practice. A benchmarking study would provide a profile of industry development that could be repeated and tracked in time to come, and also allow comparisons with international practices benchmarked and audited using similar tools. It would also give individual local government organisations a transparent means by which to compare their practice with that of others, globally and nationally. More importantly, the writer was also keen to add to the collective wisdom about the effective implementation of e-government. Her own experience prompted thinking beyond the technological possibilities and their financial implications, towards seeking to understand the purpose, potential and impacts of e-government and what is involved in bringing it to life in specific and varying contexts. She sensed that the ongoing dilemmas and tensions implicit in e-government require a range of organisational and systemic capabilities, which must be carefully crafted to accomplish the best fit in any particular setting. By engaging with the literature in a systematic way and speaking with both academic and industry commentators and practitioners, she hoped to clearly set out the challenges and complexities involved, and to develop insights that would be of genuine practical and intellectual value. The opportunity was there to make a useful contribution to this exciting and challenging phase in the development of the industry and hopefully accelerate the realisation of the early aspirations for e-government.
These intentions translated into this research question:
What are the current levels of innovative practice and key issues guiding e-government and online communication in local government in Australia, and what is needed for effective management?

The study had a number of elements:

• a review of literature on the emergence of e-government in Australia and overseas, resulting in the development of four conceptual clusters that capture the requisite functional capabilities for effective-e-government identified in that literature;

• a benchmarking study of 100 public council websites in the Australian States of Victoria and New South Wales undertaken in 2009/10, measuring 30 features of e-government that could be related to the capabilities identified in the literature review;

• a follow-up website review of 30 of these websites in early 2012, together with reflection on 14 international websites providing significant examples of innovative practice;

• in-depth interviews with 13 senior executive industry practitioners and academic commentators; and

• the crafting of advice to the industry and the exploration of the challenging organisational and community issues that are implicated in realising the full potential of e-government.

The review of literature (presented in Chapter 2) helped to clarify the early aspirations for e-government articulated by government, practitioners, academic researchers and commentators. It also revealed the way in which e-government was being understood, the stages and models of development being conceptualised for it, and the functional capabilities required to achieve it. The literature review provided an opportunity to
make another contribution, one that was not anticipated at the outset. As the review progressed, it became possible to construct a way of grouping the functional capabilities identified in the literature according to the way in which they facilitated the realisation of the full potential of e-government.

Four clusters of functional capabilities were constructed. The first cluster is concerned with interactive capabilities: the extent of interactive tools, functions and features and the presence of fully executable services online. The second is focused on understanding and engaging users and stakeholders, customising and personalising websites for democratic outreach and responsiveness to target audiences. The third concerns the connectedness and integration of access to government services, including the existence of portals that provide a one-stop-shop. The fourth focuses on issues of governance such as accessibility, reliability, usability, privacy and security.

The value of articulating these clusters lies in the possibility of making a strong and useful link between the conceptual issues identified in the literature by academics and the world of practice. Expressed in accessible ways, the clusters are like portals, making it easier for practitioners to engage with the literature, and for researchers and commentators to build strong links between theory and practice.

In the next stage of the study, a more immediate and practical way of linking theory and practice through the capability clusters emerged. A key conceptual and methodological contribution became the systematic linkage of the four clusters to the 30 features of the websites assessed using the benchmarking tool. Anyone using the benchmarking tool can not only develop a profile of individual or collective organisational practice, but also make clear connections to the advice and commentary available in the literature and to the conceptual framing of issues that it offers.

This crafting of robust linkages between the conceptual and the practical is a major rationale for undertaking academic doctoral work in the professional practice space. It is especially useful in a field of practice evolving so rapidly and associated with such complex issues of government, democracy, community and organisation. Strong bridges between theory and ideas, and the practicalities of realising the full potential e-
government, will hopefully make it easier for practitioners to make sense of the literature as it continues to evolve, while offering clear connections to the world of practice that might not be immediately obvious to academics.

While the clusters might well be added to and qualified in the near future in this rapidly developing field, they are framed to be generous and inclusive containers that will be modified and enriched rather than replaced. It is also hoped that these clusters will be of interest to researchers internationally, and to both researchers and practitioners exploring all tiers of e-government, not only local government.

In this particular study, the further advantage of developing the functional clusters was the possibility of suggesting direct connections between the functional capabilities and the organisational capabilities required to support them: capabilities such as culture, leadership, business modelling, service-chain analysis and community engagement. The review of literature certainly confirmed the researcher’s own sense that the development of these capabilities in any particular context would require careful consideration of local context, and high order management and leadership capacity to navigate the tensions created by the many varied, competing and demanding dimensions at play.

The methodology

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study in more detail.

The benchmarking study employed the website auditing tool developed and used by West (2001) in his study in the USA and repeated annually over the following seven years. This tool identified 32 features available online at State and Federal government websites, such as information, services and databases; features that would facilitate e-government access by special populations such as people with a disability and non-English speakers; interactive features that would facilitate democratic outreach; and governance features that would set standards for privacy and security. Several adjustments to West’s tool were needed for use in examining local government websites in Australia, resulting in an instrument designed to review 30 features.
There are a total of 565 councils in Australia, and a total of 100 websites were targeted: 50 from Victoria and 50 from New South Wales (NSW). This represents a sample of 18% of the total in Australia, 63% of all Victorian councils and 33% of all NSW councils. Three categories were used to define similar groups of councils by location: Regional/Rural, Suburban and Inner Urban. The examination of each website was undertaken by the author between May 2009 and December 2010. Each inspection averaged between two and three hours and involved searching for 30 features on websites.

A follow-up review of local government websites was undertaken early in 2012 to identify the uptake of more innovative interactive technology tools since the completion of the benchmarking study. The review was not intended to replicate that study but to identify examples that might be suggestive of things to come across the sector. It studied 15 of the websites in Victoria originally studied and 15 of those in New South Wales, across all three location categories. The review searched for the presence of ten innovative features or tools that have become more prominent in the online space, such as customisation tools, mobile applications, interactive maps, videos and online chat facilities. A case study on the floods that devastated the central business district of Brisbane in 2011 was also included, as it provides a high profile and relevant model for effective use of social media in emergency management for local councils. A total of 14 international websites were also reviewed, in order to provide a comparison with Australian websites. This group included eight in the United Kingdom, five in the United States of America, and one in Canada.

In-depth interviews were used to gain a deeper insight into the data emerging from the benchmarking study, and to develop an understanding of the organisational and systemic capabilities required to enable and sustain the functional capabilities of e-government at the local level in Australia. Thirteen people agreed to participate: four council Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), six consultants and advisors in the areas of public relations, technology and community consultation who had all worked for many years with councils as their clients; and three academics with doctoral qualifications.
The findings

The findings of the study are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Overall, the benchmarking study demonstrated that while progress had been made in the area of interactive service delivery online (such as online payments), there was a low average of only five fully executable online services offered across all councils. There was also a low level of interactive communication and engagement (two-way dialogue, discussion and participation), with only 25% of councils having such features present. Customisation and personalisation of features on council websites was also relatively limited. No websites offered integrated and seamless service delivery or one-stop-shop portals, although some had a login or grouped online services, indicating progress towards this end. At the time of the benchmarking study, innovative features (such as wikis, consultation forums, social media, games, video and podcasts, and targeted e-services) were available on few sites. However, review of a smaller number of websites in Australia and overseas only eighteen months later indicated that the speed of adoption of more sophisticated capabilities is increasing. This is particularly the case in relation to interactive communication capabilities. Capabilities relating to integration, seamlessness and governance remain more problematic.

The interviews offered suggestions as to the organisational and systemic factors impeding progress in the realisation of all that e-government might offer. Attention was particularly focused on the organisational challenges involved in aligning business models, back-of-house systems and limited resources to deliver responsive, integrated and customised services. The development of citizen-centric cultures, devolved decision-making, and a willingness to open up traditionally closed systems to public knowledge and participation were all seen as problematic and demanding persistent and focused organisational leadership. Traditional thinking within council organisations, which posits that local government is essentially about the provision of infrastructure and high-touch services, was also nominated as a factor that initially, at least, slowed down the serious consideration of the potential of e-government. The achievement of cooperation between agencies and tiers of government was also identified as posing a significant systemic challenge in making seamless e-government a reality.
Chapter 6 reflects on the major themes raised in the previous two chapters, and Stacey’s (1992) framing of complexity is offered as a means to understand and engage with this territory, together with Hernes’ (2004) concept of the unbounded organisation to explore the whole-of-organisation effort required. The most complex issues relate to the sensitive balance between offering access and ensuring privacy and security; between catering to the expectations of the electronically sophisticated and the marginalisation of those on the wrong side of the digital divide; between forms of democratic participation that give more people a voice more quickly and the need to take longer to make sense of increasing amounts of data. These issues are truly complex in the sense of being unresolvable in any complete way: they will continue to be sources of ongoing tension, and some of them provide new sites for struggles that have always been inherent in democracy. Their complexity demands attentive sustained engagement over long periods, over many layers of government and organisation, and across many dimensions of community.

The thesis concludes (Chapter 7) with a deeper discussion of these issues, referencing the continuing practice experience of the writer and the notion of distributed and adaptive leadership (Hiefetz, Linksky and Grashow, 2009; Clawson, 2009). The writer uses this discussion to frame the insights and advice that she offers. It concludes with her reflection, in the first person, on the role of Communications Manager (the role in which she has significant experience) and suggests how it needs to be realigned to contribute optimally to the adoption and maintenance of local e-government.

The writer has been fortunate to have experienced at first hand the enormous contribution that local government makes to the sustainability of contemporary community life in Australia. This thesis journey has added the intelligence yielded by creation of systematic data sets, and the insights of scholars and insightful practitioners, to her understanding of this exciting field of practice. She has learned that the opportunities implicit in e-government ripple across every aspect of local government and argues that the organisations involved must learn to engage at every level with the challenges posed by the blending of rapid technological change with the qualities and aspirations of human beings. This is a domain of practice and scholarship that is still in its infancy, with all the potential and excitement that that metaphor conveys.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter begins with an exploration of several key conceptual issues, including definitions of e-government and the articulation of the different levels and dimensions through which its full potential might be developed and realised. The literature reviewed spans the last fifteen years, from the time when serious attention began to be paid to the possibilities for e-government that could be envisaged, and as the enabling technology rapidly developed. It includes both academic research and commentary, and the reports and statements issued by governments and other institutions, both internationally and in Australia.

The literature continues to rapidly evolve, as intellectual and practical engagement with e-government reveals more of its complexity. The word complexity is used here in the sense suggested by Stacey (1992): that practice is complicated when neither the what (the nature of the problem or opportunity) nor the how (how we should engage with it) can be definitively knowable and resolvable. In these situations the dynamics in play are unstable and unpredictable, or they represent dilemmas or paradoxes that can’t be solved through logic or decisive intervention. The reading of the literature undertaken for this study confirmed the aptness of this framing for local e-government. The issues identified and explored included technology, communications, democracy, government, citizenry, organisation, governance and leadership, raised in the literature both separately and in relation to each other, but in ways that are still emerging and that signal competing and unresolvable tensions. This is a space for practice and knowledge that demands multi-disciplinary effort on the part of academia and the art of managing trade-offs and compromises on the part of those who lead organisations, represent communities or provide stewardship in the use of community resources.

It was a major effort to find a way to simply map and represent the existing literature. However, it became clear relatively quickly that developing a framework for organising the themes in the existing literature would be a contribution in itself, making access to it easier for scholars and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines and professions,
both now and into the future as it rapidly develops. The framework developed at first glance is practical, focused on the functional capabilities envisaged for e-government at local level. However, this very practical focus creates a series of portals through which the conceptual issues can be considered. Of course the map is not the territory, and this is a field in which almost any practical or conceptual issue that is taken up almost immediately implicates many others. But hopefully, the framework does enable the literature to be accessed in a manageable way.

Four major clusters are offered that between them incorporate the functional capabilities envisaged for e-government at the local level. The first cluster is concerned with interactive capabilities: the extent of interactive tools, functions and features and the presence of fully executable services online. The second cluster is focused on understanding and engaging the user, customising and personalising websites for democratic outreach and responsiveness to target audiences. The third cluster concerns the connectedness and integration of access to government services, including the existence of portals that provide a one-stop-shop. The fourth cluster focuses on issues of governance such as accessibility, reliability, usability, privacy and security. These clusters will undoubtedly be modified as the possibilities for e-government continue to evolve, but they serve the useful purpose of providing a road map for navigating what has already been published. While they provide the structure for the literature review, it is hoped that this road map will also be useful to others who navigate this territory, including practitioners who are seeking to inform and test their own practice experience and wisdom.

The chapter concludes with an overview of the eight major empirical studies conducted in Australia and overseas that have explored the actual take-up of e-government. These studies are important for two reasons; they provide comparative data for the analysis of the findings of the benchmarking study described in this thesis, and they explain the context in which the decision was made to undertake the benchmarking study in the first place.
The concept of e-government

E-government has been described by the Australian National Audit Office as ‘the use of information and communication technologies, and particularly the internet, to deliver government services’ (Australian National Audit Office 2005, p.8). Thomas (2004, p. 259) has teased out these dimensions further: ‘The distribution of public information on the web is a form of electronic publishing; websites enabling citizens or businesses to do things (like pay bills) or deal with routine legal matters online are examples of transactional electronic services; communications between governments, politicians and citizens, enabling consultation and feedback in both directions, are forms of electronic democracy’. Almarabeh and AbuAli (2010) provide both a community and an organisational perspective, defining e-government as:

Government use of information communication technologies to offer for citizens and businesses the opportunity to interact and conduct business with government by using different electronic media such as telephone touch pad, fax, smart cards, self-service kiosks, email / internet, and EDI. It is about how government organises itself: its administration, rules, regulations and frameworks set out to carry out service delivery and to co-ordinate, communicate and integrate processes within itself (Almarabeh & AbuAli 2010, p. 30).

The International Association for Public Participation Australasia (2004) developed the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, which describes levels of public participation and engagement as they progress from one-way information processes to more participatory engagement in which the citizens, rather than the organisation, guide decision-making. The elements in the spectrum range from informing, consulting and involving to collaborating and empowering.
The Spectrum can be used to articulate the possible levels of public participation in planning any form of community engagement, whether traditional or through e-government. The Spectrum relates different levels of participation to the range of goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decisions to be made. The Spectrum also sets out the promise being made to the public at each level of participation. Level 1 commits to keeping the public informed; Level 2 to keeping the public informed, listening to and acknowledging concerns and providing feedback on how public input influenced the decision; Level 3 to working with the public to ensure concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed, and to providing feedback on how public input influenced the decision; Level 4 to looking to the public for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions, and incorporating their advice and recommendations into decisions; and Level 5 to implementing what the public decides (International Association for Public Participation Australasia 2004).

Chadwick and May (2003) differentiate three models of interaction in e-governance: managerial, consultative and participatory. The managerial model is characterised by efficient delivery of information and services. The consultative model frames governments as developing policy ideas to respond to societal interests, then eliciting public opinion to improve them. The participatory model envisages the protection of free speech and greater engagement, with people being enabled to interact in cyberspace and use information through deliberation to influence government, facilitating increased political participation. In e-government this may include the use of social media and interactive web tools that enhance participation and collaboration.

Similar views of the development of e-government have been offered by Layne and Lee (2001), Wescott (2001), Baum and Di Maio (2000), Ronaghan (2001) and Hiller and Bélanger (2001). Baum and Di Maio (2000) suggested that e-government would move from basic information to a second stage of interaction, at which citizens can use email to contact officials and search databases. This is followed by a transaction stage at which citizens can conduct business and complete entire tasks online through self-service 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The final stage (transformation) allows the seamless flow of information among government agencies and provides a single point of contact for constituents so that they can have all their service needs met in one place.
through advanced customer relationship management. It also allows for more collaborative decision-making. In Hiller and Bélanger’s (2001) model, one-way information flows are followed by two-way communication. The third stage involves transactions such as electronic payments, followed by a fourth stage, the integration of data and information across governments, and the final point is political participation.

Some of these models focus on the technical capabilities of the systems as they develop. For example, Layne and Lee (2001) suggest that e-government begins with cataloguing and presenting static information online and moves to a transactional stage (focused on services, forms and databases), followed by vertical integration (which involves local, State and Federal governments sharing data and information online), then horizontal integration (the sharing of data and information online across government departments) providing a one-stop-shop for citizens. In Ronaghan’s (2001) model, governments develop a static, official web site which is then enhanced with more dynamic content. They then progress to interactive and transactional government, followed by seamlessness: the horizontal and vertical integration of governmental services, clustered to meet user needs. Wescott (2001) suggests that most governments begin the initial step in e-government with a simple presence on the web focused mainly on internal processes. The subsequent steps are information provision enabling inter-organisational and public access, then interactivity through two-way communication, followed by transactions (exchange of value), digital democracy (participation), and ‘joined-up’ government (seamlessness).

More recent formulations use different language and reflect the rapid development of what the technology makes possible for local government. For example, Wohlers (2009) has suggested four levels of local e-government: the Billboards level emphasising the display of relevant information for citizens and email access to government officials; the Service-Delivery level allowing the community to make online payments and request services; the Citizen Participation level offering a range of interactive online features, such as polls and comment forms, that facilitate and encourage citizen input in government decision-making; and Citizen Deliberation, empowering residents to discuss and decide on specific issues on the local policy agenda. Pina, Torres and Royo (2010) differentiate between more sophisticated levels of government-to-government
connection (G2G) and government to citizen interconnection (G2C). For these scholars, seamless integration of e-services across administrative boundaries would represent a milestone in e-government reform, demanding new architectures for service management and delivery and a new e-governance style centred on citizens and encapsulating transparency, interactivity, usability, web maturity and financial accountability.

The research and models used to describe different stages of e-government reflect a radical departure from the traditional one-way information approach of local governments to a restructured form of citizen-centric, seamless services, arriving at open engagement and meaningful participation in democratic government. The challenges and realities of reaching each stage, as well as the innovative examples, are discussed through this study. Between them, these models provide useful ways to diagnose and pinpoint the progress of any particular government organisation on its path to fully realising the potential of effective e-government.

Most models assume a distinct pathway of development through various stages as electronic activities mature. However, Shackleton, Fisher and Dawson (2005) have questioned this assumption. They argue that the move from a physical delivery environment to an online alternative in the local government sector is more complex than in other industries, as it involves multiple types of service provision and high levels of community engagement. They build on Quirk’s (2000) perspective that highlights the disparate range of functions and services provided by councils, suggesting that local e-government maturity will not necessarily follow a linear path. Instead, they differentiate a number of dimensions of e-government, including timely and customised information provision, e-commerce, e-management of people and projects, e-decision-making and the empowerment of citizens and political dialogue through e-democracy. These different dimensions will increasingly have their own growth paths as technologies and user expectations continue to change across all dimensions simultaneously. This is a powerful challenge to the mindset that subscribes to the belief that stages are to be moved through and that lasting foundations can be built upon and relied upon. It is a reminder that the world of e-government is multi-dimensional, with each dimension the site for potential and radical change at any time.
Furthermore, some literature questions the difference between the models and the practice in a different way. For example, Chadwick and May (2003) argue that ‘the democratic potential of the internet has been marginalized as a result of the ways in which government use of such technology has been framed since the early 1990s. An executive-driven “managerial” model of interaction has assumed dominance at the expense of “consultative” and “participatory” possibilities’ (Chadwick & May 2003, p. 271).

**Research into practice**

Internationally, the practice literature in this field started to appear in numbers in the early part of this century and now faces the challenge of keeping pace as the practices of e-government themselves rapidly develop. Early literature focused on State and Federal agencies in the United States (USA) and Canada, in particular, along with the United Kingdom (UK). For example, West (2000, 2001, 2008) undertook an audit of the interactive capabilities of State and Federal Government websites in the USA and this study was repeated annually over eight years. Musso, Weare and Hale (2000) undertook a content analysis of 270 municipal websites in California; in 2002, the Pew Internet and American Life Project surveyed American users of government web sites (Larsen & Rainie 2002); and over the last ten years this project has continued to provide a range of surveys on different aspects of online government services (Smith 2010). In Canada, Fraser (2007) investigated the success of an online initiative by the Canadian Government that was focused on the integration of services to achieve seamlessness.

Meanwhile, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has been concerned to review practice issues for e-government globally, with a view to providing practical guidance to the field. An OECD e-Government Working Group (including members from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands and the United States) brought together the insights and guidance of national experts and senior officials from the centres of government in OECD countries to discuss e-government issues. The OECD Report entitled *The E-Government Imperative* (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and
Development 2003) was produced. This document looked at e-government in terms of efficiency, service quality and good governance, and a second publication, *E-government for Better Government* (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2005a), focused more on user-centric services, as well as the front and back office operations needed to enhance value for citizens. More specifically, OECD countries identified five key areas in which better e-government should be achieved: making electronic services more responsive to the needs of citizens; improving links between traditional and electronic services for accessibility and service innovation; identifying common processes to reduce duplication and provide seamlessness across government departments; measuring and demonstrating the costs and benefits of communications technology investments in order to better manage e-government projects; and enhancement of e-government co-ordination by bringing a whole-of-government perspective to e-government initiatives, while taking into account existing structures and cultures of organisations (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2005b).

The Department of Education, Science and Training (2005) highlights the achievements being made by government, industry and the research sector in relation to Australia’s innovation strategy. The Innovation Report includes an Innovation Scorecard, which benchmarks Australia against other OECD countries. The Australian National Audit Office (2005) undertook a study of six government agencies, using a four-stage model to describe the levels of service delivery and interactivity. The substance of this is set out a little later in this chapter.

A key agency leading the e-government agenda in Australia at the Federal level is the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO), a dedicated office that has been implementing an e-government strategy entitled *Responsive Government: A New Service Agenda* since 2006 (Department of Finance and Administration 2006). The AGIMO provides advice, tools, information and services to help Australian Federal government departments use information and communication technologies to improve administration and service delivery. Activities are concentrated in four main areas: meeting the needs of users; establishing connected service delivery; achieving value for money; and enhancing public sector capability. The AGIMO also produced a report
annually titled *Interacting with Government on Australia’s Use and Satisfaction with e-Government Services* (Department of Finance and Deregulation 2011). The 2011 report is the sixth and final study of Australians’ use of and satisfaction with e-government services under the 2006 e-Government Strategy. The report was based on a telephone survey of a representative sample of the Australian population aged 18 years or over, with 3,011 interviews obtained. All interviews were conducted with people who had had contact with a government agency (at local, State or Federal levels) in the previous 12 months. Focus group research was also carried out involving 79 participants in five locations in metropolitan and regional New South Wales and Queensland. The report highlighted the fact that Australians continue to embrace the internet as a way of interacting with government, and that the internet has now become commonplace for citizens as a means of dealing with government. The findings show that two-thirds of the people surveyed (65%) used e-government channels to contact government in 2011. The study also showed an increased take-up in the use of new communications technologies such as email, text messaging and social networking tools. Since 2009, there has been an increase in satisfaction with the way government websites are designed. The Australian Federal government remains the most frequently accessed (49%), with state and territory (23%) and local governments (28%) having similar but lower levels of contact. The most common channel used to contact the Federal government is in-person (47%), while equal proportions of people contact the Australian government by internet or telephone (35% respectively). Similarly, in-person contact was the most popular channel used to contact State or Territory governments (47%), with (38%) making contact with State or Territory governments by internet or telephone. In contrast, the most popular way to contact local government was by telephone (45%), followed by in-person (38%) and the internet (33%) (Department of Finance and Deregulation 2011).

Over recent years, the Commonwealth Government has put in place a range of policies, resources and action plans to facilitate the progress of e-government. The Australian Federal government launched the *Government 2.0 Taskforce* in 2009 to investigate how the government could improve services and engagement through collaborative Web 2.0 capabilities (such as blogs, wikis and social networking). The taskforce released a report to the government titled *Engage: Getting on with Government 2.0* (Government 2.0
Taskforce 2009). Three pillars defined the agenda of the Taskforce (leadership, policy and governance); to achieve shifts in public sector culture and practice; application of Web 2.0 tools to government; and open access to public sector information. Importantly, the report also provided 13 recommendations for online practice to guide others. The Federal Government then produced a report responding to the taskforce titled Government Response to the Report of Government 2.0 Taskforce (Department of Finance and Deregulation 2010a), which supported most of the recommendations without modification, including the most important central recommendation: a declaration of open government by the Australian Government. The declaration was subsequently issued in July 2010, demonstrating the commitment of the government to greater participation in democracy through an open culture of engagement with better access to and use of government information, through innovative technology. The declaration included three key principles: informing, engaging and participating, to support the commitment to openness and transparency (Department of Finance and Deregulation, 2010b).

At the State Government level, the Victorian Government established an online e-government Resource Centre in 2002 providing information on e-government and government website best practice, nationally and internationally. At the time of writing, the Resource Centre actively collects research and shares resources with more than 20,000 e-government and e-democracy researchers who visit the site from around the world every month (State Government Victoria 2012). The Government 2.0 Action Plan – Victoria, prepared by the Department of Premier and Cabinet (July 2010), espouses citizen engagement in conversations about government services policy through open access to government information and internet-based technologies. In addition, a whole-of-government project (Government 2.0 Taskforce) is responsible for brokering opportunities in the Victorian Public Service; delivering and monitoring projects from all departments; ensuring that knowledge and good practice is shared across the Victorian Public Service; and reporting on progress of the plan (State Government Victoria 2012).

While the Federal and State Governments have a number of strategies, action plans and dedicated taskforce resources, the situation at the level of local government is less well
developed. There is little evidence of strategies or action plans to guide the way forward for councils. For over a decade local government has recognised that innovative technologies present significant new opportunities to communicate and engage with residents, to provide information and services online, and to enable participation in Council decision-making (Intergovernmental Advisory Board 1999; West 2001; Berryman 2004; Thomas 2004). The cost-effectiveness, interactivity and immediacy of the internet has many potential advantages in terms of communicating, engaging with and providing services to diverse audiences, across large geographic areas. However, local governments have been slower to realise the potential of e-government in relation to interactive online participation (democracy), transformation and seamless service delivery, concentrating more on information management (Reddick 2004; Berryman 2004; Musso, Weare & Hale 2000). This tendency reflects the challenges associated with accessibility to websites, the skills needed by those responsible for developing websites, appropriate infrastructure, concerns over protecting privacy and security of citizens, and a suite of managerial issues in terms of governance (Norris & Moon 2005).

There are currently 565 councils in Australia, across six states and two territories, and these comprise organisations that vary in size, services offered, budgets and funding, to cater for the different needs of communities within major capital cities (inner urban and suburban), rural areas and regional centres. Local governments provide over 100 different services to citizens of all ages, and for a variety of community groups, businesses and non-profit service organisations. Services range from immunisation, maternal and child health, libraries and waste collection, to economic development, community events, planning, aged services, pools, parks, and provision and maintenance of infrastructure.

Although local government municipalities operate within State and Federal Government policy and legislative frameworks, each local area is unique with its own set of community issues, socio-demographics, financial resources, natural environmental characteristics, infrastructure needs and political influences. While the core services of councils remain similar throughout Australia, e-government practice varies significantly at the local level around the country.
However, the growing use and adoption of technologies by the community for communication, social networking and accessing convenient services over the internet (such as banking, travel, bookings and bill payments) has driven an expectation that government should provide more services and interactive communications opportunities online (Tymson, Lazar & Lazar 2006; Pina, Torres & Royo 2010). The Australian Bureau of Statistics survey of Household Use of Information Technology (ABS 2009) has published data on the use of websites and trends in the uptake of innovative technology, indicating a significant use of websites, social media and mobile phone technologies by children, the next generation of e-government users. Furthermore, a number of commentators have suggested that councils need to be ready to respond to the needs of their communities, and meet expectations of direct dialogue, participation and service delivery online (Mitchell 2001; Bushell 1997; Shackleton, Fisher & Dawson 2006).

The functional capabilities required for effective e-government

The literature presented so far has broadly introduced the possibilities for the practice of e-government at all levels of government, concluding with local government in Australia. However, as the literature review proceeded, it was possible to discern a number of themes or issue clusters that have emerged, identifying the functional capabilities that are required to fully realise the potential of e-government. Four issue clusters were identified, each of which teases out a different dimension of what is required. Between them, they draw out the complexity of what is required and suggest why e-government presents a particular challenge for highly localised local governments across the very large geographical area that constitutes the Australian continent. Each of these clusters is now used as a way of presenting and exploring the literature in more detail. Later chapters of the thesis unpack the organisational and systemic implications of these functional capabilities and, in particular, explore the organisational capacities that are required to implement and sustain them.
Issue Cluster 1. Interactive capabilities: the extent of interactive tools, functions and features and presence of fully executable services online.

This issue cluster is about the ability of government organisations to facilitate electronic delivery of services, so that users can conveniently access the services they need and complete transactions, and so that communication can be conducted online with the capacity for feedback and dialogue.

In an early study, the Intergovernmental Advisory Board (1999) in the USA conducted a survey on integrated service delivery to assess the progress of governments in delivering services to its citizens. This significant study involved 200 state, regional, county, city and township websites, federal web sites and international websites. The study focused particularly on interfaces that allowed citizens to obtain multiple services via a single access window. At that time very few sites provided four or more transaction-based services, and it was predicted that it would be at least a decade before citizens would have online access to a range of services (Intergovernmental Advisory Board 1999). At around the same time period, Musso, Weare and Hale (2000) undertook a content analysis of 270 municipal web sites in California. The study found that at that time the majority of the web sites were poorly designed, with few innovative technology applications and no clear mission, concentrating on service provision but not interactive communication. A study undertaken by West (2001) in the USA included an audit of the interactive capabilities of State and Federal Government websites and this research has been continued annually. Brown University has conducted eight annual reviews of the features of online state and federal government services (West 2008). The sites are evaluated for the presence of features considered to be indicative of advanced e-government, including online databases, disability access, privacy protections, credit card payment facilities, and personalisation (West 2008).

The Pew Internet and American Life Project survey of American adult users of government websites in 2002 found that twice as many website users visited Federal government sites (80%) as visited local government websites (41%). The results indicated that information delivery-based e-government was most common (Larsen & Rainie 2002). The Center for Digital Government (2006) survey of websites in the
principal cities of the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the USA showed that these sites offered a great deal of diverse, low-cost information for interested and motivated users. However, very few sites facilitated online dialogue or consultation, and they generally lacked policies and procedures to support web-based public involvement. More recently, in 2008, Coursey and Norris reported that, while more than 96.2% of local governments in the US with populations greater than 10,000 had established official websites, the e-government offerings were limited and primarily included information and non-transactional services.

In Canada, Fraser (2007) investigated the success of a Government Online initiative undertaken by the Canadian Government. Canada was recognised as an early e-Government leader in the take-up and innovative use of electronic services. Fraser (2007) recognised that the use of information and communications technology (ICT) means more than using new communication channels effectively, as it reorganises relationships between citizens and government. The point is made that good governance should not necessarily be replaced by efficient communications technologies and that the focus on enhancing social equality, access, dialogue and digital democracy masks the real impact on services and labour. ‘Characterizing the Internet as integral to social progress veils disparities in equity, access, and participation based on gender and class’ (Fraser 2007, p. 209). Fraser argues that the adoption and implementation of communications technologies in Canada have impacted on governance in ways that have been detrimental, despite creating efficiencies (Fraser 2007).

Discussing a recent analysis of the progress of e-government globally, Wohlers (2009) has concluded that ‘the online presence of local government is apparent, but the scope or sophistication of e-government as a tool to disseminate information, deliver services, and enhance citizen participation in government decision-making continues to evolve. From a traditional bureaucratic paradigm, local government web sites in the United States and in Western Europe are mostly informative and are limited to providing a range of basic one-way services rather than transactional services’ (Wohlers 2009, p. 112). This conclusion is supported in a recent study by Pina, Torres and Royo (2010), which analysed the websites of 75 local governments in the European Union (EU). They evaluated websites using a five-stage maturity model and found that EU local
governments were offering citizens a wide range of services through the internet. However, most websites seemed to be at the billboard stage (one-way), and few had moved to the interactive stage (two-way communication) which could promote democratic participation by encouraging direct dialogue between citizens and government. The results indicated low percentages (26% on average) for features of website maturity such as content arranged according to life events, facilities for credit card payments, digital signatures, live broadcast of speeches or citizen consultation. Percentages for features that were able to improve accessibility of websites and bring about social inclusion, such as text-only versions, audio access, different languages and compliance with international accessibility standards, were also low (Pina, Torres & Royo 2010). However, more participative interactivity has started to appear in America. Smith presents the findings of the 2010 Pew Internet and American Life Project, highlighting the fact that 31% of citizen interactions with government online involved the use of blogs, social media, video, SMS or email, and 23% of users participated in online debate surrounding government issues. The point was also made that these channels are outside the government website environment (Smith 2010).

In Australia, the Australian National Audit Office (2005) undertook a study of six Federal government agencies: Austrade, Centrelink, the Child Support Agency, Department of Health and Ageing, Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Archives of Australia. The study was designed to identify the methods used by selected agencies and to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of their delivery of services through the internet using a four-stage model: in Stage 1, the agency had a website that published information about services to internet users; in Stage 2, the agency allowed internet users to access the agency’s databases and to explore and interact with that data; in Stage 3, the agency allowed Internet users access to the services available at Stages 1 and 2, and also permitted them to enter information on the website, exchanging or transacting secure information with the agency; and in Stage 4, the same access as in stage 3, but in addition the agency, with the user’s prior approval, shared that user’s information with other government agencies. All agencies were measured as having achieved Stage 1, having a website presence and providing basic information and publications to users. Two agencies (Health and Ageing and the Child Support Agency) were between Stages 1 and 2, while two other agencies with databases (Department of
Veteran’s Affairs and Austrade) were between Stages 2 and 3. Two agencies (Centrelink and National Archives) had progressed to Stage 3, exchanging and transacting information. None had reached Stage 4, which represented cross-agency sharing of information (Australian National Audit Office 2005). The study also revealed that advances had been made in terms of online planning and strategic intent: all agencies had a website strategy that set out the management, responsibility and use of the internet; they had all developed policies and guidelines to guide staff; agencies were consulting users about their needs before developing services; and all addressed standards for accessibility, security, usability and privacy. However, when it came to performance, the methods of the agencies were inadequate to assess whether or not the delivery of services and programs online were effective (Australian National Audit Office 2005).

Thomas (2004) supported this picture, suggesting that many local government organisations were at the Transition stage of e-government:

> The transition stage is the stage of adapting offline publishing and services to electronic networks. Transformation means the emergence of a ‘citizen-centric’ model of service provision, where the structures and institutions of government become as transparent, open and responsive as possible (Thomas 2004, p. 260).

Progress toward that end had been minimal to date:

> Much of what has been done to date involves the online publication of static data; there are also a large number of federal and state government services available on the internet. In New South Wales alone, over 900 separate services are now said to be available online .... Most of what has been done so far would be described as ‘managerial’ e-government ... non-transactional electronic publishing ... the next phase will involve more closely
integrating services across government agencies,
improving financial management and budget processes,
and developing a more strategic, whole-of-government
approach (Thomas 2004, p. 267).

Shackleton, Fisher and Dawson (2005) undertook a longitudinal study on the maturity
of twenty Victorian council websites in Australia over three years. A comparative
examination of the web sites found that electronic maturity occurred between 2001 and
2004 in a number of key areas, including: service tracking, online ordering and
payment, and provision of information relevant to the local community. The study
found that, although the web sites of Victorian municipal councils had improved
overall, they still had a heavy emphasis on governance issues. This suggests that local e-
government is not undertaken across all areas in a linear fashion, but at different rates in
different areas. The organisational commitment and dynamics of staff use involving e-
government technologies were also explored by Shackleton, Fisher and Dawson (2005).
Their case study interviews suggested that it is often internal factors, such as the push
from staff or councillors for more flexible delivery, that accelerate the development of
e-government and that this might account for the slow initial transition to the web by
some councils and the later acceleration in e-service and e-commerce.

Adam and Featherstone’s (2007) study examined local government use of the web in
marketing in Australia and the United States through an audit of 180 local government
websites using a content analysis tool (the Marketing Readiness of Website Indicator,
MRWI). By examining three elements of online marketing in this context (interactive
marketing communication capability; marketing logistics, or channel; capability, and
relationship continuity capability), the authors concluded that county government in
California and local government in the two Australian States of Victoria and New South
Wales were equally sophisticated in their use of the web for marketing communication
and in terms of online order-processing.

At the most advanced ends of e-government, e-democracy would enable citizens to
genuinely engage in contributing ideas and participate in decision-making. While the
examination of the literature could find no outstanding examples of this at the local
government level in Australia, some innovative examples from overseas have been highlighted, demonstrating the functional capabilities that are possible.

Hammerman (2005) highlighted the tendency to move beyond websites that simply provide static information toward interactive and transactional websites. As an example of an innovative, interactive feature, Michigan’s second largest city, Grand Rapids, has implemented a Geographic Information System (GIS)-based Public Inquiry system. Using this online tool, residents can contact the city regarding potholes, dead animals in the street, vacant buildings and waste, or register complaints and compliments about the local police. Any type of inquiry can be made with this tool and users can revisit the site to find out the status of their request.

The Public Agenda’s Center for Advances in Public Engagement (CAPE) researches, develops and disseminates new insights and practices that help to improve the quality of American public life through public engagement. Through CAPE, Bittle, Haller and Kadlec (2009) showcase a number of examples of functional e-government capability that engage and enable participation in government decisions. In one example, Bittle, Haller and Kadlec (2009) explain how the Obama administration experimented with a range of online tools to engage citizens in the policy-making process, through their transition website, Change.gov. For example, the ‘Your Seat at the Table’ section on Change.gov allowed citizens to read and comment on what outside groups were telling the transition team. ‘Join the Discussion’ featured weekly questions to prompt online discussion, with a video response from the Obama team. Individuals could pitch their ideas to the new administration and could comment on and rate the ideas of others. More than 125,000 participants submitted 44,000 ideas and cast 1.4 million votes (Bittle, Haller & Kadlec 2009).

It is interesting and important to note, however, that the business of dialogue with local government is not being left to government. The UK-based FixMyStreet initiative provided a place in which people can talk with fellow citizens and councils about issues in their communities. FixMyStreet was developed by volunteers, mySociety and the Young Foundation. It lets people report local infrastructure problems to the relevant local administration, using a mapping tool. Reports are sent to one central place, rather
than there being a requirement for citizens to find the contact information for the responsible department. This allows the authorities and everyone in the neighbourhood to see problems and provide updates. Some local administrations have started to use the service and added procedures to automatically gather the information submitted by the community on FixMyStreet and directly integrate actions into their own workflows and routines (Bittle, Haller & Kadlec 2009).

Bittle, Haller and Kadlec (2009) also cite another American example of citizen forums that mix online and face-to-face activities to shape local politics: the Local Issues Forums created by e-Democracy.org (a non-profit online community engagement space discussing local issues with citizens). Started in St. Paul, Minnesota, and followed by 30 additional forums worldwide, these local online discussion forums provide a place in which citizens, local officials, or journalists can post a question to find out how residents feel about an issue. Citizens connect with one another and collaborate, journalists visit to gather ideas for news stories and local politicians can listen to the opinions of their constituents. The forum is completely citizen-driven in order to empower people in the community, and people are getting to know others within their neighbourhood on and off-line, thus building a sense of community.

**Issue Cluster 2. Understanding and engaging the user, customisation and responsiveness: engaging stakeholders, customising and personalising websites for democratic outreach and responsiveness to target audiences.**

This issue cluster concentrates on the capacity to understand and effectively engage with the needs and preferences of specific groups. It focuses on the ability to provide targeted information and customised services for particular groups, and to package information and services to meet specific user needs, rather than simply adopt a mass-communication approach.

In the USA, West (2001) presented a study of features available online through a detailed analysis of 1680 State and Federal government websites. West’s project adopted a citizen's perspective on e-government. In other words, in his analysis of government websites he looked for material that would assist an average citizen logging
on to a site. This content included contact information that would enable a citizen to call or write to an agency if there was a problem; information, services and databases; features that would facilitate e-government access by people with a disability and non-English speakers; interactive features facilitating democratic outreach; and statements about privacy and security, to reassure users. West (2001) found that, while there was considerable progress on information provision and service delivery, there were ‘continuing challenges in the areas of privacy, security, democratic outreach, and interactive features’ (West 2001, p. 4). Moreover, ‘compared to various commercial websites, the public sector lags the private sector in making full use of the technological power of the Internet to improve the lives of citizens and enhance the performance of governmental units’ (West 2001, p. 4).

Samson (2005) has highlighted the investment of the Commonwealth of Virginia in providing high-speed internet access to all its regions to help attract more businesses, while the e-Virginia procurement system is reported to have saved millions of dollars and now includes over 17,200 registered private vendors. A TechRiders program has offered free computer and internet training; an ‘Education for a Lifetime’ initiative is helping to make schools more efficient; and another project involving electronic health records seeks collaboration among health plans, governments, pharmaceutical companies and providers.

It is arguable that citizens might expect online communication and service delivery from government to match the types of services they have already used in their online dealings with the private sector (such as banking, purchasing tickets, completing transactions on e-bay, buying and reading books and arranging travel). However, the I-Ways Journal of e-Government Policy and Regulation (2009) presented a report on E-government Developments which suggested that as more countries increase their e-services, they are not only informing citizens on new services available, but are also actively encouraging them to take advantage, and that this trend represents a shift from centralised e-government platforms to decentralised e-municipalities. To get a sense of what this might entail, it is helpful at this point to explore the significant growth in, and patterns of, internet usage by individuals and communities across Australia.
The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) survey of Household Use of Information Technology reveals that internet use is increasing significantly and that the next generation of children is adopting social media, mobile, gaming and other interactive technologies as a part of their lifestyle and education. Between 1998 and 2008, Australian household access to the internet at home jumped from 16% to 72%. The ABS also found that households with children under 15 years of age were more likely to have broadband access (77%) compared to those without (56%). Most children (73%) accessed the internet from home, and almost one-third (31%) had their own mobile phones. Children used the internet mainly for education (85%) and playing games (69%). Almost one-half of older children (48%) used the internet to visit social media sites and a significant 24% created their own on-line content such as blogs or websites. Colteryahn and Davis (2004) argue that, for young people who will be soon entering the workplace, technology is an extension of their bodies and personalities and that ‘E’ will not be a separate thing.

Other studies suggest that the rate of adoption and use of the internet in Australia is above average in comparison with other OECD countries. The Department of Education, Science and Training’s (2005) Innovation Report outlines the Australian Innovation Scorecard for 2004 undertaken by the Australian Federal Government’s Department of Education, Science and Training. The Scorecard is intended to provide a snapshot of Australia’s innovation performance, relative to other OECD economies. In the 2004 Scorecard, Australia had 601 internet users per 1000 head of population, significantly above the OECD average and ranking sixth among 30 OECD countries.

In this context, the adoption of relevant customised electronic communications systems and technology to meet community expectations is a key issue for government to address: ‘Consumers of public services encounter a much different experience when using private services. But as public services are going online, the same level of service and customer experience will be expected, even demanded’ (Mitchell 2001, p. 61). New technologies are continually raising citizens’ expectations of government. Tymson, Lazar and Lazar (2006) point out that when stakeholders become comfortable with technology, they start to expect more from organisations. Furthermore, the technology itself generates the demand for stronger two-way relationships with stakeholders, who
expect to be able to establish contact online, at any time, and expect that communication will be relevant and responsive (Tymson, Lazar & Lazar 2006).

Pina, Torres and Royo (2010) support this view, arguing that:

The offer of interactive initiatives from the private sector and citizen demands are putting governments worldwide under pressure to change and innovate the way in which their bureaucracies relate to citizens. The dramatic development of e-commerce and the evolution projected for the near future has encouraged citizens to demand more customized services. In the private sector, research surveys suggest that customers achieve high levels of satisfaction from e-commerce vendors, so citizens – who are the e-commerce users – are starting to demand the same level of responsiveness and service from their governments as they are receiving from the private sector (Pina, Torres & Royo 2010, p. 3).

This sentiment has been known for well over a decade, with Bushell (1997) warning 15 years ago that Australian governments must find ways to deliver greater and more efficient access to government services and information via a range of channels, from telecentres to website pages and kiosks. Councils are also expected to be more responsive to differentiated community needs.

Demand from citizens is a motivator for some e-government services, but the rapid development of the technology itself is a major driver, so that demand (peoples’ expectations) and supply (available technology) are arguably in a complex, mutually reinforcing spiral, with governments at all levels left with the need to both anticipate and respond to what is expected and possible.

Central to creating a culture of citizen-centric services is the concept of creating customer value through identifying targeted and relevant, user-friendly and convenient
services, which exceed expectations through offering additional benefits, and enabling genuine participation. This can be achieved through the use of collaborative online tools and applications, fostering partnerships with innovative private agencies, leveraging off customer relationship management platforms, and by local government organisations investigating opportunities for service enhancements within their own organisations and embracing new, innovative engagement technologies.

The importance of concentrating on the citizen was the focus of the study by Reddick (2005), which took a demand side perspective in examining citizen interaction with e-government. Reddick suggested that most of the literature at that time used a supply side perspective, analysing surveys of e-government offerings, and chose instead to use the street-level bureaucracy literature as a theoretical framework within which to identify how citizens interact with e-government. The study identified the key characteristics of citizens who access government web sites to enable policy makers to market their e-government initiatives towards these groups. This study paid particular attention to the extent of development of e-government relationships in the information and transaction phases, to identify the key factors that influence citizen interaction. The results revealed that, while information-based e-citizens were prevalent, transaction-based e-citizens were uncommon, which matches the existing supply side and demand side literature on e-government adoption. Citizens visited government websites to search for information on topics such as tourism and recreation. Transactional-based e-government was undertaken less frequently, with only 15% of users filing their taxes online. Reddick (2005) found evidence that e-government had improved citizen interaction with government, and that the majority of users preferred to interact with government over the Internet instead of in person or by telephone. However, the 23% of the population using government websites only visited several times a month, so automated government over the world wide web could take time to be truly realised (Reddick 2005).

More recently, Wohlers (2009) has pointed to promising examples of advances made by local governments in e-democracy. The city of St. Paul, Minnesota, offers an e-mail notification and personalisation option, and the cities of Esslingen and Ulm in Germany
have used the Internet to elect the Municipal Youth Council and to evaluate public projects.

Hui and Hayllar (2010) have also looked at the use of recently developed and innovative tools that build on Web 2.0 and offer a Public-Private-Citizen Collaboration framework that reflects the interactions through which public and private stakeholders can exchange information with citizens. They explore how technical advancements in the internet, and the development of Web 2.0, can provide tools that will enable a partnership to be achieved between government, the private sector and citizens in identifying public value and in improving governance. By using the platform of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), which emphasises segmentation and integration of user information, government can process relevant data to provide e-services based on a better assessment of public value. Hui and Hayllar (2010) outline the challenge, advising that both governments and citizens need to collaborate and that government should proactively search for the value that citizens seek in relation to public services. While they acknowledge that, in the past few years, some governments have been using age groups and interest segmentation to bundle together information and services that are relevant, they argue that most developments still do not deliver personalised services to citizens. They contend that:

Innovations used in e-government have been more instrumental than transformative. Certainly, the new technologies have helped to enable reforms, but few of these reforms go beyond the achievement of improvements to existing business systems and processes. In many cases it is still public managers who decide the business modifications required and then look to find, or create, a technology that will enable them to achieve the new capability or efficiency gains they desire (Hui & Hayllar 2010, p. 128).
They also argue that, because the technology is enabling the citizen to engage, government has a responsibility to be using this to add value:

With Web 2.0 the web user is no longer merely a consumer of contents. Instead, a user can now be a contents contributor too, creating the content, feeding the line and driving the changes through a range of do-it-yourself web-based services operating in various social fields environments. If Web 2.0 can create an interactive and collaborative platform that allows people to participate in the process of creating and sharing content, then it can be used also to help to refine and promote public value and to assist governments in building value-added services that are more sharply focused around citizen needs (Hui & Hayllar 2010, p. 121).

Hui and Hayllar (2010) provide examples of the way some governments have used the model of a public-private partnership to deliver their official web portal, incorporating Web 2.0 tools:

The State of Virginia has collaborated with Youtube to provide all Virginia-related videos on the official website. The most advanced state in the USA is South Carolina. On the official website (www.sc.gov), the user can find the most common Web 2.0 tools such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and Google Maps. Local government departments, such as the Los Angeles Fire Department, have also utilised Web 2.0 tools including Twitter to publish its duty information or to provide the public with details of in-progress fire-fights or helicopter rescues. The City of San Francisco has even taken a step forward to allow registered users to ‘tweet’ the city government by alerting or reminding the local government as to some problems
such as graffiti, broken streetlights and potholes around the neighbourhood (Hui & Hayllar 2010, pp. 124-125).

Hui and Hayllar also note that users receive ‘a tracking number which allows them follow the progress of any improvement works’ (idem).

**Issue Cluster 3. Connecting government services, collaboration and integration: the existence of integrated portals that provide a one-stop-shop.**

This issue cluster focuses on the functional ability to connect services across the local community and to connect to services with other levels of government. As a focus for functional capability, it offers dual opportunities: to improve access to and provision of services for users, whilst fostering business efficiencies and benefits through collaboration amongst complementary service providers. However, as the literature presented here will suggest, the realisation of this capability set has so far proven difficult, partly because of the fundamental challenge it presents to traditional organisation and management practices in local government (issues of organisational capability), and partly because of the broader and more complicated systemic dynamics of co-operation, communication and decision-making that inter-agency linkages entail. For that reason, this section starts to take up some of the organisational and systemic implications and issues that have been postponed to the last chapters in the case of the other functional capability clusters.

As previously indicated, one of the early and continuing aspirations for effective e-government has been the achievement of integrated one-stop-shop government online, connecting agencies, offering electronic services that are integrated behind the scenes, and improving communications between government and stakeholders. E-government allows a significant shift in thinking in the public sector from a silo-focused mentality towards a more connected and collaborative understanding of government (Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia 2006). Layne and Lee’s (2001) model of e-government envisaged a fourth and final stage of horizontal integration, at which administrative reform is achieved and a ‘one stop shop’ is available. There are many
other models which aspired to this stage of transformation (including Wescott 2001; Baum & Di Maio 2000; Ronaghan 2001; Hiller & Bélanger 2001).

Governments had similar aspirations. In the United Kingdom, the Blair Government offered a vision of a ‘joined-up government’ in three principal ways:

First, services are to be ‘joined-up’ horizontally: war is to be waged on departmentalism; public services are to become more holistic; and public service agencies are to be encouraged to collaborate more actively in confronting social need. Second, government is to be ‘joined-up’ vertically to customers. Public services are to become more convenient to use by means of such information age arrangements as electronic ‘one-stop-shops’ and ‘direct’ telephone services. Third, policy-makers are to be ‘joined-up’ more effectively to operational tiers of government’ (Bellamy 1999, p.89).

In Canada, the Federal government pledged to become a model user of information technology by 2004, promoting its ‘Government On-line Initiative’ through an integrated service-delivery network (Fraser 2007).

In the USA, the Intergovernmental Advisory Board (1999) conducted a survey of integrated service delivery to assess the progress of governments in delivering services to their citizens. This significant study involved 200 state, regional, county, city and township websites, Federal web sites and international websites. The study focused on integrated service delivery and, in particular, on interfaces that allowed users to obtain multiple services via a single access window. At that time, very few sites provided four or more transaction-based services, and it was predicted that it would be at least a decade before citizens would have online access to a range of services. At an international level, the study found that technology was not the only requirement for integration; cooperation between governments and citizen access were also important. Other challenges included privacy, security, policy and culture, which had limited the
level of implementation across governments. However, evidence of progress was identified through some governments reorganising their online services to reflect citizen needs rather than the structures of organisations, such as Australia’s Centrelink department and the US Government’s Access America initiatives for students and seniors (Intergovernmental Advisory Board 1999).

Although many organisations have aspired to achieve integration for well over a decade, governments at all levels have struggled to realise this aspect of the potential of e-government. Public Works and Government Services Canada declared ‘mission accomplished’ on its project by making 130 services available online (Fraser 2007). However, Fraser’s own conclusion was that, while the Canadian Federal government had positioned the electronic restructuring of services with a focus on the citizen, numerous studies established how the information age has also included cutbacks to services and privatisation. This provides an insight into the impact of innovative technologies upon organisations, outside the intended models and stages of progression in the path to e-government transformation that was forecast in earlier studies. Castleman and Cavill (2004) had already concluded that ‘the task of integration between channels for one government is challenge enough; to integrate across different levels of government and between governments is especially problematic’ (Castleman & Cavill 2004, p. 271).

Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow and Tinkler (2008) have observed that governments in Australia, like those in other countries, were initially attracted to grand e-government strategies but implementation has proven to be a problem, raising questions around government policy, decision-making and the implementation of a joined-up government. They undertook a seven-nation study (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, the US, the UK and The Netherlands), and concluded that while Australia fares well in e-government rankings, developments that successfully join departments together have been scarce. They suggest that:

Australia’s e-government is characterized by a supportive environment but a variable record, with early success in e-government being superseded by a lack of central
initiatives or joined-up strategy. Even the success of some major departments, such as the Australian Tax Office and, particularly Centrelink, seem to depend more on a joined up ‘front-end’ that masks problematic legacy systems’ (Dunleavy et al. 2008, p. 24).

The lack of rapid progress in the integration of e-government across the world has at its heart the issue of requisite organisational capabilities (involving both people and systems), rather than the technology alone. Bekkers and Homburg (2007) explain some of the impediments to achieving integrated e-government through their analysis of public policy documents in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Australia and Canada. Each of the countries studied has tried to establish citizen single-entry points and found that integrated service delivery means several back offices need to work together. However, sharing information and exchanging knowledge between back offices implies the integration of several domains, with their own systems, data, procedures, expertise, cultures and experience. The examination of e-government practices shows that the lack of cooperation between these back offices is still a major problem, reflecting the complexity of organisational re-design and practices, and the many actors involved with their varying interests, resources, relationships and strategies (Bekkers & Homburg 2007).

Pina, Torres and Royo (2010) articulate the problem that is inherent in a bureaucracy facing innovative change:

If a city maintains the traditional bureaucratic paradigm, its website organization tends to be administratively oriented and does not reflect any substantial rethinking of the bureaucratic process. Cities that have shifted from the bureaucratic paradigm to the e-government paradigm tend to use two common approaches. The first is the ‘information-oriented’ approach, which applies the concept of the ‘one-stop shopping service’ and the second is the ‘user-oriented’ approach, whose design goes one
step further by categorizing information and services on
the web according to the needs of different user groups
(Pina, Torres & Royo 2010, p. 6).

Despite the challenges, events in recent times in Australia have highlighted the potential for councils to provide seamless integrated e-government in crisis situations such as bushfires, floods, storms and pandemics, providing instructions, links to relevant government websites, recovery information and updates. Emergency and recovery situations have highlighted the key role that local government authorities can also play in their communities in the long aftermath of these events, in partnership with emergency services and other levels of government, and the need for connected, streamlined communications. This was evident in the online communications that occurred after the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria in 2009 and Brisbane floods in 2011, where councils operated municipal emergency response centres (Whitelaw 2011). These situations demanded a whole-of-government response, ensuring linkages to Country Fire Authority, State Emergency Services, State health agencies and welfare authorities to coordinate and implement recovery services (dealing with issues such as fencing, water, accommodation, health, food, facilities and the media). In these scenarios, regular communication between councils and their communities was essential and ongoing for months, and now occurs in preparation for fire and storm seasons (Manningham City Council 2012b).


The governance cluster highlights the accessibility, trustworthiness, confidentiality, safety and reliability of e-government.

Electronic technologies provide an opportunity for government to communicate more effectively with stakeholders of all ages (young people, families, adults and seniors), people with disabilities, community groups, businesses and other levels of government. However, the aspiration for greater inclusiveness is challenged by the potential for the creation of a ‘digital divide’ between those who can access online services and those
who cannot, limiting the realisation of e-government. The digital divide is created by variations in physical accessibility (the number and location of points, and the speed and reliability of connections), and accessibility issues relating to the lack of technology skills, which can result in some users within the community being excluded (Berryman 2004). People can be physically, mentally or economically disadvantaged in using e-government, or geographically remote (Mitchell 2001; West 2001). The Australian National Audit Office (2005) claims that, while over 80% of people aged 16 years and over can currently access the internet from any location in Australia, internet access is lower for some groups, including older people and a large proportion of government clients, whose need to use e-government is the greatest.

Bekkers and Homburg (2007) point out that while many agencies interact with citizens as genuine service recipients, they also interact with concerned and difficult individuals. For users of online communications technologies, the impacts of online communication, rather than face-to-face communication, can create other significant issues. Some commentators argue that the impersonal dialogue encouraged by e-government, and the cultural values associated with internet-based technologies, actually undermine the participatory nature of a democratic political system.

Well before the manifestation of e-government as actual practice, Green (1996) raised a number of different issues of concern. One was its potential to marginalise voices in society: ‘technology is identified by both feminism and the men’s movement as threatening the interests and integrity of their constituent group’ (Green 1996, pp. 54-55). Green wrote that:

It would seem that as a mode of conversation (telephone, teleconferencing, or email, for instance) becomes more important, it replaces-or largely supplants- the previous pertaining ‘less efficient’ face to face conversations between the same group of people .... The process is one of substitution, with a transitional period during which loyalty, and community membership, withers (Green 1996, p. 55).
The matter of trust was also raised as a major issue, where absence of human interaction due to technological influence presents a challenge.

Green warns that:

Building intimacy and laying the foundations for trust may consequently both be compromised when conversations are increasingly appropriated to the technological realm….Personal revelations-if not encouraged by the subtle, but reassuring, index of supportive facial expressions and body language in the listener-may remain unexpressed. Without a communication ecology within which individual wants and needs are an appropriate topic, personal issues can fall from technologically mediated agenda and become lost to the conversational exchange. Without disclosure, there can be no sense of (external) acceptance, and a personal issue may assume an ‘out of proportion’ significance (Green 1996, p. 56).

More recently, privacy concerns and practices have been specifically signalled by Hammerman (2005), who notes that residents of Michigan continue to state a strong preference for not putting public records online; in a cyber-state.org survey, over 80% of the public in Michigan said that they did not want government to keep public records on the Internet. Another community, the city of Sterling Heights in the US, offers a privacy policy providing detailed explanations so that website users can understand how their information is collected and used, and be reassured:

When you visit our site simply to browse, read or download information we will not collect any individual identifying or personal information. Nor will we use ‘cookies’ without your express permission or any other means (such as Adware or Spyware) to track your visit in any way. Based upon the data we do collect during such
'information-gathering' visits, the city cannot ascertain any personal information regarding an individual user (such as name, street address or telephone number) (Hammerman 2005, p. 19).

Hammerman claims that the city ‘has made clear efforts to address citizens’ concerns and offers a straightforward explanation of how personal information is or is not used and collected’, and that this ‘helps to alleviate any privacy concerns users may have’ (Hammerman 2005, p. 19).

However, the full complexity and range of the governance issues emerging through efforts being made in the practice of e-government have been clearly and succinctly articulated by Dawes (2008):

Communication networks span the globe, allowing individuals, groups, and organizations to interact regardless of time or location. However, the networked society is fraught with complexity and vulnerable to new threats - threats to stability, privacy, security, and stewardship. This environment of risk and opportunity presents continually evolving challenges for public service (Dawes 2008, p. 86).

Dawes sounds a cautionary note, stating that:

Today, the Internet, global e-mail, laptops, cell phones, and other mobile devices are ubiquitous forms of communication with and within government... Today, public records are “born digital,” and many are at risk of disappearing. In the 1990s, a government database was almost always tied to one service or regulatory program operated by a single agency. Today, that same information is often transmitted over networks, carried on mobile
devices, and made available for uses beyond the original reason for collecting it. Simultaneously, the boundaries between organizations, sectors, and levels of government are becoming more permeable as information is used and reused in interconnected, overlapping organizational networks that often reach deeply into the non-profit and private sectors. Citizens and businesses interact with government much more through e-mail, Web sites, and interactive voice systems, and much less in person or on paper. Government is even beginning to engage in virtual electronic worlds, crossing the boundary between physical and digital communities (Dawes 2008, p. 86).

The issues raised by Dawes, by Green and by many others, are extremely complex, and not just specific to local government. Societies, economies, constituencies, law makers and the judiciary across the globe are struggling at individual and collective levels to both take advantage of what modern technology offers and deal with the associated risks. This represents a set of dilemmas that are unlikely to be resolved and, indeed, are likely to grow more complex.

Furthermore, at the purely pragmatic level, Shackleton, Fisher and Dawson (2005) offer stark reminders of the four barriers to e-government more generally; legislative barriers, budgetary barriers, technological change and the digital divide. In addition to these major obstacles, there are a range of factors that impact on electronic service delivery in the local government sector, including structural reform, process reform to service delivery and the policy priorities of councils under pressure to provide a range of services with limited resources.
A review of eight comparative studies of the take up of e-government in Australia and internationally

The previous section of this chapter reviewed literature that identified the functional capabilities envisaged for e-government and introduced some of the issues that challenge the realisation of these potential capabilities. This section of the chapter engages with the literature in a different way, comparing eight major empirical studies of e-government undertaken in Australia and overseas prior to the study reported in this thesis. The chapter describes the methodologies used and the major emphases of the studies, and in doing so, provides the rationale for the focus and methodology of the present study. The detailed findings of the studies are not presented here but are used for purposes of comparison when presenting and interpreting the findings of this study in chapter 4.

At the time this study commenced, content analysis of websites had been undertaken in two Australian studies (Shackleton, Fisher and Dawson 2005; and Adam and Featherstone 2007), and in a number of international studies: in the USA (West 2001, 2007; Musso, Weare and Hale 2000), Nordic countries (Baldershiem and Ogard 2008), Germany (Wohlers 2009) and the European Union (Pina, Torres and Royo 2010), to explore the uptake of e-government. While these studies enable some level of comparison to be made across international borders, with similar themes and issues arising, each study has been based on a different focus, set of measures and form of analysis.

Appendix 15 summarises the elements of each Australian and international study as well as the key elements of the study reported on in this thesis (elements of which are detailed in the methodology chapter, Chapter 3).

**Australian Study 1: Shackleton, Fisher and Dawson (2005)**
Shackleton, Fisher and Dawson (2005) used website content analysis to investigate the progress of local governments towards the implementation of e-government. It focused on the types of electronic services provided, changes in the sophistication of service delivery, and in the level of maturity of different aspects of the websites over the three year period studied. It included a longitudinal content analysis of 20 websites of
metropolitan, rural and outer suburban councils in Victoria, over the years 2001, 2003 and 2004 and a case study of three councils, looking at the factors influencing the adoption and development of e-government. The researcher worked with staff in a council for over two years, observing and interviewing council staff as they developed and implemented the Council’s web site in March 2003. Fourteen interviews were conducted with a range of council staff exploring the council’s decision-making process, its web development strategy and implementation issues.

A number of features were measured through the content analysis, grouped into three categories:

- e-service interface with customers (service details, news and events, FAQs, Direct email support, novel e-services such as interactive maps, and service tracking);
- e-commerce cash transactions (online payments of rates and other charges, ordering facilities); and
- e-decision making/e-democracy (council information, community information, email address for contacting council, council decision-making, minutes and plans, links to other businesses, community groups/bulletin boards/chat room/broadcasting).

These categories were based on Quirk’s (2000) model of the stages of development of local e-government presented in the previous chapter, ranging from information giving to empowering citizens as the final stage. Quirk’s model suggested that local e-government maturity does not necessarily follow a linear path to maturity, but involves multiple types of service provision and high levels of community engagement.

While the Shackleton et al study made a robust contribution to the initial study of Australian local e-government, it had some limitations which presented opportunities for the current research. It was based on a relatively small number of websites (20), which represented only one State in Australia. The features that were actually measured focused on e-services and e-commerce, which were features found typically at an early stage of e-government. It did not consider what might be happening outside of local government in emerging technologies such as online audio, video and the
personalisation and customisation of services. As a result, the findings of the study are somewhat skewed, reporting a very high presence of features measured at the end of the three year period, with more than half the websites achieving a high level of presence over time, at or near 100%.

The measurements undertaken in relation to e-democracy and decision-making focused mainly on the presence of static documents (such as provision of council information, plans and minutes) reflective of a traditional one-way model of communication rather than forms of interactive and proactive engagement that allow people to participate earlier in a project and therefore influence the direction of decision-making. While few interactive tools such as community chat and broadcasting were measured, the results still reflected a very low level of presence (only 5%).

These limitations suggested the opportunity for a much larger study measuring a broader range of e-government features, where features such as privacy, security, accessibility, a range of interactive communications, audio, video, e-news as well as integrated portal measures could be included. It also suggested the value of looking at emerging best practice both in Australia and overseas. These were all opportunities taken up in the present study.

From a qualitative research perspective, through their organisation case studies, observation and interviews, Shackleton, Fisher and Dawson’s study provided a great level of insight into the inner workings of local government organisations and the key influences in adopting e-government. Whilst this put the spotlight on local government organisations per se, it also suggested the value of seeking out broader industry perspectives including communications, information technology and academic. These were also perspectives taken up in the present study.

It is important to note that the Shackleton et al study was undertaken at the beginning of website development, when the development of other technologies such as social media were not on the agenda. The present study, by definition, has taken place in a period when the possibilities and challenges of e-government have expanded significantly.
**Australian Study 2: Adam and Featherstone 2007**

Undertaken at around the same time as the previous one, Adam and Featherstone’s (2007) study examined local government use of the web in marketing in Australia and the United States through an audit of 180 local government websites. Using a content analysis tool, the Marketing Readiness of Website Indicator (MRWI), the research measured online marketing across 60 Australian websites (30 in New South Wales and 30 in Victoria) and 120 American websites (30 cities in California, 30 cities in Alabama; 30 counties in California and 30 counties in Alabama). It borrows a best practice approach from commercial communications and marketing perspectives that are largely consumer-centric. The private sector has a much longer history in website development with high levels of service delivery and interactivity (and therefore maturity), and is relevant if one takes the view that experience in dealing with commercial entities drives customer expectations for dealings with government. The overall Marketing Readiness of Website Indicator (MRWI) index evaluates websites in terms of the capability of the sites across three main elements of marketing: interactive marketing communication capability; marketing logistics or channel capability; and relationship continuity capability.

Marketing communication elements measured by the MRWI are predicated on a more commercial marketing emphasis on branding advertising, and promotion where URL (website address) association, and logo prominence are important. By comparison, the dynamics in local government are rather more complex, involving not just one business focus but many different business types under the one organisational umbrella. Online marketing capability or e-commerce refers to transactions on websites, online payment of bills and coordinating the activities of channel members. This is discussed in terms of organisational performance, fast response times, and customer perceptions of timeliness and accessibility. It also considers the use of databases to develop, maintain, and enhance relationships with householders and businesses, and ventures such as allowing third parties like Australia Post to facilitate online merchant services whereby taxes and licence fees may be paid online. With this capability, a type of ‘one stop shop’ can be seen emerging through secure intranet access for employees only and extranets with secure access for citizens among other features. On–line relationship management
capability is important in the sense that organisations should seek to understand and address the personal preferences, values, needs or problems of customers.

Whilst Adam and Featherstone’s study set out to prove or disprove that the USA was more sophisticated in its website marketing than Australia, it found that Californian county government and local government in the two Australian states of Victoria and New South Wales were equally sophisticated in their use of the web for marketing communication and in terms of online order-processing. They also found that in most respects, Australian and US local governments made similar use of the web for marketing communication purposes, with the exception of Alabama counties and cities. Local government use of the web in the two countries differed most in marketing channel and relationship management use. Alabama county and city governments lagged in their use of the web for these roles. There was no significant difference between the Californian county and the Victorian and NSW local government sites in terms of online order processing facilities. The other US entities were significantly less likely to employ online marketing channels. The relationship management and continuity aspect of websites was found to be more difficult and under-utilised, despite the organisational benefits associated. The outcomes of this study suggested that Australian websites in Victoria and New South Wales matched the sophistication of websites in California USA from a marketing perspective, despite the fact that the USA was an early adopter.

The study was one of the first to compare Australian and international local government websites, and as such, it provided a very useful point of comparison for the present study. However, a weakness of the study was its limited focus on marketing communications, compared with the more comprehensive features demanded of e-government and the complexities presented by the local government organisation as opposed to the commercial organisation.

West’s studies in the USA have used a comprehensive website content analysis tool to measure and compare thousands of government websites over eight years (from 2000 to 2008). The tool measures 32 features of e-government at state and federal government levels (West, 2001).

West’s most recent (2008) State and Federal E-Government Report examines whether e-government effectively capitalizes on the interactive features available on the web to improve service delivery and public outreach. It undertakes a detailed analysis of 1,537 state and federal government websites, assessing on average 30 websites in each state across the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. Websites were evaluated for the presence of a number of different features, such as online publications, online databases, audio clips, video clips, foreign language or language translation, advertisements, premium fees, user payments or fees, disability access, several measures of privacy policy, multiple indicators of security policy, presence of online services, the number of online services, digital signatures, credit card payments, email addresses, comment forms, automatic email updates, website personalisation, PDA accessibility, and readability level.

Even as recently as 2008, West concluded that: “Although considerable progress has been made over the past decade, e-government has fallen short of its potential to transform public-sector operations.” (West 2008, p. 1).

West’s website auditing tool (see Appendix 1) provided a transparent way of identifying and counting key functional characteristics of websites that enable e-government. In his study, West (2001) looked for material that would aid a citizen logging onto a site, including contact information that would enable a citizen to call or write to an agency if there was a problem to be dealt with; material on information, services and databases; features that would facilitate e-government accessibility; interactive features that would facilitate democratic outreach; and statements that would reassure citizens of privacy and security measures (West 2001).
West’s series of annual studies provided a way of tracking the progress of e-government over time, and highlighted the opportunity to establish a benchmark of practice in Australia that could be replicated to enable subsequent comparisons to be made. It provided the inspiration for the study in this thesis because it has been used over a number of years to provide systematic and comparable longitudinal data, with the flexibility of enabling individual organisational comparisons over time, industry comparisons in Australia or international comparisons to be made.


Musso, Weare and Hale (2000) undertook a content analysis of 270 municipal web sites in California, and along with West can be considered pioneers in e-government research. Their study developed a theoretical framework for local governance reform based on two dimensions: entrepreneurial (good management) and participatory (good democracy). The entrepreneurial model views the city as a service provider, whilst the participatory model highlights the civic character in a democratic sense. The study considered how internet technologies might support each approach to reform.

Entrepreneurial reform takes a customer-oriented approach to service improvement: innovations such as reducing the cost of transactions between residents and government, and enhancing possibilities for economic development, business activities and tourism. Participative reforms facilitate communication between the service recipient and provider and consultative approaches to policy-making, supported by flat management structures. In this case, the internet would be used to enhance the process of government decision-making, enabling people to voice their interests, concerns or preferences. Here, online technology is seen to enhance inclusiveness by facilitating the ability for individuals to contact and influence decision-makers. In addition, they are able to identify and contact others with similar interests.

Their study looked at the communications technology offered by the internet as a way of revolutionising two key areas of council activity: interactive communication and participation, and online service delivery, taking a customer-focused and indeed, democratic, view of government online. This study was undertaken right at the start of
serious interest in the field of e-government, and the results therefore reflect a basic level of e-government, as would be expected, with very little interactive functionality and very few councils embracing new ways to engage and provide services to customers.

Overall, a total of 35 sites (13%) were assessed as being of high quality out of 270 websites. Examination of exemplar sites was useful in demonstrating that both entrepreneurial and civic reform through information technologies is politically and practically feasible. An exemplar website is a site that provides rich information, and vertical and horizontal communication channels. However, only seven of the 35 high quality sites (out of 270 websites in total) contained a chat or bulletin board function, which is a significant indicator of horizontal communication.

While the results were published 12 years ago, the issues raised through the results of the study continue to be just as relevant now, for Australian and international councils: low levels of communications interactivity and participation, service provision, and lack of engagement and connectedness between citizens, the council organisation and other organisations. The difference is that a number of other important issues have since emerged around governance and organisational capability that are equally important considerations in achieving successful e-government.

Musso, Weare and Hale’s (2000) study presented a range of opportunities for this thesis, in looking at the importance of focusing on the customer, and in reconsidering the way local government services have been provided and can be provided into the future. Furthermore, the study highlighted the relevance of organisational factors such as structure, culture and business modelling; engendering a consultative approach with regard to online participation of citizens in decision-making; and improving the quality of service delivery.
International Study 3: Baldershiem and Ogard 2008

In Baldershiem and Ogard’s (2008) study, the web sites of 75 cities and 54 county councils in the four Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden were inspected between January 2003 and February 2004. The study analysed e-government initiatives as processes of innovation, with the aim of identifying factors that contribute to innovative, citizen-oriented procedures. A model of innovation was developed to capture typical features of local government as a setting for innovations in e-governance.

Their study reinforced the importance of the distinction between e-government in terms of what is information, and what is interactive communication, and how this relates to meaningful participation. The importance of moving from a basic information mode of online communication to interactive communication and service delivery mode is a common thread across most of the studies examined in Australia and internationally. However this study further highlights and explains the relevance in relation to e-government, how it enables the participant or citizen, and how it impacts upon the organisation:

The municipal organisation connects three principal groups of actors: citizens, elected politicians and administrators. A good web site may entail changes in patterns of interaction among and between all three groups. (Baldershiem and Ogard 2008, p. 126).

Web pages were analysed according to information and communication features of the sites. Information refers to the contents of communication channels between citizens and town hall, whereas communication refers to the extent of interactivity of web sites, or how citizens can actually communicate via municipal sites.
Baldershiem and Ogard (2008) argued that:

A web page with good communication features carries the potential of turning the citizen into a dialogue partner with politicians on a continuous basis but will also enable the citizens to keep a more watchful eye on the politicians if the necessary information is provided on the web. On the politicians’ side the dialogue opportunities may be welcomed, but the extra attention that may accompany more empowered citizens may entail a more heavy workload and also more political pressure. In service provision citizens tend to be cast as passive clients being offered fairly standardised services on a highly routinized basis. Communication technology enables more customer-oriented approaches to service provision and more choice, but this will not happen, of course, unless there is a conscious push by management in this direction. (Baldershiem and Ogard 2008, p. 126).

The quality of the information and communication features found in the study determined the innovation scores that the municipalities actually obtained. Communication features were subdivided into retrieval, feedback and participation (or 1-way, 2-ways and 3-ways communication channels). One of the advantages of online technology is the opportunity to search for and locate information quickly (retrieval). Some municipalities have made large quantities of information available on the web. How helpful this is to citizens depends on how easy it is to navigate the municipality’s home pages.

Participation, on the other hand, refers to opportunities for interaction among groups of citizens to influence decisions of government. This might include citizen contributions to local decisions, such as expressing an opinion on urban development schemes, organising petitions on the web or taking part in forums dealing with local issues. Participation implies establishing social bonds between citizens and empowering
citizens with regard to the timing and nature of their communications. (Baldershiem & Ogard 2008).

Overall Baldershiem and Ogard (2008) found that municipalities and regions with a history of effective change management and organisational development were more inclined to develop good web pages. They argue that a characteristic feature of innovators is that they have learned to learn and to proceed through the stages of innovative projects: they have acquired organisational wisdom. Their study highlights the importance of the local government organisation in taking steps to enhance citizen participation from the outset, which places the focus on organisational capability, mindsets, culture change, systems, tools and skills. Above all, however, this study highlighted the importance of considering approaches to organisational change and innovation, issues that are taken up explicitly in the final two chapters of this thesis.

**International Study 4: Wohlers (2009)**

Wohlers’ (2009) study was based on a sequential approach (or model) of local e-government sophistication consisting of the following four levels: (a) billboards, (b) service delivery, (c) citizen participation, and (d) citizen deliberation. The billboards level emphasizes the display of relevant information used by residents to access government departments and elected officials. The service-delivery level provides citizens with benefits from the use of online services. The citizen participation level offers a range of interactive features that enable citizen input in government decision-making and involvement in the community. The final and forth level, citizen deliberation, allows residents to discuss and decide upon local policy issues.

Using a series of benchmarks and survey results, Wohlers’ (2009) study analysed the presence, sophistication, and user perception of e-government across more than 1,000 incorporated municipalities in the USA and Germany. In the USA, the sample was selected from the states of Washington, Idaho, Wyoming, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Maine. The German communities were located in the western states of Saarland and Bavaria, and in the new eastern states of Saxony and Brandenburg. The study argued that local e-government
sophistication in the USA was more advanced than in Germany, while the presence of local e-government was more advanced in Germany compared with the USA.

The study focused on whether the internet facilitates service delivery to and communication with residents, incorporation of citizen input, and citizen engagement in local government.

In keeping with the findings of Baldersheim and Ogard (2008), Wohlers (2009) found that:

\begin{quote}
The online presence of local government is apparent, but the scope or sophistication of e-government as a tool to disseminate information, deliver services, and enhance citizen participation in government decision-making continues to evolve. From a traditional bureaucratic paradigm, local government web sites in the United States and in Western Europe are mostly informative and are limited to providing a range of basic one-way services” (Wohlers 2009, p. 112).
\end{quote}

However, Wohlers (2009) did find that in responding to the information needs of specific groups within the community, city e-government had evolved beyond this information-oriented stage. Local governments were in the process of centralising their citizen-oriented e-communication channels and categorising their web-based services. Wohlers argued that the strong service-oriented economy in the United States had resulted in an increasing percentage of cities in the United States offering web portals and online services where citizens can pay utility bills, parking tickets, building permits, and taxes, as well as submit applications for city jobs, permits, license renewals, and property registrations.

Wohler’s (2009) study was an incentive to intensively study the full variety and type of services on offer in Victoria and New South Wales, but also to look at best practice and seek out innovations that could signal what lies ahead in this rapidly evolving territory.
International Study 5: Smith (2010)

In contrast with the studies discussed previously, Smith (2010) presented the Pew Internet and American Life Project survey of American adult users of government websites, a study undertaken from the user perspective of e-government. This involved a telephone survey of 2258 adults and 565 interviews conducted in 2009.

This study provided data on the opinions and experiences of users of e-government services at all levels of government in the USA. This enables comparison of what users were actually doing online with what government organisations were providing. Smith reported that a total of 82% of the internet users surveyed had looked for information or completed a transaction on a government website in the twelve months preceding the survey. Some of the specific government website activities in which Americans take part included:

• 48% of internet users looked for information about a public policy or issue online with their local, state or federal government
• 46% looked up what services a government agency provides
• 41% downloaded government forms
• 35% researched official government documents or statistics
• 33% renewed a driver’s license or auto registration
• 30% got recreational or tourist information from a government agency
• 25% sought advice or information from a government agency about a health or safety issue
• 23% got information about or applied for government benefits
• 19% got information about how to apply for a government job
• 15% paid a fine, such as a parking ticket
• 11% applied for a recreational license, such as a fishing or hunting license.

Smith’s own findings identified important data on citizens’ interactions with government that suggests a change towards using more social media, mobile platforms and digital tools other than government websites. Specifically, it suggested that citizen interactions with government are moving beyond the website. Nearly one third (31%) of online adults used online platforms such as blogs, social networking sites, email, online
video or text messaging to get government information. Americans are not simply going online for data and information; they want to share their personal views on the business of government. Nearly one quarter (23%) of internet users participated in the online debate around government policies or issues, with much of this discussion occurring outside of official government channels. Nearly one-third of online adults used digital tools other than websites to get information from government agencies or officials.

However, importantly, Smith’s (2010) study also reveals that Americans tend to interact with government using a mix of online and offline methods. Internet users prefer contacting government online, but the telephone remains a key resource for government problem-solving. A total of 44% had contacted a government agency or official in the preceding twelve months via the telephone, a letter or in-person contact, and these traditional methods were frequently used as a supplement to online information-seeking. More than half of online government users have contacted government using offline as well as online methods. The technologically proficient (those with a home broadband connection and mobile internet users) and those who engage in a wide range of online government interactions more strongly preferred online contact to other means.

This study inspired thinking about the customer or website user perspective and also the changing nature of e-government in the light of emerging technologies. It highlighted the fact that citizens were changing their preferences for contacting, undertaking services and engaging with governments. This ignited the idea to undertake a website review, further to the benchmarking study, in order to keep up to date with changing technologies and trends (such as social media), and to see how councils both in Australia and overseas were responding to these changes and what innovative tools were being developed or implemented to meet changing needs, usage and preferences. The study also highlighted the importance of understanding why there was a need for both offline and online communications channels with councils relating to complexity of issues and accessibility.
A study by Pina, Torres and Royo (2010) analysed the websites of 75 local governments in the European Union (EU) including the four biggest cities plus the capitals of the first 15 EU countries. They evaluated websites using a five-stage maturity model.

In line with the Pew study presented by Smith (2010) and the findings of the Baldershiem and Ogard (2008) study, Pina, Torres and Royo (2010) recognise that increasingly, citizens are expecting the same level of responsiveness from government as they get from the private sector. They discuss how the use of the internet has moved from being seen as a way of delivering information and services, to a way of improving and transforming government through openness, accountability, transparency, relationships, reform, accessibility and interactivity. These issues take in a broader spectrum of governance, participation, technology, communication and organisational capability issues.

Their findings suggested that most websites seemed to be at the billboard stage (one-way), a small number had moved to the interactive stage (two-way communication) which could promote democratic participation by encouraging direct dialogue between citizens and government and few were at the transact stage (with fully executable transactions). Interactivity, which could enable democratic participation by encouraging citizen dialogue and interaction between citizens and government reflected low levels of implementation. The websites analysed were predominantly non-interactive, limiting e-government potential to transform the relationships between citizens and public administrations.

The issues surrounding policy development for e-government is discussed by Pina et al from a broader perspective, in terms of key drivers such as federal and state government policy and differences in strength and level of implementation across different countries:

In most countries, there do not seem to be clear ideas or centralized policies about the development of e-
government initiatives. In general, there is a high degree of dispersion in the level of e-government developments in cities within each country. In Germanic and Southern European public administrations, initiatives seem to depend on the individual political will of each local government. By contrast, in the UK, central government gives guidance about contents and structures of local government websites (Pina, Torres & Royo 2010, p. 4).

Furthermore, Pina, Torres and Royo (2010) argue that the contribution of communications technologies via the web to the modernization of government is leading to the reinforcement of existing structures, positions and processes rather than enabling the introduction of deliberative democracy mechanisms and new styles of governance.

Finally, the evaluation of websites and levels of e-government was raised as both an issue and an opportunity to be addressed:

Even though the construction and management of websites are at the core of modern public administration reforms, little is known about the effectiveness of public websites. Given the substantial investment in time and other resources on governmental online initiatives, it is essential to begin to evaluate governmental website initiatives... Yet, to date, there are no comprehensive benchmarks of the progress of public entities in this regard (Pina, Torres and Royo 2010, pp. 4-5).

Pina, Torres and Royo (2010) raised a question about the role of policy in addressing e-government at the local level, which prompted thought around the Federal and State Government policy in Australia and how this affected local government, and what was driving e-government at the local level. They also raised the importance of evaluating website effectiveness, which presented the opportunity of using a benchmarking study
to not only evaluate websites, but as a way of offering advice to the industry on how to improve website effectiveness.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the literature that is able to throw light on the functional capabilities required for effective e-government as it is currently understood at the level of local government. Four areas of functional capability were discerned in the literature and used as a framework for presenting the issues and findings offered by academic commentators and the reports of government and other institutions. Some of the literature reports on the take-up of the capabilities by governments at several levels internationally and in Australia over the last decade. The literature also suggests why developing and sustaining some of these functional capabilities has proven to be challenging, particularly those that involve connecting government services across different agencies, and integrating the portals and pathways that allow easy access to a wide range of information, services and facilities. Capabilities associated with governance that facilitate accessibility, reliability, usability and citizen empowerment while ensuring privacy and security continue to be challenging, calling up as they do the complex paradoxical tensions or dilemmas of freedom and safety, accessibility and control, transparency and personal rights, and ownership and the creation of social capital.

The literature reviewed also begins to bring to the surface some of the organisational capabilities that are implied by the functional capabilities of e-government: resourcing, back-of-house structures and processes, leadership skills and nimble flexible cultures that can thrive on the requirements of constant change. It also hints at the systemic capabilities that are implicated here and that lie at the heart of some of the most fundamental challenges: robust public decision-making, political commitment, and community awareness and skilfulness in working with government. As many commentators point out, the challenges lie not with the technology but with our aspirations, fears and skills in engaging with it, individually and collectively.
Freeman (2011) has contextualised the issues by pointing to the United Kingdom’s modernisation agenda, which has clear synergies with the current challenges for e-government:

In the UK, a federally coordinated policy approach provides e-government targets, standards, frameworks and strategies designed to utilise ICTs [information and communication technologies] to improve local government processes. These policy frameworks have been in place since the late 1990s, with their national implementation occurring prior to the widespread integration of new technologies and e-government strategies into the operations of local government. Of particular relevance here is the Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA), a term used to collectively describe more than 20 policies that were developed between 1998 and 2001 (Freeman 2011, p. 188).

Freeman explains how the lack of government policy at the local level, when compared to the Federal level, has impacted e-government implementation:

At present, limited policy guidance of local e-government in Australia is resulting in the autonomous development of ad-hoc online applications and initiatives that predominantly reiterate the service delivery role of local governments. While several authorities have implemented or are experimenting with participatory e-government practices, these often lack policies guiding both online content and applications, and the ways civic involvement is incorporated into decision-making (Freeman 2011, pp. 189).
Freeman’s conclusion is that:

A long-term, sustainable approach to participatory e-government development will depend on a cohesive governmental strategy that combines federal and local knowledge, while using policies to support ICTs and using ICTs to support policies. Advancing online engagement requires a combination of direct and indirect policies to enable sufficient civic access to ICTs, help citizens develop appropriate skills to use technologies, provide content citizens can contribute to that is of relevance to their lives, and ensure civic participation in online political practices will impact decision-making (Freeman 2011, p. 181).

The interviews conducted for this study (and reported on in Chapter 5) bring a practitioner perspective to bear on these organisational and systemic capabilities, while the final chapters draw on further literature that explores them in more detail.

It is hoped that the framing of the four areas of functional capability in time to come will provide a useful map for those attempting to navigate the emerging literature in this rapidly developing field, and provide a bridge between the insights offered in the literature and those that emerge through the experiences of practice. However, the framing of the functional capabilities also provided a more immediate and practical way of bridging those two territories, by linking the website features examined in the benchmarking study (reported in Chapter 4) to the relevant functional capability cluster.

This last section of the literature review has highlighted the possibility and opportunities for undertaking an Australian study that would add to the knowledge of the progression of e-government at the local level, leveraging off the gaps and opportunities presented by previous studies in Australia and overseas. The next chapter offers a detailed description of how this study was designed and implemented in the light of these previous studies.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Overview

This chapter describes the methodology employed across all stages of the study, including an account of how the data were created and presented. It begins by revisiting the goals of the research and explores the ways in which others have researched e-government practices and issues. The broad design, in terms of the culture of the inquiry and its several elements, is then presented. The specific samples and tools employed at each stage are described next, including an evaluation of their strengths and limitations. Chapter 4 presents the findings and offers a preliminary analysis of the first data set (the benchmarking study) and the following chapter presents the findings and analysis of the second data set (the interview data).

This study has been undertaken with the goal of making a contribution to the development of e-government in Australian municipal councils. Specifically, the research aimed to identify the major functional capabilities envisaged in the literature for e-government at the local government level, and then systematically analyse the key characteristics of current and emerging practice in Australia through a benchmarking study. Deeper insight into the findings of the benchmarking study was sought through interviews with senior practitioners and commentators in the field. Reflection on the deeper organisational and community issues implicated in e-government at the local level, and development of advice to the industry, are presented in the last chapters of the thesis. These issues are also informed by the researcher’s own experience as a senior practitioner in the field of local government communications in Australia.

As the literature chapter indicated, studies on the nature and level of e-government activity have been undertaken since the early 2000s, focused on State and Federal agencies in the United States (USA), Canada, the United Kingdom (UK) and internationally, including West’s studies in the USA (2000, 2001, 2008); Fraser’s (2007) study in Canada; and studies in the UK by Bellamy (1999) and Mitchell (2001); the seven nation study by Dunleavy et al. (2008); the multinational study of e-government implementation by Bekkers and Homburg (2007); Chadwick and May’s
(2003) study in the US, Britain and European Union countries; the I-WAYS Journal of E-government Policy and Regulation (2009) international study; and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005b) international study. Studies of activity at local government level include the Intergovernmental Advisory Board’s (1999) study of 200 State, regional, county, city and township websites in the US; the study by Hodges (2012) on joined up government in the UK; Moon & Norris’ (2005) study on e-government and managerial orientation; Baldershiem & Ogard’s (2008) study on municipal websites in Nordic countries; the content analysis by Musso, Weare and Hale (2000) of 270 municipal websites in California; the Pew Internet and American Life Project measuring users of all levels of government services in the US (Smith 2010); Reddick’s (2004) study on e-government growth; the evaluation by Irani et al (2005) of the e-government experiences of two local UK authorities; the study by Wohlers (2009) of four levels of local government online in the United States and Germany; the analysis by Dawes (2008) of the challenges of e-government in the US at State and local levels, and the study by Pina, Torres and Royo (2010) of 75 local government websites in the European Union.

Most of the early literature and previous studies in Australia have focused on analysis of agency websites at the Federal and State government levels. The Department of Education, Science and Training’s (2005) Innovation Report included a scorecard benchmarking Australia against other OECD countries. The Australian National Audit Office (2005) measured six Federal agency websites for their level of online interactivity; Macnamara (2010) measured Federal government online consultation trials; Castleman and Cavill (2004) discussed government strategy online; and the Australian Government Information Management Office measured user satisfaction with e-government services (Department of Finance and Deregulation 2011) at all levels.

At the local level in Australia, Shackleton, Fisher and Dawson (2005) undertook a longitudinal study on the maturity of 20 Victorian council websites in Australia over three years. This included a comparative examination of the web sites between 2001 and 2004 in a number of key areas including service tracking, online ordering and payment, and provision of information relevant to the local community. They used Quirk’s (2000)
four-stage model (including e-management, e-service, e-commerce and e-decision-making) to evaluate the maturity of local government websites. A content matrix was used to examine the presence of features such as information, email addresses and payments. The features were grouped under eight areas within Quirk’s four categories (basic information, website navigation, contact details, product and service details/support, transaction handling, sense of community and links).

Adam and Featherstone (2007) examined local government use of the web in marketing in Australia (60 local government websites in Victoria and New South Wales) and the United States (60 city and 60 county websites in Alabama and California). The methodology used a commercial content analysis tool, the Marketing Readiness of Website Indicator (MRWI). The MRWI evaluates websites against three terms of capability of the sites: interactive marketing communication capability, marketing logistics or channel capability, and relationship continuity capability against 14 information cues.

Building on these earlier studies, the driving research question for the study described in this thesis was framed as: what are the current levels of practice and key issues guiding e-government and online communication in local government in Australia, and what is needed for effective management?

To answer this question, the research design contained the following key elements:

- an investigation of literature on the emergence of e-government at local levels in Australia and overseas, and the development of four conceptual clusters that capture the requisite functional capabilities for effective-e-government identified in that literature;

- a benchmarking study of 100 public council websites in the Australian States of Victoria and New South Wales undertaken in 2009/10, measuring 30 features of e-government that could be related to the capabilities identified in the literature review;
• a follow-up website review of 30 of these websites in early 2012, together with reflection on 14 international websites providing significant examples of innovative practice;

• thirteen in-depth interviews with industry practitioners and academic commentators; and

• the exploration of the challenging organisational and community issues that are implicated in realising the full potential of e-government, and the crafting of advice to the industry.

Figure 1 outlines the key steps in the research design.
The culture of the research inquiry

As suggested by the earlier introduction to the design of the study, a number of elements were employed: development of conceptual clusters through examination of the literature; the systematic application of a benchmarking tool that involved assessing and counting the presence of specified features of publicly available websites; the creation of further insights into the literature and the benchmarking study through conversations with people who lead, consult and practice in, and commentate on, the field and who can articulate the context of the issues; and an interpretation of the organisational and systemic implications of the study that draws on all these data and perspectives, while drawing on the researcher’s own insights as an experienced communications manager in local government in Victoria.

Most stages in the study were informed by those who came before and those who followed, and in that sense the design was more layered and iterative than Figure 1 suggests. Blaikie (1980) refers to a design of this type as employing abductive logic: the combination of inductive and deductive logics in working from theory to data and data to theory as meaning is created cumulatively across the study and over a significant period.

The research approach is interpretive, beginning with a generative question to guide the inquiry, rather than a hypothesis, and involving the continuous interplay of data creation and sense-making (Urquhart, Lehmann & Myers 2010). The research is also seen as being part of a larger, ongoing discourse: work that is continually in progress in a context of rapidly changing human experience, with both conceptual and practical significance.

Eisner (1991) has suggested a continuum of interpretive work, ranging from technical to connoisseurship: from relatively unambiguous reading of pre-determined data displays; through the treatment of scholarly journals as data sets to be read critically; to the intellectual, ethical and aesthetic representation of complex dilemmas, paradoxes and highly contested views of what is, what should be and what can be. On this continuum, the role of this researcher was understood at times as being technical (the reading of
pre-defined data sets through the benchmarking study), and at other times crafting
meaning (Kvale 1996) through discussion with others (the interviews), and the
purposeful reading of what has been written (working with literature). At different
times, it has involved both bracketing off (Heron 1988) and deliberately including the
researcher’s own experience and understanding.

For research of this kind, rigour is sought both substantively (the credibility of the
content) and methodologically (the capacity to replicate and critique the process). The
trustworthiness, integrity and authenticity of the research is developed through using
several different forms of data creation; co-creating meaning with the practice
community; bringing into play both historical and current understandings; being vigilant
regarding the lenses brought to the work by the researcher; being honest about the
researcher’s motives in undertaking the work; being transparent about the researcher’s
journey of thinking and how it is changed by her experience of the journey; and
transparency about the methods used to form interpretations and develop arguments so
that others can replicate, modify or critique the method (Green 1996; Lincoln & Guba
1985).

The researcher for this study has a professional background as a manager of
communications within local government organisations. Over the past 18 years she has
worked in eight local government organisations spanning inner city, suburban and rural
locations. Her motivation for undertaking the work was not only to inform her own
practice and that of others, but also to offer something that would be seen to be of
sufficient value to the industry, while at the same time earning a significant academic
credential.

The methodology in detail

Treatment and use of the themes emerging from the literature review.

The literature explored in the previous chapter suggested that, while significant
initiatives had been taken up in Australia, government at all three levels has struggled to
realise the full potential of e-government. It also suggested that studies of e-government
at the local level in Australia have been scarce. This gap presented a significant opportunity for this study in relation to the benchmarking of practice and the discussions with senior practitioners and commentators. It also suggested the possibility of making a strong and useful link between the conceptual issues identified in the literature by academics and commentators and the world of practice.

The literature review identified four clusters of issues that, between them, summarise the functional capabilities required to effectively realise the full potential of e-government. Those capabilities might well be added to and qualified in the near future in this rapidly developing field, but conceptually the clusters are framed to be generous and inclusive containers that will be modified and enriched rather than replaced. The first cluster is concerned with interactive capabilities: the extent of interactive tools, functions and features, and the presence of fully executable services online. The second cluster is focused on understanding and engaging users and stakeholders, customising and personalising websites for democratic outreach and responsiveness to target audiences. The third cluster concerns the connectedness and integration of access to government services, including the existence of portals that provide a one-stop-shop. The fourth cluster focuses on issues of governance such as accessibility, reliability, usability, privacy and security.

The key conceptual and methodological contributions of this study are not only the development of the four functional capability clusters, but their systematic linkage to the benchmarking tool used to study practice. This linkage between the conceptual and the practical is a major rationale for undertaking academic doctoral work in the professional practice space. It is especially valuable - and challenging - in a field of practice that is evolving so rapidly and that brings with it such complex issues of government, democracy, community and organisation. A strong bridge between conceptual analysis and the practicalities of realising the full potential of e-government should make it easier for practitioners to make sense of the literature as it continues to evolve, and also offer clear connections to the world of practice that might not be immediately obvious to academics.
Once the clusters of the functional capabilities had been identified, it was possible to systematically relate each of the features in West’s (2001) audit tool to one or more of the clusters. It was also possible to design questions for the interview stage that related directly to the clusters, thus integrating each element of the study. This particular bridge between the conceptual and the practical offers the benefit of allowing individual councils to compare their own profiles with others nationally and internationally, as well as allowing researchers and others to track industry progress overall.

The benchmarking study

Like Shackleton, Fisher and Dawson (2005), this study measures the presence of features of e-government. It targeted a larger sample (100 websites in total) over two States (compared with the study by Shackleton et al. involving 20 websites, and that by Adam and Featherstone involving 60 Australian websites), in order to obtain a strong representation of council locations (Rural/Regional, Suburban and Inner Urban) in Australia, and to concentrate on a broad variety of features.

The literature review identified a study undertaken by West (2001) of Brown University in the United States of America. His website auditing tool (see Appendix 1) gave him a means by which to identify and count key functional characteristics of websites that enable e-government. Annual studies of websites at the State and Federal levels of government in the USA have been conducted between 2000 and 2008 (West 2000, 2001, 2008).

In his study, West (2001) identified 32 features available online at State and Federal government websites and examined the differences that exist across 50 states and between the two different levels of government. This entailed detailed analysis of 1,680 state and federal government websites. It looked for material that would aid a citizen logging onto a site, including contact information that would enable a citizen to discover whom to call or write to at an agency if there was a problem to be dealt with; material on information, services and databases; features that would facilitate e-government access by special populations such as people with a disability and non-English speakers; interactive features that would facilitate democratic outreach; and visible statements that
would reassure citizens worried about privacy and security (West 2001). Features were defined as such if the entire transaction could occur online.

West’s series of studies provide a way of tracking the progress of e-government over time, and highlighted the potential value of trying to benchmark progress in Australia. Clearly a one-off audit of websites has a temporary value, and quickly becomes outdated as technological developments continue at increasing speed. However, when seen as an opportunity to establish an initial transparent benchmark of practice that can be replicated in the way that West has done, even a one-off study makes a significant contribution. This research offers that initial benchmark and also a transparent tool (adapted from West’s) that enables subsequent comparisons to be made by academic and industry researchers as local e-government continues to develop in Australia, as well as international comparisons with West’s own studies. As previously suggested, the tool can also be of practical value to individual councils wishing to profile and compare themselves with industry practice.

The study by West (2001) in the USA employed a tool that carefully considered the features needed by a citizen to effectively use a government website. It assesses a broad range of features that, together, provide a comprehensive indication of e-government development, measuring not only services online, but also open forms of interactive communication, plus governance issues such as privacy and accessibility. It was selected for use in this study because of its comprehensiveness, and also because it has been used over a number of years to provide systematic and comparable longitudinal data. The use of West’s tool for this study has the great advantage of allowing international comparisons to be made.

However, a number of adjustments to West’s tool were needed for use in the examination of local government websites in Australia. The revised tool (see Appendix 2) measures a total of 30 features. The changes made were to simplify the benchmarking sheet by explaining the terms clearly for easy comprehension and replication (especially in relation to currently available social media and tools), while some terms needed to be made culturally specific to Australia. Qualitative sections were included, such as listing the top ten services available on the front page, and an area in
which to list the types of fully executable online services. A range of recommendations is made in Appendix 3 in relation to how the benchmarking tool can be modified for further use.

There are a total of 565 councils in Australia, and a total of 100 website audits were targeted: 50 from Victoria and 50 from New South Wales. This represents a sample of 18% of the Australian total, 63% of all Victorian councils and 33% of all NSW councils. Three categories were used to define similar groups of councils by location: Regional/Rural, Suburban and Inner Urban.

Location was the only variable that could be used to draw meaningful comparisons between councils. There are no other variables in the profiles of councils that can be used because each community and council organisation has a unique set of many characteristics.

Of the New South Wales council websites studied, 28 were Regional or Rural, 15 Suburban and seven Inner Urban including Sydney. Of the Victorian websites, there were 23 Regional or Rural, 22 Suburban and five Inner Urban including Melbourne. A list of all the websites studied and their grouping by location appears in Appendix 4.

The examination of each website was undertaken by the author between May 2009 and December 2010. The duration of each audit averaged between two and three hours and involved searching for 30 features on websites that could provide up to 100 different services. This required multiple navigations and took much longer for less accessible sites and sites with more innovative features. An example of a completed examination of an individual website appears in Appendix 5. Where possible, examples of the home page of websites have been included in the text, but the opportunity to do this was severely limited by copyright restrictions on the reproduction of web pages.
Interviews

In-depth interviews were used to gain a deeper insight into the data emerging from the benchmarking study, and to develop an understanding of likely future trends and issues in relation to e-government at the local level in Australia.

This element of the study required ethics approval and the application for ethics approval from Swinburne University of Technology appears at Appendix 7, followed by the letter of approval from the Ethics Committee in Appendix 8 and the Ethics Review in Appendix 9. The letter seeking the participation of individuals in the study and the consent form appear in Appendices 10 and 11.

A total of 20 people were approached to undertake the interviews. Participants were found by using the Public Relations Institute of Australia website (www.pria.com.au), the website of the Municipal Association of Victoria and Local Government Professionals (www.mav.asn.au, www.lgpro.com); and through a search of Australian University websites to identify academics with relevant research interests.

Thirteen people agreed to participate: four council Chief Executive Officers, five consultants and advisors in the areas of public relations, technology and community consultation who had all worked for many years with councils as their clients; three academics with PhDs and relevant publications; and one director in a website technology and research company. This is best described as convenience sampling (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009) and has the limitation that it could by no means be considered a representative sample of opinions held across Australia by academics, consultants and practitioners in similar roles.

However, a key strength of the sample was the high level of knowledge and experience that the interviewees could bring to the study, from a range of perspectives. On the other hand, additional interviews with operational staff (who spend each day working on, and within the realms of, e-government and online communications in a hands-on capacity) would undoubtedly have added strength and further insights to the findings. A focus
group conversation among the interviewees would have also been useful as a way of further teasing out issues but was logistically difficult, given their locations.

The interview questions (in Appendix 12) were intended to explore the clusters of functional capabilities identified in the literature review, and at the same time give participants the opportunity to raise and discuss issues important to them. As the questions were designed, it became clear that the interview could be unreasonably long if all four clusters were explored. Consequently, the decision was reluctantly made to leave cluster four (governance capabilities) aside. Instead, the opportunity was taken to ask interviewees about the implications of the functional capabilities for organisational capabilities such as skills, business modelling, cultural practices and leadership. They were also asked for the specific advice they would give for strategically managing the take up of e-government.

Questions were structured as a series of triggers to encourage more in-depth discussion of topics as they arose. The triggers were:

- How electronic technology changes the way communication occurs and the implications.

- The extent of interactive, two-way online communication and engagement in local government and the features or tools used.

- The levels of service delivery provided online in Australian local government.

- Stakeholder expectations of electronic technology services.

- The impact of e-government on customers and other stakeholders.

- The management issues emerging with e-technology and communications (including the systems, skills, processes or solutions that are needed to address them).
The models and issues guiding current approaches to e-government in local government in Australia.

The key components for developing a strategic framework to manage effective communications and electronic technology.

The connections between these triggers and the capability clusters are set out in Table 1.

Table 1. Triggers and Clusters of Organisational Capability For e-Government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRIGGERS</th>
<th>CLUSTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How electronic technology changes the way communication occurs and the implications.</td>
<td>Cluster 1. Interactive Capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The extent of interactive, two-way online communication and engagement in local government and the features or tools used.</td>
<td>Cluster 1. Interactive Capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The levels of service delivery provided online in Australian local government.</td>
<td>Cluster 1. Interactive Capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder expectations of electronic technology services.</td>
<td>Cluster 1. Interactive Capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of e-government on customers and other stakeholders.</td>
<td>Cluster 2. Understanding the User, Customisation and Responsiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The management issues emerging with e-technology and communications (including the systems, skills, processes or solutions that are needed to address them).</td>
<td>Cluster 4. Governance As well as Clusters 1, 2 and 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The models and issues guiding current approaches to e-government in local government in Australia.</td>
<td>Cluster 3. Connecting Services and Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The key components for developing a strategic framework to manage effective communications and electronic technology.</td>
<td>Cluster 4. Governance As well as Clusters 1, 2 and 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A recording device was used (with the permission of each participant) to ensure that all the data were available. Each interview was transcribed and then coded, using the clusters of functional capability, insight into the organisational capabilities required, and strategic advice to the industry as the overarching categories. All responses were first allocated to one or more of the categories, then summarised and displayed as a series of tables (Appendix 14), so that it is possible to get a transparent and accessible overview of the range of responses and how the responses of different types of interviewees (practitioners, academics and consultants) were interpreted by the researcher.
The interview questions also invited commentary on the organisational and systemic capabilities required to effectively realise e-government at local level. That commentary is summarised and presented in the body of Chapter 5.

Website Follow-Up Review 2012

A follow-up review of local government websites was undertaken in the early part of 2012 in order to identify the uptake of more innovative interactive technology tools, and to try to get some sense of the changes that had occurred since the completion of the benchmarking study. The aim was not to replicate that study but to gain an insight into examples that might be indicative of things to come across the sector, including 15 from Victoria and 15 from New South Wales, across all three location categories (Rural/Regional, Suburban and Inner Urban). The selection was made from those websites previously audited that had scored well overall in the initial benchmarking study or had had some recent innovative additions or changes to their site highlighted through the local government industry association networks, information from private sector consultants, through conference materials highlighting innovative case studies and through the use of search terms on Google about the use of more innovative digital technologies.

The review searched for the presence of 10 innovative features or tools that have become more prominent in the online space:

- customisation tools that enable the user to customise the website to their needs;

- mobile applications that enable customers to access information or submit requests to fix issues from their i-phone or smart phone);

- QR (Quick Response) Codes that can be scanned to link to website information or multimedia data, from a mobile phone;
• interactive maps that allow people to find services, facilities or activities in their community;

• videos which allow messages to be communicated by visual means;

• online chat applications enabling people to speak to customer service via internet technology in real-time;

• consultation portals with discussion forums that enable people to contribute to council decision-making through interactive engagement with council and with others in the community;

• social media including council pages on external sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube;

• integration where council services are linked seamlessly behind the scenes; and

• dedicated online services and payments sections that pool together a range of services conveniently for easy customer access.

The presence of these features on the Australian websites were tabled (see Chapter 4) and analysed.

A case study on the management of the consequences of the floods that devastated the central business district of Brisbane in 2011 was also discovered through industry networks, and is included as it provides a high profile and relevant model for effective use of social media in emergency management for local councils.

A total of 14 international websites were also reviewed as a source of insight into recent developments. They included eight in the United Kingdom, five in the United States of America, and one in Canada. These websites were identified through online listings of local council websites, using search terms that would find innovative features such as
QR (Quick Response) codes and mobile applications. Fifty websites were scanned and 14 were selected as clear and obvious examples that provided significant contrast with Australian practice.

The last phase of this study was the search for literature exploring the organisational and systemic capabilities required for the realisation of e-government. This literature was identified purposefully. It is in the process of rapid development, and is informed by a range of voices and disciplinary perspectives, including the systemic dynamics of political science and democracy, contemporary understandings of organisations as borderless and complex, and emergent theorising about social networking and communication. The final chapter attempts to offer insights that will inform practice, while not avoiding the contradictions and paradoxes which beset it. In that sense, it attempts the building of another bridge, this time between the worlds of very complex theory and very complex practice.

This chapter has described the methodology of the study and it is to the presentation and discussion of data that the thesis turns in the next two chapters.
CHAPTER 4. INSIGHTS INTO PRACTICE

Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the benchmark study of 100 Australian local government websites conducted in 2009/10, followed by an analysis of that data. Next, the data are compared with the significant empirical studies from Australia and overseas, described in the literature review. A further review of 30 local government websites conducted in 2012 is then presented and discussed, together with recent examples of international local government websites. The implications of all of these data sets are further explored at the end of the chapter.

The 2009/10 Benchmarking Study

As described in the previous chapter, the benchmarking process employed an auditing tool based on the work of West (2001) to assess the presence of 30 online features. Appendix 6 tabulates the presence of those features across each of the councils, grouped by location (Rural/Regional, Suburban and Inner Urban) and State. The scores for each council are also tallied in that Appendix as an overall indication of the level of e-government attained.

Analysis of the data tabulated in Appendix 6 indicates that the average number of features present across 100 websites was 18 of 30. There was an average of 17 features measured in New South Wales (NSW) (874 features across 50 councils) and an average of 19 features measured in Victoria (VIC) (945 features across 50 councils). The highest numbers of features were found in the two major Inner Urban cities: 26 for Melbourne, Victoria and 24 for Sydney, New South Wales. The lowest scores were for a Rural/Regional council in New South Wales (with only 9 of 30 features present) and a Rural/Regional council in Victoria (with only 11 of 30 features present).

In Victoria, there were an average of 22 features present across the five Inner Urban councils; the lowest score was 21 features, the highest was 26 features. An average of 20 features were present across 22 Suburban councils; the lowest score was 16 features,
the highest was 24 features. An average of 17 features were present across the 23 Rural/Regional councils; the lowest score was 11 and the highest was 22 features.

In New South Wales, there were an average of 20 features present across seven Inner Urban councils; the lowest score was 17 and the highest was 24 features. An average of 18 features were present across the 15 Suburban councils; the lowest score was 14 and the highest was 21 features. An average of 16 features were present across the 28 Rural/Regional councils; the lowest score was nine and the highest was 21 features.

The data indicates that the overall level of e-government, that is the number of online features, is greater for Inner Urban and Suburban councils in both Victoria and New South Wales than it is for Rural/Regional councils. However, with regard to interactivity through communications tools and services online, there is less of a gap between these locations.

Table 2 sets out the results of the analysis for each of the 30 features measured. Features highlighted in green indicate a high level of presence: that means 80-100% of councils had this feature on their website. Features in yellow show a medium presence, which indicated that 50-79% of all councils audited had these features on their website. Those highlighted in orange reflect a low level of presence, indicating that 0-49% of the councils audited had this feature on their website.

Each feature is matched against the four clusters of functional capabilities developed in the literature chapter, namely: interactive capabilities (the extent of interactive tools, functions and features and the presence of fully executable services online); understanding and engaging the user (customising websites for democratic outreach and target audiences); connecting government services (integrated portals that provide a one-stop-shop); and governance (facilitating accessibility, reliability, usability, privacy and security). The cluster that each feature relates to is highlighted in the last column of Table 2. Tables 3 and 4 provide a further breakdown of this data by council location (Rural/Regional, Suburban and Inner Urban) for Victoria and New South Wales, respectively.
Table 2. Benchmarking Study Features and Results 2009/10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Being Measured</th>
<th>% of features across 100 Councils</th>
<th>NSW Councils</th>
<th>VIC Councils</th>
<th>CLUSTER REFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Phone information</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Address information</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Email information</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Links to other sites</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>CON/INT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Publications</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Databases</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>E-news</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Audio/Podcast</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WEB SITES OFFERING CONTACT INFORMATION, PUBLICATIONS, MULTIMEDIA OPTIONS AND DATABASES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Being Measured</th>
<th>% of features across 100 Councils</th>
<th>NSW Councils</th>
<th>VIC Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>SiteMap</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Search Capability</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Quickfind</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**USABILITY / NAVIGATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Being Measured</th>
<th>% of features across 100 Councils</th>
<th>NSW Councils</th>
<th>VIC Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Presence of fully-executable services</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of services / Averages</td>
<td>510/100</td>
<td>224/50</td>
<td>286/50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FULLY TRANSACTIONAL ONLINE SERVICES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Being Measured</th>
<th>% of features across 100 Councils</th>
<th>NSW Councils</th>
<th>VIC Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Security Statement</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Privacy Statement</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SECURITY AND PRIVACY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Being Measured</th>
<th>% of features across 100 Councils</th>
<th>NSW Councils</th>
<th>VIC Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Accessibility - Disability Access</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Language Translations</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ACCESSIBILITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Being Measured</th>
<th>% of features across 100 Councils</th>
<th>NSW Councils</th>
<th>VIC Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Email Interactivity</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Post Comments (Social media/Consultation)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Email Updates / RSS</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Broadcast (Blogs, Chats, Discussions, Twitter)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Website Personalisation/Customisation</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Online Forms / Surveys</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Website Campaigns</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INTERACTIVITY BETWEEN COUNCIL AND CITIZEN Government Websites Offering Democratic Outreach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Being Measured</th>
<th>% of features across 100 Councils</th>
<th>NSW Councils</th>
<th>VIC Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Advertisements</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>User payments</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>e-payments</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Portal Link</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Digital Signature</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Credit Card use</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**E-COMMERCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Being Measured</th>
<th>% of features across 100 Councils</th>
<th>NSW Councils</th>
<th>VIC Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>NUMBER OF FEATURES PRESENT</td>
<td>1819/100</td>
<td>874/50</td>
<td>945/50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LEVELS OF E-GOVERNMENT (AVERAGES)</td>
<td>(18 ave)</td>
<td>(17 ave)</td>
<td>(19 ave)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total council locations across NSW and VIC: Rural/Regional (51) Suburban (37) Inner urban (12) = 100
## Table 3. Victoria Benchmarking Study Features and Results 2009/10 By Location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Being Measured</th>
<th>% of Councils (NSW &amp; VIC)</th>
<th>RURAL/REGIONAL Victoria (out of 23)</th>
<th>SUBURBAN Victoria (Out of 22)</th>
<th>INNER URBAN Victoria (out of 5)</th>
<th>TOTALS ACROSS LOCATIONS IN VIC</th>
<th>3 CLUSTER REFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Phone information</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50 out of 50 100%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Address information</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50 out of 50 100%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Email information</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50 out of 50 100%</td>
<td>CON/INT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Links to other sites</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50 out of 50 100%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Publications</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>49 out of 50 99%</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Databases</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26 out of 50 52%</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13 out of 50 26%</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>USEABILITY / NAVIGATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>SiteMap</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26 out of 50 52%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Search Capability</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50 out of 50 100%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Quickfind</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47 out of 50 94%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>FULLY TRANSACTIONAL ONLINE SERVICES</td>
<td></td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>23 had services present Total services = 106/23 AVERAGE: 5 Services</td>
<td>22 had services present Total services = 149/22 AVERAGE: 7 Services</td>
<td>5 had services present Total Services = 31/5 AVERAGE: 6 Services</td>
<td>50 out of 50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Presence of fully-executable services and number of services</td>
<td>218/51 = 4 Services Rural/Regional</td>
<td>225/37 = 6 Services Suburban Inner Urban 69/12 = 6 Services</td>
<td>23 had services present Total services = 106/23 AVERAGE: 5 Services</td>
<td>22 had services present Total services = 149/22 AVERAGE: 7 Services</td>
<td>5 had services present Total Services = 31/5 AVERAGE: 6 Services</td>
<td>286 services / 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Security Statement</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35 out of 50 70%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Privacy Statement</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>49 out of 50 99%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>INTERACTIVITY BETWEEN COUNCIL AND CITIZEN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Language Translations</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21 out of 50 42%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Email interactivity</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>49 out of 50 99%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Post Comments (Social media/Consultation)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8 out of 50 16%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Email Updates / RSS</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25 out of 50 50%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Broadcast (Blogs, Chats, Discussions, Twitter)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 out of 50 10%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Website Personalisation/ Customisation</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 out of 50 4%</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Online Forms / Surveys</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46 out of 50 92%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Website Campaigns</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 out of 50 4%</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Advertisements</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 out of 50 0%</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>User payments</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>47 out of 50 94%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>e-services</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50 out of 50 100%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Portal</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 out of 50 0%</td>
<td>CON/INT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Digital Signature</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 out of 50 0%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Credit Card use</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>48 out of 50 96%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL FEATURES**: 17 AVERAGE (401/23) 20 AVERAGE (433/22) 22 AVERAGE (111/5) 19 AVERAGE (945/50)
### Table 4. New South Wales Benchmarking Study Features and Results 2009/10 By Location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Being Measured</th>
<th>% of features across 100 Councils (NSW &amp; VIC)</th>
<th>RURAL/REGIONAL New South Wales (out of 28)</th>
<th>SUBURBAN New South Wales (out of 15)</th>
<th>INNER URBAN New South Wales (out of 7)</th>
<th>TOTALS ACROSS LOCATIONS IN NSW</th>
<th>CLUSTER REFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Phone information</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50 out of 50 100%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Address information</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50 out of 50 100%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Email information</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>42 out of 50 84%</td>
<td>CON/INT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Links to other sites</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42 out of 50 84%</td>
<td>CON/INT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Publications</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50 out of 50 100%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Databases</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46 out of 50 92%</td>
<td>UCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>E-news</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26 out of 50 52%</td>
<td>UCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Audio/Podcast</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 out of 50 15%</td>
<td>UCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11 out of 50 22%</td>
<td>UCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>WebSites Offering Contact Information, Publications, Multimedia Options and Databases</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Security Statement</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8 out of 50 16%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Privacy Statement</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>44 out of 50 88%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Presence of fully-executable services</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>26 had services present Total services = 112 / 28 AVERAGE: 4 Services</td>
<td>15 had services present Total services = 76 / 15 AVERAGE: 5 Services</td>
<td>7 had services present Total Services = 36 / 7 AVERAGE: 5 Services</td>
<td>48 out of 50 96%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Accessibility - Disability Access</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14 out of 50 28%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Language Translations</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8 out of 50 16%</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Email Interactivity</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50 out of 50 100%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Post Comments (Social media/Consultation)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17 out of 50 34%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Email Updates / RSS</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28 out of 50 56%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Broadcast (Blogs, Chats, Discussions, Twitter)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17 out of 50 34%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Website Personalisation/Customisation</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 out of 50 4%</td>
<td>UCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Online Forms / Surveys</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38 out of 50 76%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Website Campaigns</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 out of 50 10%</td>
<td>UCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>E-COMMERCE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Advertisements</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 out of 50 4%</td>
<td>UCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>User payments</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>45 out of 50 90%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>e-services</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>48 out of 50 96%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Portal</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 out of 50 0%</td>
<td>CON/INT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Digital Signature</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 out of 50 0%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Credit Card use</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>45 out of 50 90%</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>TOTAL FEATURES</td>
<td>16 AVERAGE (460 / 28)</td>
<td>18 AVERAGE (271/15)</td>
<td>20 AVERAGE (143 / 7)</td>
<td>17 AVERAGE (874 / 50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data summarised in Tables 3 and 4 are presented in more detail in the following sections, considered through the lens of each of the four clusters of functional capability in turn.

**Cluster 1. Interactive capabilities: the extent of interactive tools, functions and features and presence of fully executable services online.**

This cluster investigates the capability of a local government organisation to facilitate delivery of services, so that users can conveniently access services and complete transactions, and communication can be delivered online with capability for interaction, feedback and dialogue.

**Fully executable online services** (Features 13, 26, 27, 29 and 30 in Tables 2, 3 and 4).

Fully executable services are those that can be completed entirely online, from start to finish. User payments were present on 92% of websites and online services were present on 98% of websites, suggesting that nearly all councils were making at least one service available online. On average, most councils had five online services available where people could transact with council. However, the number of services available for each council varied from none to 17 (see Appendix 6), depending on how advanced their website was. The most frequent examples include online payments for rates, water, bills and fines; making and tracking planning and development applications; electronic tendering; making a customer request or reporting a complaint; applying for a job; completing surveys and consultation on issues; using online maps; and filling in online forms for service requests. The use of digital signatures (signatures that can be used online to approve a transaction) was not identified in any of the websites. Credit card use (available on 93% of websites) closely matched the use of online payments. Generally, the services commonly made available online were either simple to undertake, or had templates or platforms in place that could be replicated or used across more than one council. For example, e-tendering and online planning operate from a similar platform on a number of Council sites.

Overall, the 51 Rural/Regional councils had slightly fewer online services available (an average of four per council) compared to the results of all council websites audited (an
average of five per council overall). The 37 Suburban councils had an average of six online services per council. The 12 Inner Urban councils audited also had an average of six online services per council.

However, the results indicated that irrespective of location (Inner Urban, Suburban, Rural/Regional) there was little variation from the average number of services available online. Appendix 6 indicates that the average at the lowest end was four services per council type (Rural/Regional New South Wales), compared to an average at the highest end of seven services per council type (Suburban Victoria). There were very few individual councils with high numbers of online services in any of the three categories of location. At the time of the benchmarking study, the highest Suburban council had 17 services, the highest Regional/Rural council had 13 services and the highest Inner Urban Council had 10 services online; all of these were located in Victoria. All other councils across both States measured nine services or fewer.

An average of four services were offered online per council in New South Wales (from a total of 224 services offered by 50 councils). This was less than Victoria’s average. An average of four services per council were offered online by Rural/Regional Councils in New South Wales. An average of five services per council were offered by both Inner Urban councils and Suburban councils in New South Wales. The highest number of services offered online in New South Wales was nine, for a Suburban council.

An average of six services were offered online per council in Victoria (from a total of 286 services offered by 50 councils). However, a total of 46% (23 out of 50 councils examined in Victoria) were Rural/Regional, which was five fewer councils audited in this category than was the case with New South Wales. An average of five services were measured for each Rural/Regional council in Victoria. An average of seven services per council were offered by Suburban councils, and an average of six services per council were offered by Inner Urban councils in Victoria. The highest number of services offered online in Victoria was 17, for a Suburban council, which was almost double the highest number for a council in New South Wales (9).

Some of the Rural/Regional council websites in Victoria and New South Wales were innovative, taking up new technologies as a way of communicating and doing business
across extensive and dispersed areas, where it may be difficult to physically visit a
council (e.g. webcasting of council meetings via online video, online car share system
and town planning registers). Tourism was also a big feature for Rural/Regional areas
with natural attractions, with corresponding interactive tourism sites. One example was
Indigo Shire’s website (see Diagram 1) promoting four information centres for key
visitor destinations, such as the Rutherglen wine region, which are connected by
hyperlinks to dedicated websites offering a range of fully-executable services, such as
accommodation bookings.

The more advanced councils featured a specific section labelled ‘Online Services’ or ‘E-
payments’ or ‘I Want To...’ on the front page of their website, with all options listed,
making it easy for the user to clearly see options for conducting transactions with
council. (See examples of these specific sections and labelling in Diagrams 2, 3 and 4.)

provides links to dedicated tourism sites.

Diagram removed for Copyright purposes

Go to website: www.indigoshire.vic.gov.au

Diagram removed for Copyright purposes

Go to website: www.moreland.vic.gov.au


Diagram removed for Copyright purposes

Go to website: www.hume.vic.gov.au
Interactive communication online (Features 18, 19, 20, 21 and 23 in Tables 2, 3 and 4)

The presence of two-way communication features such as the ability to post comments (e.g. through social media sites such as Facebook or consultation forums) was low, with only 25% of all websites including these features. Similarly, broadcast features such as Twitter, or chat/real-time discussion were present in only 22% of websites. These features typically appeared in a public forum where anyone could view and contribute to discussions. However, features with more direct avenues of feedback to council (not appearing in a public forum) had a high level of presence. Two examples were online forms/surveys (84%) and email interactivity (98%), which could only be viewed by the council recipient.

While New South Wales had a lower number of services available online, councils in this State featured more interactive communication online. Of the 25% of councils that enabled the posting of comments, 8% were in Victoria and 17% were in New South Wales. Of the 22% of councils that featured broadcasting, 5% were in Victoria and 17% were in New South Wales.

Of the 17 councils from New South Wales that enabled posting of comments on their websites, 47% (8) were Rural/Regional, 29% (5) were Suburban, and 24% (4) were Inner Urban. Of the eight Councils from Victoria that enabled posting of comments on
their websites, 12% (1) were Rural/Regional, 63% (5) were Suburban and 25% (2) were Inner Urban.

Among the 17 councils from New South Wales that featured broadcasting on their websites, 47% (8) were Rural/Regional, 24% (4) were Suburban and 29% (5) were Inner Urban. Of the five Councils from Victoria that featured broadcasting on their websites, 20% (1) were Rural/Regional, 40% (2) were Suburban and 40% (2) were Inner Urban.

While online discussion forums (used for community engagement) were relatively new for councils, solutions were being offered by the marketplace, in which online consultation experts (such as Bang the Table (2010) located in New South Wales, accessible through www.bangthetable.com) have provided ready-made consultation forum platforms, reducing the risks, administration and overhead costs. Examples of these service offerings appearing in two council websites, with a similar template, include: Newcastle Voice, an interactive online consultation and engagement portal offered by the City of Newcastle (2010) in New South Wales (www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au); and Your Say Warringah, a similar online engagement portal offered by Warringah Council (2010) in New South Wales (www.warringah.nsw.gov.au), also using a Bang the Table template and tools.

Although interactive communication in a public forum was low for the sector overall, some of the more innovative and engaging technologies or tools being found amongst council websites included social media use (Twitter, Facebook and You Tube), blogs, podcasts, ‘RSS’ feeds (Really Simple Syndication that includes subscribing to receive updates from websites on topics of interest), electronic newsletters, SMS mobile phone alerts, online television, separate tourism or business websites with online shopping or key attractions, and multimedia (audio and video footage) to promote a particular area. Another innovative example included online customer service in real-time (chatting with a real customer service person) via the internet offered by Warrnambool City Council (2010) (www.warrnambool.vic.gov.au). (Examples of engaging technologies being used by Boroondara, Randwick and North Sydney councils are pictured in Diagrams 5, 6 and 7.)

Diagram removed for Copyright purposes

Go to website: www.boroondara.vic.gov.au


Diagram removed for Copyright purposes

Go to website: www.randwick.nsw.gov.au
Melbourne and Sydney tended to have more progressive and interactive sites featuring a number of social media tools, electronic newsletters and subscriptions, online consultation forums and customised portals to package information for specific audiences and to engage, create dialogue, promote and entertain. A range of social media tools and other features are highlighted on the front page of the City of Sydney (2010) website (www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au), including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Pinterest, Google+, videos, podcasts, e-news and RSS feeds. The dedicated events and tourism site That’s Melbourne, which can be found via the City of Melbourne (2010) website (www.thatsmelbourne.com.au), also provides a range of interactive and entertaining options for people wanting to find out what is occurring in Melbourne. These options include blogs, Facebook updates, YouTube files and Twitter posts, event listings, visitor assistance, dining and nightlife suggestions, and other tools.

The use of websites for emergency warnings, management and recovery was a common occurrence as the web offers an immediate and direct way of getting messages to many people in local communities in targeted areas. Many councils created dedicated information sections to establish links to emergency services websites, such as the Country Fire Authority and State Emergency Services, in order to provide advice and information and contact details in relation to flooding, storm damage and bushfires. Swan Hill Council (2010), which is located in rural Victoria, generates a dedicated link
to State Emergency Services and provides updates on flooding advice on the front page of the website when a situation arises.

Social media on council websites in general tended to be used in a mode that was ‘one-way’ (for example, use of Twitter as a one-way tool to push out information such as media releases or event information, with the safety of subscribing and sending to a specific audience). There were very few public ‘two-way’ examples of information feedback in real-time, where the message could not be controlled.

*Cluster 2. Understanding and engaging the user, customisation and responsiveness: engaging stakeholders, customising and personalising websites for democratic outreach, and responsiveness to target audiences.*

This cluster concentrates on functional capability in understanding the needs and preferences of people in relation to online services and communications. It investigates the provision of targeted information and customised services for particular groups, and packaging information and services to meet specific user needs, rather than reliance on mass-communication.

**Personalising and Customising Websites** (Feature 22 in Tables 2, 3 and 4)

This is the ability to select which information and services are visible on screen, move them around, view some topics of interest and disable others. This also includes the presence of personalised logins, which links customer details and information behind the scenes. In terms of personalising online services and communication, the web audits found that there was little customisation of sites to the needs of customers. Personalisation or customisation was present on only 4% of websites (4 of 100), two of which were in Victoria (1 Rural/Regional and 1 Suburban) and two in New South Wales (1 Inner Urban and 1 Suburban). One example of a council using personalised information through a dedicated login was Parramatta Council’s (2010) Online Services Portal, accessible from the front page of the website (www.parracity.nsw.gov.au).
The study found that ‘break-out’ sites on specific topics were common, reflecting an effort to cater for segments of the community audience. Some of the examples include strategic planning websites such as the City of Melbourne’s (2010) dedicated Future Melbourne (www.futuremelbourne.com.au) website, Camden Council’s (2010) dedicated family website Camden Kids in New South Wales (www.camdenkids.com.au), and youth websites such as City of Greater Bendigo’s (2010) Youth Online Bendigo (pictured in Diagram 8). Councils also offered a range of tourism websites, history websites, library websites, recreation facility websites, arts and entertainment centre websites, and specific project websites (e.g. developments or regional initiatives). Business and Investment was frequently a separate site, including information on starting a business, investment opportunities, business data and directories.


Diagram removed for Copyright purposes

Go to website: www.yobendigo.com.au
E-News, Subscriptions, Audio, Video and Databases (Features 6, 7, 8, 9 and 20 in Tables 2, 3 and 4).

The use of RSS or website updates was present on 53% of sites, enabling people to elect to receive regular updates on particular topics (or web pages) of their choice (e.g. employment vacancies, events or news). A total of 56% (28) of the councils in New South Wales featured RSS capabilities on their websites (16 of 28 Rural/Regional, 6 of 15 Suburban, and 6 of 7 Inner Urban councils), and 50% (25) of the councils in Victoria featured RSS capabilities on their websites (10 of 23 Rural/Regional, 11 of 22 Suburban and 4 of 5 Inner Urban councils).

A total of 20% of all council websites had audio features on their websites and 24% had video featured on their websites. Audio and video capabilities were predominantly used as marketing, tourism or employment tools. Altogether, 12% (6) of the councils in New South Wales featured audio files on their websites (1 of 28 Rural/Regional, 3 of 15 Suburban, and 2 of 7 Inner Urban councils), and 28% (14) of the councils in Victoria featured audio files (2 of 23 Rural/Regional, 9 of 22 Suburban and 3 of 5 Inner Urban councils). A total of 22% (11) of the councils in New South Wales featured video files on their websites (5 of 28 Rural/Regional, 3 of 15 Suburban, and 3 of 7 Inner Urban councils), and 26% (13) of the councils in Victoria featured video files (3 of 23 Rural/Regional, 7 of 22 Suburban and 3 of 5 Inner Urban councils).


Databases were featured on most websites (95%) across both States and across the spectrum of council locations, providing search tools and contact details to connect people with a range of community groups, businesses and special interests relevant to the needs of customers.
Electronic news (e-news) appeared on 52% of websites, indicating that people were subscribing to receive news from councils on particular topics of interest. Some of the newsletter topics were related to business, events, sustainability and general news. More than one-half, 52% (26), of the councils in New South Wales (14 of 28 Rural/Regional, 8 of 15 Suburban and 4 of 7 Inner Urban councils) featured e-newsletters on their websites, and 52% (26) of the councils in Victoria (12 of 23 Rural/Regional, 9 of 22 Suburban and 5 of 5 Inner Urban) featured e-newsletters on their websites. Willoughby Council (2010) in New South Wales (www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au) offered a range of e-newsletters on topics as diverse as bushcare, climate, library activities, performing arts and festivals.

**Advocacy and Campaigns** (Features 24 and 25 of Tables 2, 3 and 4).

Innovative examples of councils engaging their communities included a Wiki on the historic 150th anniversary of the establishment of Orange Council in New South Wales, with photographs, history and community comments; and online campaigns including a regional New South Wales Highway Upgrade campaign via the Bega Valley Shire Council (2010) website (www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au) and an Evocities campaign which aims to encourage people to move to country New South Wales (pictured in Diagram 9). Online games and interactive flash features that enable users to interact in a creative and enjoyable way were discovered on the website of Auburn Council (2010), in New South Wales. (See www.auburn.nsw.gov.au/waste/index.html for a waste education game that teaches people how to recycle.) These innovations reflect the commitment of some councils to providing services and online communications in a more dynamic way, in order to engage the audience, to educate, to influence and to facilitate decision-making.

A total of seven of the 100 council websites studied featured campaigns on their websites for such purposes as advocacy, seeking government funding and safety, or encouraging people to either relocate to or visit a particular region. Of these councils, five were from New South Wales (2 were Rural/Regional, 2 were Suburban and 1 was Inner Urban), and two were from Victoria (1 Inner Urban and 1 Suburban council). Only two councils of 100 featured advertising on their websites; both were in New South Wales (1 was Rural/Regional and 1 was Suburban).

Go to website: www.evocities.com.au/locations/wagga-wagga

Cluster 3. Connecting government services, collaboration and integration: the existence of integrated portals that provide a one-stop-shop

This cluster is about connecting services across the local area and other levels of government in order to maximise the benefit to the user and improve efficiencies between government agencies.

This section is relatively short, because the most striking thing about this cluster is its relative absence.

Integrated Portal and Links to Other Sites (Features 28 and 4 in Tables 2, 3 and 4).

The benchmark study found that no councils had reached the stage of creating website portals that linked services seamlessly with other government services, or had fully-integrated portals that link customer services behind the scenes and enable customers to view or utilise a variety of different services of their choice through one port of entry.

However, a few councils had created personalised login pages by means of which users could complete transactions via the website, which indicated a step in this direction. The
website of Hornsby Council (2010) in New South Wales (www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au) features a login and a range of online services. This council received an award for e-government received by this council as early as 2007. Some websites also displayed links with key agencies, partners and services, such as the use of the Australia Post Bill Pay site for rates payments and navigation on the front page connecting to relevant tourism services (such as airports, accommodation and attractions). Initiatives of this type could indicate a move towards integration of services. In addition, a total of 92% of council websites had links directing people to other sites such as State and Federal government agencies, emergency services, related tourism sites, utility sites, environmental agencies, regional websites, neighbouring councils and community services.

Camden Council (2010) in New South Wales (www.camden.nsw.gov.au) provides an example of a council website that provides links to key attractions and businesses (with sections on Dining, Attractions, Recreation, Arts and other facilities), enabling visitors to see and experience what the area had to offer. Other councils, such as Kempsey Shire in New South Wales, provided links to government agencies and relevant organisations, such as Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and ‘Save Water’. Blue Mountains in New South Wales linked to local attractions and the government agency Road Traffic Authority.

Despite these examples, there was no evidence of totally integrated service delivery between government agencies and services, a goal espoused by Federal governments in Australia and internationally (as discussed in the literature chapter).

**Cluster 4. Governance: Facilitating accessibility, reliability, usability, privacy and security**

The governance cluster refers to the capacity of the websites, and the systems, policies and processes underpinning them, to ensure that services are easily accessible, trustworthy, safe and responsive.
Usability/Navigation (Features 10, 11 and 12 in Tables 2, 3 and 4).

In terms of usability and navigation, most websites had search capabilities on the front page (98%) and a Quick find option (86%). The websites that focused on the user rather than the internal structure of the organisation tended to arrange information by themes (e.g. Online Services, Have Your Say, Connect With Us) and label it for particular audiences (e.g. Residents, Visitors, Business), or provided multiple options for conducting searches (e.g. a search box, A-Z index, ‘I want to…’ (options), sitemap, quick links/popular links). A total of 63% of websites had a sitemap showing the layout of the website as another navigation function. Some websites had key features identified in a clearly visible way that made them easy to find from the front page, in addition to good visual design and clear information architecture. In terms of usability or ease of use, the most effective websites had navigation buttons and topics that were easy to understand and follow, more direct pathways to information and well-organised structures. Generally, the benchmark studies of more user-friendly and interactive websites took less time to complete than the examinations of those that were difficult to follow.

Websites Offering Contact Information and Publications (Features 1, 2, 3 and 5 in Tables 2, 3 and 4).

Telephone numbers, physical addresses, email details and publications were present on 100% of websites. This information is standard, in the sense that most websites at least display the contact details of an organisation. Moreover, information or publications are easily placed on websites and made part of content management systems.

Accessibility (Features 16 and 17 in Tables 2, 3 and 4).

Compliance with the Australian Federal Government’s Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the internationally recognised World Wide Web Consortium (2010) or ‘W3C’ website accessibility standards are important steps in ensuring that websites are accessible to all people. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 (part of the W3C standards) provide a wide range of recommendations for making website
content more accessible. There were varying degrees of accessibility on websites in Victoria and New South Wales. It appeared that only 48% of websites had accessibility standards applied or promoted overall. Most Victorian websites (68%, or 34 of 50) included a statement of W3C or features promoting accessibility. In New South Wales only 28% (14 of 50) included a statement of WCAG standards or features promoting accessibility. Accessibility compliance is important. If a person with a disability makes a complaint about an inaccessible website that is upheld under the Australian Disability Discrimination Act 1992, the relevant council can be forced to pay a significant financial penalty and ordered to address the website inaccessibility issue.

In Victoria at the time of the benchmarking study in 2009/10, accessibility was featured on 14 of 23 Rural/Regional council sites, 16 of 22 Suburban council sites and four of five Inner Urban council sites. By comparison, in New South Wales, only eight of 28 Rural/Regional councils, three of 15 Suburban councils and three of seven Inner Urban councils featured accessibility on sites.

The most accessible websites clearly identified that they were striving to meet World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Accessibility Standards and explained how they were doing so. They demonstrated user-friendly navigation, had options to change font size, had a content-only version of their website available where graphics and images could be removed, had attachments that were Word documents and not PDF files, and the pictures were labelled with alt tags (scroll-over captions that appear) so that vision-impaired people using a screen reader could easily make sense of the site.

A TTY (teletypewriter), or National Relay Service, was promoted for people with hearing difficulties (usually on the Contact Us page or front page). Other features included options for SMS (text messaging), audio files of newsletters and audio readers on the website.
**Language Translations** (Feature 17 in Tables 2, 3 and 4).

Evidence of the provision of translation of information in different languages was present, though only to varying degrees, on a mere 29% of websites, with most providing limited text and referring people to a phone number. A total of eight websites in New South Wales featured translation messages (6 Suburban, 2 Inner Urban and 0 Rural/Regional), and 21 websites in Victoria (17 Suburban, 4 Inner Urban and 0 Rural/Regional) featured translation messages.

**Security and Privacy** (Features 14 and 15 in Tables 2, 3 and 4).

Security and privacy are important issues that need to be highlighted on websites as they enhance trust, especially for new users of online technologies.

Most websites had a privacy statement (93%), and a disclaimer or copyright statement. The best websites had ‘About this site’ or accessibility statements explaining the site, accessibility, the use of cookies (which trace information and visitation to websites) and various technical functions and options for feedback to improve the site.

Security was mentioned as a statement on only 43% of websites, though some references were made through disclaimers about using the internet and linking to other, external websites. This is an area that could be improved to increase the community’s level of trust in conducting transactions on a council website.

Another aspect of website governance was the use of disclaimers and terms and conditions in order to ensure that users were aware of accessing information, commenting online or using services via the websites. These are equally important to the organisation (for moderation, legal protection and good governance) as they are to customers using the site (for understanding, privacy, security and trust).
Discussion of the Benchmarking Results

A number of issues emerge from the results presented for each of the four clusters, and these are noted in this section. Most of these issues are further explored in the next chapter, which presents the perspectives of senior practitioners, commentators and academics.

The overall results across the 30 features

The benchmarking study and the tool used provide all councils in Australia with the means to establish their own profile and to compare themselves with a substantial section of the sector.

The results across all of the council websites measured in 2009/10 identified an average score of 18 of 30 features present, just over one-half, which indicated significant room for improvement, particularly when the range of scores span from the lowest (9) to the highest (26). However, the data indicate that some individual council organisations were offering significantly higher levels of online services and opportunities for interactive engagement and participation via their websites. The data also indicate that the technology is available for a range of online features that could, in principle, be taken up by most councils, suggesting that actual take-up is related to the organisation’s knowledge, resources and commitment to providing services and interactive communications online. This capability and commitment is reflected in and tested by the business model of the council, as highlighted in the earlier literature review chapter and further discussed in the following chapter.

Council Services Online

While the benchmarking study revealed a high level of presence of some basic online services (98%) across all websites examined, the average number of services that were able to be fully completed online was only five. The highest number of online services recorded across all websites (17) set a standard at the time of the study and suggested that the average of five services could be almost quadrupled across the industry. When
comparing the results of Rural/Regional, Inner Urban and Suburban councils, it was also interesting to note that there was little variance in the average number of services available online across locations. Again, this suggests the potential for all councils (whether country, city or suburban) to significantly increase service delivery online. The benchmarking study provides important data on which councils were performing well with higher levels of online service delivery, and it provides an insight into some of the ways councils are delivering services or organising their websites with a focus on the customer.

While it is the role of the local government organisation to provide services for citizens online, it is also important to understand how the expectations and experiences of citizens relate to online service delivery, in a constantly changing technological environment. As noted previously, the literature suggests that the expectations of citizens regarding service delivery online are high, and that government services should be delivered in a way that matches the private sector, where citizens are already accustomed to using a range of fully-executable online service tools, such as online banking, subscriptions, insurance, travel bookings, entertainment, purchases and a range of other services (available at all hours of the day and night). However, as suggested by the interviews reported in the next chapter, there needs to be more research conducted on the services people say they want from local e-government, and these services need to be relevant and targeted to audience needs.

With the capabilities that the internet presents, the boundaries in cyberspace have changed. The physical distance to the local town hall becomes less of an issue when a range of services can be delivered in a virtual town hall, and services are able to be accessed outside of traditional office hours. It can always be argued that the nature of local government business is often more challenging to access and organise: services can be more physical (such as road works), complex (such as planning applications) or require relationship building and face-to-face contact (such as home care or child care).
However, at least some components of these services can be undertaken online. Online services can be created by councils analysing their service delivery processes from end to end, breaking them down into stages, establishing elements that are suitable for electronic delivery and those that are not.

One reason that some councils are offering more services online than others could be that they are accessing services shared with other councils in order to simplify the process (for example, use of links to online services such as Bill Pay), or using modules or templates such as e-planning or e-tendering, where grouped services have developed suitable solutions together. The more advanced websites audited had dedicated sections that were labelled Online Services or brought together a range of services that could be conducted online in one distinct portal. Some included personalised, secure logins for this that are far easier for citizens to find. Consolidation of this type reflects a strategic effort to focus on the customer, attract online transactions and integrate services behind the scenes.

**Interactive Communication, Engagement and Social Media**

At the time of the benchmarking study, only one-quarter of all websites included interactive communication features such as the ability to post comments via social media tools or consultation forums. With social media being used by many people in their everyday lives, at home and at work, for professional networking, socialising and entertainment, there appears to be a significant divide between what the general community is already accustomed to doing and what councils are offering.

This situation could have arisen for a number of reasons. One issue is that the open and immediate communication that social media enables typically occurs in a public forum in which anyone can view and contribute to the discussion. There could be a perceived risk of potential damage to the organisation’s image and reputation as a consequence of it not being able to control or manage the message, as is the practice with traditional communication in local government organisations. Social media creates a two-way dialogue, which means anyone is able to provide their views in an instantaneous way for all to see. This form of fast, immediate communication presents significant issues for
local government, challenging traditional practices of carefully scripting, checking and approving material. The benchmark data suggested that councils were more likely to choose tools that could be controlled over those that were public and potentially uncontrollable: for example, the use of tools to provide feedback on a particular topic to a dedicated officer (rather than in an open, public forum) online. Such examples included online forms and surveys (84%) and email interactivity (98%), through the use of which only the council recipient could view the responses.

Despite the challenges presented by online communication and social media, some councils are achieving success in this area. The benchmarking study found double the number of interactive communication features (such as social media pages and community engagement portals) in New South Wales as were found in Victoria across all locations: Inner Urban, Suburban and Rural/Regional. It is not obvious why NSW had a higher rate of adoption of these interactive communication features than Victoria.

**Personalisation, Customisation and Connectedness**

While the benchmarking data revealed that customisation and personalisation of websites was low overall, what was clear was a move away from the traditional corporate central site to segmented sites with information packaged for specific audiences and mini-websites created in an effort to cater to the needs of specific groups. Other features that councils were using to target information included the use of RSS web feeds, social media sites and electronic newsletters on specific topics such as events, arts and sustainability. Where efforts are being made to develop a range of separate websites that are independent, and potentially with a range of authors, it could be argued that dilution of the council brand is possible if these initiatives are not carefully managed.

The full potential of the one-stop-shop is not being realised at any level of government across the globe (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow & Tinkler 2008; Bekkers & Homburg 2007). There was no evidence in this study of councils reaching the level of transformation espoused internationally as the final stage of website advancement. One reason for this could be the fact that there is a very significant organisational issue
around whether the business model of the council is able to achieve the necessary integration connecting services behind the scenes.

**Governance Capability**

Governance capability is the capacity of organisations to respond to customer requests with the immediacy that online communication commands, whilst ensuring the integrity, privacy, security, accessibility and usability of online communications and services for all users.

The governance implications of e-government for local government organisations are both complicated and serious, from an administrative perspective and a legal perspective. Websites must comply with the Federal government’s Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and international W3C Accessibility standards (World Wide Web Consortium 2010), in order to ensure access for all, and there are significant legal and financial penalties for non-compliance when complaints are made. Despite the fact that offences are regarded as serious, accessibility scored a low level of presence in the benchmarking study (48%), thus identifying significant legal and financial risks to organisations, as well as the growth of the digital divide, which is arguably a breach of the implicit social contract between council and citizens.

Security and privacy are also matters affecting the confidence with which people transact business on websites. While security statements received a low score of presence on websites (43%), a key area that needs strengthening, privacy statements were present on most websites (93%) in 2009/10 (explaining the commitment of the organisation to maintaining customer privacy and how this is undertaken). However, this does not reduce the risks to the user. Privacy becomes complicated when people place their lives online and register personal details and posts on public sites. It is important to note that online innovations such as social media take citizens outside the official realms of the council website. It must be clear to the user that they are entering sites that have different rules when they engage in discussions on Facebook pages, Twitter sites, You Tube and so on. For example, if a profile is registered, privacy settings must immediately be selected to ensure that posted information, photographs
and videos are only visible to some users, and not the world. When registering with a social media site, a person’s name and details could potentially be searchable by employers, identity thieves and the general public. Moreover, if photographs are posted, the rights to those photographs may then be owned by the social media website which can legally retain the copyright to use those photographs for marketing purposes.

Governance issues relating to the role and behaviour of individual councillors are also complicated by e-government. Councillors are elected representatives from the community who play a significant role in creating policy and presenting views on local issues, which are sometimes at odds with the combined decision of council or recommendations of council employees. Many councillors have high public profiles, engage with traditional and online media, and have strong views on matters. They also have roles outside the council in their own professions, as leaders of community groups or interest groups, and are sometimes members of political parties. The use of personal social media sometimes blurs these roles, and could pose an interesting challenge if a councillor was to direct residents to personal sites/blogs and pages rather than official council sites. The policies and guidelines must be clear for employees and for elected representatives, while at the same time navigating some very complex territory.

The interviews reported in the next chapter also present a host of issues specific to employees such as authorisation and empowerment to respond to and moderate communications online, while safeguarding the reputation of the organisation, its credibility and trust in the eyes of the public.

The next section of this chapter provides a comparison of the benchmarking study with other major empirical studies undertaken both in Australia and overseas.
COMPARISON OF THE 2009/10 BENCHMARKING STUDY WITH OTHER MAJOR EMPIRICAL STUDIES UNDERTAKEN IN AUSTRALIA AND OVERSEAS

A number of significant empirical studies were undertaken between the years of 2000 and 2010 both within Australia and overseas (listed in Appendix 15), which has enabled points of comparison to be made in relation to the take-up of e-government.

The first comparison to be made was with the work of Shackleton, Fisher and Dawson (2005) in an Australian study of 20 websites over three years, which suggested there was an ad-hoc approach to the use of the web by local government to deliver services, provide information and gain community views. This was a view also confirmed in the 2009/10 benchmarking study.

Their results showed internet-based service delivery grew rapidly over the period of their longitudinal study. The greatest growth was in providing email contact details, postings related to community information and available services. They also reported a great variation on what could be paid online and how. The council with the most comprehensive payment options included pet registrations, fines, child care costs, meals on wheels, other payments relating to aged care uses, and a link to an external electronic provider. Seven (35%) councils only had provision for the payment of rates and all of these Councils were using an external provider for electronic payments. Six councils (30%) allowed two payments; online rates and usually animal registration. The most variation was in the e-service category (creative uses of the technology for the delivery of services) with some councils using the web to provide services such as tracking of building permits and interactive maps, electronic feedback forms and opinion polls, tracking of services and video streaming of council meetings.

By comparison, the 2009/10 benchmarking study reported here (undertaken six years after the Shackleton et al study) revealed that 98% of councils studied had at least one online service and 92% had online payments. The 2009/10 study also measured the number of services provided by each council and council category (inner urban, suburban and rural/regional), finding an average of 5 services provided across the board.
with a range from 0 at the lowest end to 17 at the highest. This study suggests that individual councils were likely to have higher or lower levels of service delivery based upon their organisational capabilities, culture, leadership, skills or commitment to e-government rather than the location of the council as rural, suburban or inner urban council. There were pockets of innovation across all three location categories, as was the case for interactive communication, engagement tools (such as social media and online forums).

The other major empirical study in Australia was by Adam and Featherstone (2007), which examined local government use of the web in marketing in the United States and Australia, through an audit of 180 websites. Unfortunately, direct comparison with the findings was impossible as the study was based on a commercial tool (the Marketing Readiness of Websites Indicator), which was primarily based on marketing elements, as opposed to e-government features.

One thing that can be said is that the findings of this thesis matched the focus on customer-centric communications via the web, with a clear trend towards customer-orientated and segmented websites and tools aimed at reaching specific audiences (e.g. business websites, arts/cultural e-newsletters, youth portals etc).

The most significant study for purposes of comparison of the findings with the Benchmarking study reported here is the work of West (2000, 2001 & 2008) in the United States. For ease of comparison, Appendix 16 contains a series of tables that directly compare the results of the West study (based on federal and state government websites) with the Benchmarking study (based on local government websites) forming part of this thesis.

As the West methodology (2000, 2001, 2008) was used as the basis for the research presented in this thesis, the data from his study indicates where local government in Australia sits in comparison to federal and state government agencies in the USA. However, it is important to note that the types of organisations being compared are very different: where Councils might have over 100 diverse types of services on the website (e.g. from local laws to water collection, libraries, economic development, aged services
and planning), state and federal government agencies concentrate on more specific areas of business, which should be noted in assessing and comparing the two.

The results indicate a high level of information online, which is expected for a basic level of e-government (such as contact details: address, email and phone; publications; links and databases). However, in both studies, features allowing interactivity, participation and engagement, or providing customer value through a range of services, and customisation online, are still relatively low.

The results differ in relation to audio clips and video clips, where West’s results are double those found in this study, which reflects more interactive forms of engaging with customers in the USA State and Federal sites, than in Australian Local Government in 2009/10. However, while still at a high level, the smaller presence of databases and links to other sites in West’s study is surprising since these features help to connect with other agencies, and other organisations, which adds value for the customer in being able to deal with enquiries where more than one organisation is involved.

The presence of electronic services refers to end-to-end service delivery, where customers can transact or undertake a service completely online. While both West’s study and this study indicate that a high number of organisations have services online (89% in the US in 2008 and 98% in Australia in 2009/10) the number of services is different across different organisations. This study took the extra step of counting the total number of services for each organisation and revealed that an average of 5 services were present across the 100 websites measured. This is a low number compared to the potential demonstrated by those high-achieving organisations (a top of 17 for one Australian Council). However, overall this does demonstrate a high level of services online, with the clear majority of councils in Australia, and government agencies in the USA, measuring 3 services or above.

The presence of privacy and security policies online can translate to user confidence and trust in using online services in Government websites as they promote a strong commitment to maintaining privacy of personal details and secure transactions. Privacy policy presence was high, but still needed improvement, particularly in the USA, but
security policy presence was low (particularly for Australian council websites). This is a significant issue that needs to be addressed to enhance e-government.

Levels of accessibility were low across both studies. While on the surface, the Australian council website presence looks higher than the West study of US websites, the West study in more recent years tested for W3C compliance using a stringent ‘Wave software’ (an accessibility software) whereas the Australian results show presence of W3C commitment through a number of features (e.g. ALT tags, contrast/option to view text only, and W3C commitment/accessibility statement). In addition, foreign language access is low across both studies, even more so in Australia.

In both countries studied, the level is low and unacceptable, furthering the ‘digital divide’ between those who can and those who cannot access government services via a website due to language or disability.

User fees in West’s study refers to the charge of a fee for accessing online services. This was not measured in the Australian study as it was less relevant at local government level; however, advertising was measured and this was low in both studies at 2% each.

Public outreach or interactive participation, engagement, and personalisation of government online reflected a number of issues. Email was a common method used to contact government across both studies. Search functions were more advanced in Australian councils, probably due to the diverse range of services and information that needed to be placed online and the need to have a range of options for customers find what they needed. So it was common for not only search functions to be found where the user could type a word and search the site but also in most cases information was bundled into ‘I want to...’ options, A-Z alphabetical listings and site maps, as well as navigation of topics under key themes and groupings. This was not the case in the West study, and was recommended as a way for State and Federal Governments in the USA to improve.

Comments and broadcast referred to the ability for customers to comment openly and share information (e.g. through forums, posts, social media). The result was low in both
cases, and in Australian councils the ability to comment in an open forum was almost half that of the USA State and Federal result, indicating that far less interactivity and open dialogue online was occurring or ‘enabled’. However, the safe use of email updates or RSS (web updates) and e-news subscription was marginally higher.

Personalisation was low, but in West’s study this was more about tailoring information to customers, whereas in the Australian study, this type of segmentation was common, and the emphasis was more about customisation where advanced websites allowed users to choose what information they could see on the website, move items around on the page and create their home-page view of services and topics relevant to them.

It is important to note that the results vary from council to council in Australia, and from organisation to organisation at state and federal government level in the USA. The mere presence of a feature on a website can vary greatly in terms of quality and usability. However, the statistics provide a benchmark and alongside qualitative analysis, can provide a general direction for moving forward.

A study by Musso, Weare and Hale (2000) comprising of a content analysis of 270 municipal websites in California indicated that most websites did not take advantage of the electronic communications capabilities of the internet required to support reform. They found that the technology was designed primarily to facilitate routine interactions between service providers and recipients rather than direct citizen participation in policy-making processes. The majority of the websites were poorly designed, with few innovative technology applications and no clear mission, concentrating on service provision but not interactive communication. Only 20.7% provided users with electronic forms with which to conduct city business (e.g. building permit applications and picnic area reservations). Given that internet-based transactions offer a major innovation for cities in enterprise development and service provision, four out of five sites made no effort to experiment with this technology. These sites did not commonly provide e-mail access to officials. Only 19.6% of economic development departments could be contacted by e-mail, 14.8% of police departments and 21.1% of city councils. Forty-four web sites (16.3%) offered comment boxes that enabled users to send electronic queries and comments to city officials. As most sites with comment boxes did
not support e-mail, these comment boxes appear to be a lower quality substitute for direct e-mail access. Only 35.6% of the sites provide a link to another level of government, either Federal, State, county, or special districts. Municipal web sites were not very likely to contain information about, or links to, community organisations. Only between 13% and 20% of the sites had links to either neighbourhood organisations, fraternal and social organisations, like the Rotary club, or non-governmental organisations such as charities and religious institutions. Even fewer had links to local interest groups.

Although this study was undertaken 10 years earlier, the findings were similar to those of the Australian benchmarking study in 2009/10, in the sense that interactive communication enabling citizen participation was low. In addition, the Musso, Weare and Hale (2000) study found that electronic services offering internet transactions were scarce at the time, whilst the benchmarking study found that while nearly all of the council websites had some form of online service, there was a low level of 5 service types offered on average. Links to other State and Federal websites (a relatively easy feature to include) were high in the 2009/10 benchmarking study (compared to the Musso et al study), and the quality of the design of websites varied depending on the individual organisation.

Despite the clear opportunities presented to local governments to truly engage the community, Baldershiem and Ogard’s (2008) findings on a study of 75 city websites and 54 county websites in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden were similar to the findings of the 2009/10 Australian Benchmarking Study. They found that the efforts cities made to provide feedback channels for citizens and opportunities for participation via the website were rather limited. The classical systems were debate pages and chat pages, with or without a moderator.

Generally, the Nordic cities obtained low scores with regard to what has been termed participatory functions. The cities did not encourage direct citizen involvement via the net but seemed to prefer the tried and trusted procedures of municipal politics. Feedback opportunities were mostly provided in the form of e-mail addresses for the municipality, and specific citizen feedback or complaints system could be seen in relatively few
places. A few cities demonstrated efforts to enhance the community pages from tourist ads to a community hub but the general finding was of rather static information management. On the other hand, retrieval functions were fairly well developed, with navigational aids and search engines in place, allowing citizen to search the site by topic. So-called “intelligent agents” (enabling the capacity to alert citizens to the publication of documents on the web) were unusual.

The study on Nordic websites reflected similar findings to those of the benchmarking study, with low scores for participatory functions such as the ability to openly comment online and genuinely contribute to consultations (e.g. via online forums and social media, present on only 25% of Australia websites), and more reliance on direct and private forms of feedback through surveys, forms and email functions, which are only able to be viewed by the council. Navigational aids were also high in the Benchmarking study with many different options available to search for information. However, the capability of subscribing to receive email alerts or updates via RSS or intelligence agents seemed to be more advanced than Nordic countries with over half of Australian websites having this feature present.

Wohlers (2009) study of more than 1000 municipal websites in the United States and Germany found that in responding to the information needs of specific groups within the community, city e-government has evolved beyond the basic information-oriented stage. Local governments were in the process of centralising their citizen-oriented e-communication channels and categorising their web-based services. Wohlers argued that the strong service-oriented economy in the United States had resulted in an increasing percentage of cities in the United States offering web portals and online services where citizens can pay utility bills, parking tickets, building permits, and taxes, as well as submit applications for city jobs, permits, license renewals, and property registrations. This matches the findings of a number of other studies, including this Australian benchmarking study, which found online service presence had grown (although the number and diversity of services varies across councils).

In examining the intersection of social media and engagement with government, the Pew Internet and American Life Project study by Smith (2010) explored the opinions and experienced of users of government websites at all levels, in the United States. The
study looked at emerging technologies and asked about the use of online tools such as text messaging, online social networks or blogs to keep up-to-date with what government agencies or officials are doing.

In the twelve months preceding the survey:

- 15% of internet users watched a video on a government website
- 15% of email users signed up to receive email alerts from a government agency or official
- 13% of internet users read the blog of a government agency or official
- 5% of internet users followed or became a fan of a government agency or official on a social networking site (this represents 9% of social networking site profile owners)
- 4% of cell phone owners who use text messaging signed up to receive text messages from a government agency or official
- 2% of internet users followed a government agency or official on Twitter (this represents 7% of Twitter users)
- Online government participators tend to use new digital tools to keep up with what government is doing—58% are government social media users.

These data suggest a number of emerging themes for e-government to address: that social media and other interactive forms of communication, as well as sharing ideas and discussing issues is becoming more common, that tools other than websites are being used to engage with or talk about government issues; and that citizens who are familiar with using online media expect governments to provide these tools. These issues are further explored in the next section of this chapter.

The findings of a study by Pina, Torres and Royo (2010) based on an analysis of 75 local governments in the European Union, suggested that most websites seemed to be at the billboard stage (one-way communication); that a small number of websites had moved to the interactive stage (two-way communication) which could promote democratic participation by encouraging direct dialogue between citizens and government, and that a few websites were at the transact stage (with fully executable transactions). The websites analysed were predominantly non-interactive, limiting e-
government potential to transform the relationships between citizens and public administrations.

The results indicated low percentages (26% on average) for features of website maturity such as content arranged according to life events, facilities for credit card payments, digital signatures, live broadcast of speeches or citizen consultation. Percentages for features that were able to improve accessibility of websites and bring about social inclusion, such as text-only versions, audio access, different languages and compliance with international accessibility standards, were also low.

Overall, the eight empirical studies indicate that the potential of local e-government over 10 years has not yet been realised, with low levels of service delivery, interactive communication and participation, accessibility and governance features appearing on websites. However, there has been some change in relation to the type and range of services provided online, and there are some innovative municipalities performing better than others, which could be attributed to a range of possible influences (to be discussed in the next chapters). Finally, there is evidence that the customer use of online communications tools is changing and that the type of interaction or service required may influence the way in which customer prefer to contact, participate or do business with councils. These studies indicate that while Australian councils still have a significant journey ahead, they are grappling with the same issues that are being experienced at an international level.

The next section of this chapter provides an insight into some of the latest e-government features that have emerged since the benchmarking study took place, and in light of the international comparisons just made.
JANUARY 2012 WEBSITE REVIEW

In the previous section of this chapter, the 2009/10 benchmarking study highlighted a number of significant issues with regard to e-government around the levels and use of website technologies and the implications thereof for the council organisation. This section outlines and discusses the findings of a follow-up Website Review, undertaken with 30 Australian local government websites (15 New South Wales councils and 15 in Victoria) in January 2012.

While the 2009/10 benchmarking study used a systematic tool to assess the presence of 30 features on 100 websites, the 2012 Review focused on 30 of these websites (listed in Table 5), finding features that have become particularly prominent in the online space over the last 18 months, including: customisation tools, mobile applications, QR (Quick Response) codes, interactive maps, videos, online chat functions, consultation forums and social media. The aim was not to replicate the benchmarking study but to gain an insight into emerging trends and innovative features being used online. In addition, 14 websites in the international local government online space were explored as a point of comparison (listed in Table 6).
**Table 5. Snapshot of 30 Australian websites 2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VICTORIA COUNCIL</th>
<th>COMMENTS/CHANGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Moonee Valley (S) Vic</td>
<td>Customisation Mobile Application ‘Snap, Send, Solve’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Yarra Ranges (R) Vic</td>
<td>Customisation Social Media (Facebook)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Stonnington (IU) Vic</td>
<td>Consultation Portal Integrated Social Media (Facebook, Twitter) Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bass Coast (R) Vic</td>
<td>Customised Discussion Forum and video Online Chat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Frankston (S) Vic</td>
<td>Frankston TV My Address – Connecting our Community (interactive online mapping of facilities and services in the municipality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Whittlesea (S) Vic</td>
<td>Christmas Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. East Gippsland Shire (R)</td>
<td>Purchase tickets online / new website Twitter Near me – map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Port Phillip (IU)</td>
<td>Have Your Say Forum (Bang the Table)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Casey (S) Vic</td>
<td>Casey Conversations Forum (Bang the Table) Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Melbourne (IU) Vic</td>
<td>Social Media competitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Hume (S) Vic</td>
<td>Interactive Maps Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Brimbank (S) Vic</td>
<td>Interactive Maps Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Borroondara (IU) Vic</td>
<td>Interactive Maps Video Social Media (Facebook, Twitter and Blogger)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Swan Hill (R) Vic</td>
<td>QR Codes linking to the website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Kingston (S) Vic</td>
<td>Blog Integrated Social Media (Facebook and Twitter) Consultation portal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEW SOUTH WALES COUNCIL</th>
<th>COMMENTS/CHANGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Parramatta NSW (S)</td>
<td>Mobile Application for fixing issues Live Support Online ‘Chat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Sydney (IU) NSW</td>
<td>QR Code – Events (Bizarre Bazaar) More Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Port Macquarie - Hastings (R) NSW</td>
<td>Have Your Say forum (Bang The Table) Social Media (Facebook) Competitions – win an Ipad 2 Webcasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Hornsby Shire (S) NSW</td>
<td>Online Services and login</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Bankstown NSW (S)</td>
<td>Translations of whole site Social Media with Mayor (follow me on Facebook and Twitter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Liverpool (S) NSW</td>
<td>Translations of whole site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Blacktown NSW (S)</td>
<td>Virtual Front Counter Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Cessnock (R) NSW</td>
<td>Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Bega Valley (R) NSW</td>
<td>Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Snowy River (R) NSW</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Waverley NSW (IU)</td>
<td>Video Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Hurstville (S) NSW</td>
<td>Interactive maps Video Social Media (Facebook)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. North Sydney (IU) NSW</td>
<td>Social Media (YouTube / Video on front page, Facebook and Twitter) (Previously had a blog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Fairfield (S) NSW</td>
<td>Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Mosman (IU) NSW</td>
<td>Advanced participation forum Extensive Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, blogs) QR codes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRISBANE SOCIAL MEDIA EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31. Brisbane (IU) QLD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY: Council Locations:**
- R – Rural/Regional
- S – Suburban
- IU – Inner Urban
### Table 6. Snapshot of 14 International Websites: UK, Canada, USA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Websites</th>
<th>Trends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nottingham, UK</td>
<td>My Nottingham – customised and social media integrated site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Manchester, UK</td>
<td>Do it online – extensive services Winter service information (real-time) – connected with social media sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Leeds, UK</td>
<td>Extensive online services – 45+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Oxford, UK</td>
<td>Do it online: Pay it, Report it, Apply for it, Find it / Services 50+ / 20 most popular / Hot topics Advertising ‘Advertise with Us’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cambridge, UK</td>
<td>Customised site Social media savvy site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Warwickshire, UK</td>
<td>Mobile Apps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Hampshire, UK</td>
<td>Mobile Apps for Library, Culture and e-books Advanced online surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Westminster, UK</td>
<td>Find it in Westminster Interactive map – view transport, education, leisure, council services, children’s services, health services, amenities, libraries, offices, police stations ‘Your one stop shop express’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Edmonton, Canada</td>
<td>Planning Consultation site – fully interactive and connected with social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Los Angeles, USA</td>
<td>Ideas Lab – fully interactive &amp; participatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. New York, USA</td>
<td>Notify NYC – register to be notified about emergency events – via mobile / email / phone etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Saint Peters, Minnesota, USA</td>
<td>Snowplough updates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Tucson, Arizona, USA</td>
<td>TV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Social Media Growth and Community Engagement Tools

The website reviews suggest some growth in the presence of social media sites. This was not only apparent in the larger suburban and inner urban council websites examined, but also in the rural/regional areas. For example, the Shire of Yarra Ranges (2012) in Victoria has a Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/yracouncil) and a Twitter Page (www.twitter.com/yracouncil) that are used to encourage citizen feedback on local issues and promote services and activities (such as library programs, community events and immunisation sessions). In addition to broadcasting council information to citizens, Yarra Ranges re-tweets information that it monitors from other Twitter sites relevant to the local area, including tourism news, train services, Country Fire Authority messages and government agency updates (from organisations such as Business Victoria,
Another example of a rural council using social media is Port Macquarie-Hastings Council (2012) in New South Wales (www.facebook.com/pmhc2444), which allows people to comment on council activities via its Facebook page, find out about upcoming events, projects and the latest news, and also encourages participation in consultation opportunities.

The 2012 review indicated that more websites offered consultation portals with discussion forums that engaged community in feedback online across all council locations (Rural/Regional, Suburban and Inner Urban). One-half of the consultation forums identified through the 2012 review appeared in templates from online community engagement company Bang The Table (2012) (www.bangthetable.com.au), which sets up interactive tools and guidelines making it easier for councils to communicate with and consult citizens online. However, a number of councils had developed customised solutions, including the consultation portal offered on the Bass Coast Shire Council (2012) website (http://consult.basscoast.vic.gov.au/portal) which offers a range of consultation topics for community feedback, a personalised login and a video on how to use the portal. The City of Stonnington (2012) website (shown in Diagram 10) also offers a customised consultation portal, Connect With Us, that includes social media, polls, forums, videos and surveys. These tools enable people to have their say by either by voting or commenting on an issue.

It was noticeable that a few councils had taken online consultation forums to high levels of participation, generating, sharing and showcasing community ideas. For example, Mosman Council (2012) in New South Wales offered a ‘Big Ideas’ forum in addition to extensive social media options (Diagram 11), which enables people to present ideas, and others to vote on these ideas. Another example was Kingston’s ‘Make Your Mark’ visioning forum connected to the online community engagement and research tool IdeaScale (http://ideascale.com/ and www.kingston.ideascale.com), which allows people to submit and vote on ideas, post comments, link to social media pages (including Facebook and a blog) and participate in surveys. These examples extend beyond the adoption of the interactive tools and social media, to actively promoting, engaging and encouraging citizens to suggest ideas and leave these ideas for others in the community to vote on.

Diagram removed for Copyright purposes


Diagram removed for Copyright purposes

Go to website: www.mosman.nsw.gov.au
Emergencies

Case studies on the use of social media by councils re-affirm the benefits and success of channels such as Facebook and Twitter during emergencies, for extreme weather warnings and in recovery situations. Outside the New South Wales and Victoria website review, one example that has been widely recognised in the local government sector is the Brisbane City Council’s use of social media in 2011 during floods, featured in Table 7. The benefits of social media use during emergencies may have influenced the adoption of these tools by councils.

Table 7. Brisbane City Council Social Media In An Emergency Case Study (Whitelaw 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flooding occurred throughout Queensland, Australia, in January 2011. Leading up to this event, Brisbane Council sought to communicate urgently with residents and businesses in the flood area and general community. Brisbane Council’s Digital Communication Team devised and implemented a highly successful social media campaign to communicate vital flood information to the community. Brisbane City Council had an established presence on Facebook and Twitter, the main channels used for mass information sharing and engagement with residents. The council also initially promoted a sandbagging video on YouTube at the beginning of the flood event. Social media channels also enabled the sharing of messages from other authorities, such as the Police, Energex, State Emergency Service (SES) and Translink. Using social media was integral to spreading information quickly and engaging directly with concerned residents, and was also an opportunity to obtain usable intelligence from the public that could then be fed back to the Local Disaster Coordination Centre (LDCC). Brisbane Council’s social media channels were monitored continuously and the most common queries from the public were fed back hourly to the LDCC to obtain the correct responses which could then be shared publicly. One of the biggest social media successes for Brisbane Council involved co-ordination of volunteers. On Friday 14 January, around 5pm, the Lord Mayor announced that there would be Volunteering Clean-Up weekend. By 6am the next day, more than 10,000 volunteers arrived at designated meeting points and had registered to help the community. Another example was the case of a woman whose phone was not working and she was caught in flooding at Yeronga. She contacted Council via Facebook asking for help. She was awaiting evacuation by the SES, which had no way of contacting her. Council contacted the SES and Queensland Police Service directly via phone and Twitter, and worked with them to ensure the woman was evacuated. Within two hours the woman let Council know via Facebook that she was safe.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Statistics: Brisbane Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook:</td>
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Through the 2012 website review, it was apparent that a range of tools currently being used by the private sector are starting to appear in more local government websites (including online Google maps, blogs such as those offered by WordPress and Blogger, Wikis and corporate Facebook pages).

**QR Codes**
Another form of technology that is being widely used in the private sector is the ‘QR code’ or Quick Response code, which is similar to a bar code that can be scanned by a smart phone and linked to a range of data online or in multimedia format. The data are commonly stored on websites but the technology means the code can be put on almost anything, so people can discover information anywhere and anytime they see the code. While evidence of QR codes was still low in the 30 websites reviewed, there was evidence that they are starting to appear in both Victoria and New South Wales across all locations: Rural, Suburban and Inner Urban. The presence of QR codes can be harder to detect than other forms of technology as they may be used on printed publications, windows, posters, tickets, buildings and a range of materials that link to the website. This means they are more likely to feature on a document or sign than on a website (the destination point to which the QR Code leads). The City of Sydney (2012) has used this technology for events promotion and invitations, and Mosman Council (2012) actively promotes the use of this technology on its website (see Diagram 11) for library book information, festival promotions, road upgrade project signs, and on signage for art trails, thus providing a multimedia experience. Another innovative example was also found through an online news article featured in *The Guardian* newspaper (Severin 2011) on Swan Hill Council (a rural Victorian council) which has used QR codes for its history markers, linking to information on the council website. This is quite ground-breaking for the entire local government sector, and demonstrates how technologies can be used with success across all locations.

**Interactive Mapping**
Interactive online mapping was available on more than one-half of the websites reviewed across Victoria and New South Wales. This technology was linked to Intramap or Geospatial Information Systems already used by councils for a range of other purposes, or was linked to Google Maps via the internet. One example was the
Near Me online map featured on the new website of the East Gippsland Shire (2012), located in rural Victoria (www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au), which enables citizens to search for a service, location, park, facility, event or attraction and shows the roads, landmarks other features in the local area.

Videos, YouTube and Webcasting
The presence of videos online also appears to be increasing with the rise of social media interactivity and, in particular, YouTube. Over one-half of all websites reviewed featured videos, and this was the case across both States and all locations (Rural, Suburban and Inner Urban). Frankston City (2012) is one example of a municipality that has taken this technology one step further, by engaging the community and visitors through its Frankston TV initiative (www.frankston.tv). This is an innovative forum in which residents can post positive video footage of Frankston on YouTube to promote the features and attractions of living in the seaside city, and to combat any negative image of the area. In addition, some rural councils are using webcasting technology to broadcast live council meetings to those living in remote locations, which means that they can virtually tune in to council meetings, without needing to physically get to the town hall. One example of this phenomenon is the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council (2012) website in NSW (www.hastings.nsw.gov.au).

Customisation
The customisation of websites to meet the needs of users was more prominent and advanced in 2012, with some websites offering the user the opportunity to select navigation through sophisticated menus and web structures, to personalise the design and select information on relevant topics and services through the method of their choice. The City of Moonee Valley (2012) website (www.mooneevalley.vic.gov.au) enables people to register on What's My Moonee Valley so that they can customise the council homepage, create events in the calendar, and create directory entries. The Shire of Yarra Ranges (2012) website (www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au) allows people to choose from three personalised views of the website: as a Business, a Resident or a Visitor. The content for each selection is customised to the user group. This makes the website more relevant to people with specific needs. For example, if the Business option is selected by a local trader, the site only shows information about business activities, registrations,
events, projects, networks and forms, rather than general community information. This streamlines navigation.

**Mobile Applications and Mobile Websites**

Mobile applications were starting to appear on websites across Victoria and New South Wales in suburban councils. Applications can be used via iPhones and smartphones with android technology, which are commonly available. However, to create the applications the organisation needs to identify a customer need, arrange the design and then package the relevant information, multimedia content and online services suited to a small-sized mobile smartphone format. This is totally different from the processes and systems used for the larger official website, but can bring many benefits to the customer through the added values of convenience, portability and immediacy. Some companies offer ready-made products that can be used by councils to simplify the set-up process. However, the impact on the organisation emanating from the implementation of such technologies can be disruptive, causing increased workloads.

An example of a council using an application was the City of Moonee Valley’s (2012) use of the ‘Snap, Send, Solve’ (2012) application (see website in Diagram 12 and www.snapsendsolve.com/council), which enables citizens to report issues in under 30 seconds and take a photo of something, like a pothole in the road and send it to the council to fix. ‘Snap, Send, Solve’ determines the citizen’s location using GPS and sends back all relevant contact information. All reports are sent from a citizen’s email address so the council can communicate directly with the citizen to resolve the issue. However, there is still more to the service. The success of such an application is contingent on the item (e.g. a pothole) being physically fixed or addressed in a timely manner, which requires significant organisational capability and follow-up along with integration with councils’ customer request systems, both of which can be complex. Councils adopting this technology are taking the lead in being proactive in encouraging people to report issues. In the meantime, customers are able to use applications such as ‘Snap, Send, Solve’ to contact their council anyway (whether the council is ready or not), so if they do not embrace the technology, councils are inherently in a reactive situation.
Smartphone applications were also being used by Parramatta Council (2012) in New South Wales (www.parracity.nsw.gov.au) to offer live navigation to car spaces, and live tracking of the Parramatta Shuttle Bus. Smart Parking Parramatta uses the smart phone GPS to pinpoint the location of commuters and displays nearby car parks. It also enables users to touch on any of the locations to view car park details, including up-to-the-minute occupancy rates.


Diagram removed for Copyright purposes

**Go to website: www.mvcc.vic.gov.au**

**Online Chat**

Online chat functions were present on very few websites. These facilities enable free contact and real-time discussion to occur between citizens and customer service staff via the internet, rather than by means of the telephone. The Parramatta and Bass Coast Shire councils offered this service, but it is not surprising that this feature was absent from most websites, given the impact that this type of technology would have on the business model of a council. It requires new processes, dedicated people, skills, training and integration of systems to ensure that customer requests are dealt with immediately, recorded, processed and followed up appropriately and efficiently.
Integration
In terms of achieving integration and connected services behind the scenes, there was no clear progress reflected in the examples studied in 2012. However, nearly one-half of the council websites reviewed did feature dedicated sections for online services or online payments, which indicates an organisational commitment to grouping similar services for convenient customer access. In some cases, a personalised login was established to access a range of services.

International examples
Using the same convenience search strategy (described in the Methods Chapter), 14 international council websites were reviewed, as a point of comparison with Australia, including eight councils in the UK, five councils in USA, and one council in Canada.

The number of fully executable services available on council websites in the United Kingdom was significantly higher than that found on those examined in the Australian study. The Leeds City Council (2012) website (www.leeds.gov.uk) had more than 45 services on offer through its Do It Online portal, including 17 different bills and payments that could be processed online, seven business transactions, 11 license transactions, 10 different online forms, a calculator, a range of facility booking options, planning application services, and library services such as book renewals. This was more than double Australia’s highest standard of 17 services measured through the benchmarking study in 2009/10, and significantly more than the average of five services across all councils measured. The Oxford City Council (2012) website (www.oxford.gov.uk) was another example of a website with extensive services on offer under the labels of Pay It, Report It, Apply for it. This website highlighted the 20 most popular online services for user convenience, but offered over 50 online services, clearly marked with an icon which indicated that the service could be undertaken electronically (for example, via an online form or by online payment).

Mobile applications on websites in both the United Kingdom and the United States showed traffic details, weather alerts, updates on the use of snow ploughs and other real-time information. An outstanding example was the Manchester City Council (2012) website in the UK (www.manchester.gov.uk), which featured a dedicated Winter
Service Information section, in which severe weather warnings, delays and updates were broadcast to citizens to help them get around the city and home safely. The City of New York (2012) example, ‘Notify NYC’ (www.nyc.gov), is a multi-platform notification system which enables people to register to receive storm warnings and information updates on important issues, activities, events in their area and emergencies. Users could choose to receive notifications via mobile, telephone or computer.

Some councils are also using applications for promotional, information and entertainment purposes. For example, the Hampshire County Council (2012) website (www.hampshire.gov.uk) offers a range of mobile applications for specific services, customised to citizen interests, including library services and cultural activities. Warwickshire County Council’s (2012) web applications (Diagram 13) contain up-to-the-minute news and events information, and details on how to find key services and help citizens get in touch with the council.

The international web reviews indicated that online integrated mapping, by means of which a wide range of services can be viewed on an interactive map of the council area, is at an advanced level. The City of Westminster (2012) website (www.westminster.gov.uk) provided a map searchable by address or postcode, which enabled people to see their local services, facilities, schools, children’s services, health services, leisure centres, attractions, transport options, offices, police stations, public amenities and more, on the one integrated map.

Examples of customisation and social media integration are websites designed to cascade and highlight or hide elements on the front page. The Nottingham City Council
(2012) website (www.nottingham.gov.uk) provides a range of topics such as What’s On, My News, My Sport, My Jobs and My Free Time to select from. The options are as diverse as highlighting cinemas in the local area, to the latest weather, rugby news, schools, maps and My Stuff (links to favourite websites). This level of customisation was not found in the Australian benchmarking study in 2009/10 or in the follow up review in 2012, but highlights the direction for the future, allowing people to create their own personalised portal with relevant community networks (as well as council information and services). The website, branded #My Nottingham, also appears visually as a social media news site, rather than a formal council website. It has a live feed from Twitter on the front page, streaming the latest news tweets.

The potential for community participation online was highlighted through websites on which people could contribute to and lead discussion. Two outstanding examples found through the web reviews were the City of Edmonton’s (2012) integrated forum for engagement on city planning through its Transforming Edmonton site (www.transformingedmonton.ca) and the City of Los Angeles (2012) ‘LA/2b’ online ideas and engagement portal for better mobility around the City (http://la2b.org). These examples were fully interactive and connected with social media, presenting a plethora of topics that were open for discussion, links to ideas that people had generated, and sharing and highlighting those ideas as part of community discussion and decision-making.
Conclusions

The findings of the 2009/10 benchmarking study indicated a low presence of interactive communications tools, social media and engagement forums, but the 2012 website review suggested some growth in Victoria and New South Wales. A greater level of sophistication was also starting to appear, with councils collaborating with the social media sites of other organisations, sharing relevant news updates and genuinely presenting opportunities for participation through open dialogue. In addition, online features were emerging that enabled citizens to lead discussions on community issues and nominate ideas for consideration by council, rather than simply follow a set agenda and consultation path.

The increase in social media might reflect a number of things: a growing level of commitment to community engagement as citizens come to expect online services and interaction; the realisation of benefits experienced as a consequence of events such as the Brisbane Flood emergencies and bushfire preparations; and the solutions offered by private companies providing ready-made templates and platforms, through which the risks, administration and overheads are reduced.

The results indicate that potentially all councils, no matter where they are located (country, city or suburban), can implement interactive communication and social media tools and enhance community engagement, networks and services. However, when compared to the international examples, there is still a long way to go. Meanwhile, councils must still grapple with key governance issues such as privacy of information, moderation of material, management of information, rules around usage, together with the other significant functional capabilities required.

Key examples of such functional capabilities are the structuring of the back-of-house elements required for effective e-government, and the development of appropriate business models. The move towards mobilisation of council services and applications being made available to people through their personal smartphones, and the use of QR codes connecting to websites or multimedia, were important findings of the 2012 website review. The segmentation occurring through the development of websites for
specific target audience adds to the complexity of service delivery. With councils now possessing an official website, a range of segmented mini-sites, as well as mobile sites, applications and other initiatives, there are significantly more channels to manage than ever. While the customer is presented with a range of options which enable them to contact, engage and transact business with council online, the council needs to be able to respond to physical requests, monitor and update a range of different channels, ensure that the skills, processes and resources are in place to manage these, and to be aware of new technologies as they constantly evolve. Moreover, as technologies change, councils need to learn and innovate, changing the way information is gathered, agendas are created, and how customer needs and expectations are identified.

Of interest to the author is the challenge that all this presents for those in the ever-changing role of the communications manager. Of interest to the industry as a whole are the organisational capabilities that these requisite functional capabilities of e-government imply: such as skills, knowledge, culture, leadership, decision-making, strategic planning, stakeholder management and community relationship building. As the conversations reported in the next chapter suggest, some of these matters raise issues that are very complex indeed. Arguably, the nature of the work of local government is unique in the depth and range of the daily interactions with its constituencies that are implicit in its service and social obligations. The practicalities of e-government confront it with issues that remain abstractions for other sectors: the nature of organisational boundaries in a borderless online environment; the paradoxes of privacy and participation in e-democracy; the bundling and un-bundling of value-chains; and participation in complex multi-organisational virtual supply chains.

These issues aside, before this benchmarking study was undertaken there was limited empirical data available concerning levels of e-government at local government level in Australia. Now that benchmark exists, as well as a tool that individual councils can use to profile and compare themselves with their counterparts. The website review has also offered an insight into what innovative Australian and international councils are now taking up, a helpful look at the short-term future. The next chapter complements these data with the insights of people who lead, consult to and commentate on the industry.
CHAPTER 5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS–INTERVIEWS

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings of 13 in-depth interviews with senior professionals that explore key issues relating to e-government. These interviews were undertaken to complement the benchmarking study and to explore the issues raised by that study. As mentioned in the Methods chapter, the people interviewed included eight men and five women who were senior professionals: four were Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in the local government sector; five were senior public relations or community consultation directors, some with expertise in new technology who had worked for many years with councils as clients; three were academics with doctorates and a track record of publication in the field; and one was a director in a website technology and research company.

Through the lens of each interviewee’s discipline, the interviews explored the development of e-government at the local level. For local government leaders, the issues focused on leadership in taking up e-government innovations and reconfiguring the organisation’s business model to match functional capabilities with user expectations of seamless service delivery, as well as considering the demographics of community. The business model reflects the organisation’s ‘best fit’ solution to the particular set of circumstances existing in the local community and the resources and dynamics of organisation that the council has inherited and can create. Those interviewed expressed concerns about the increased workloads associated with enhanced service responsiveness, and the requirement for culture change to re-focus staff experienced in traditional ways of doing business. They also discussed shared business platforms and tools that could raise levels of e-government across all councils. From the perspective of the website, public relations and online engagement consultants (people who worked outside local government but consulted to the sector), the key issues were the need for local government to loosen control and approval processes to keep pace with the dynamic nature of social media and take up online tools that allow people to genuinely participate in decision-making from the start of projects, while working with strategic commitments and governance frameworks. From an academic perspective, issues
included consideration of how theories of communication have changed with the rise of the internet and Web 2.0 (interactive and participative technologies); the organisation implications of changes in communications roles and processes; how communication needs to be considered within a broader strategic context, and the importance of research in understanding consumer needs. They also mentioned the importance of ensuring that the value of face-to-face and interpersonal communications is not lost in a digital world.

In the first part of this chapter, the interview data are presented and analysed in terms of the four clusters of functional capabilities identified in the literature review as being necessary to realise the full potential of e-government. This approach enables a clear connection to be made to the issues raised in the literature, the findings of the benchmarking study and the views of those interviewed. No direct questions were asked about governance issues because of a concern about the length of the interviews, though views about governance were at times offered and are reported. Two questions were asked about the organisational capabilities required to acquire, implement and sustain the functional capabilities. These capabilities relate to the leadership, strategy, business modelling, skills, culture and agility required of the organisation and are explored in the second half of the chapter.

Cluster 1. Interactive capabilities: the extent of interactive tools, functions and features and presence of fully executable services online.

Central to this cluster is the capability of a local government organisation to facilitate electronic delivery of services and online transactions, and interactive communications with the capability for two-way feedback and dialogue.

The interview questions and prompts that related to this cluster were:
Question 1: how electronic technology changes the way communication occurs and the implications for local government organisations and communities;
Question 2: the extent of interactive two-way online communication and engagement in local government and the tools used;
Question 3: the levels of service delivery provided online in local government; and
Question 5: the impact of e-government on stakeholders.

A number of themes emerged in relation to this first cluster.

**Online technologies have significantly transformed the nature of communication and engagement**

Two of the academics interviewed focused on the key difference between Web 2.0 and Web 1.0: ‘Putting aside face to face communication, the most mediated communication now does happen using digital communications’ (Participant 5). Web 2.0 means that instead of passively viewing information from a website, people can engage with an organisation or each other, share content, comment on a topic or discuss and collaborate with others using social media and a range of online tools (such as personal blogs or Facebook pages). Poster’s (1995) definition of the first and second media age was offered: the first media age being ‘primarily one-way, centrally controlled, monologue’, and the second media age ‘two-way, interactive, dialogue not monologue, not centrally controlled but bottom-up, side to side, not top-down’ (Participant 5). The second media age is Web 2.0.

‘The protocols and cultural practices of communicating have changed in this age, even though many people are only focusing on the technology. While traditionally the cultural practice of communication may have focused on sending out a carefully scripted and filtered message to an audience via a one-way communications channel such as a newspaper, Web 2.0 means open dialogue, with many people able to communicate freely and provide feedback directly and immediately, bypassing any intermediary’ (Participant 5).

‘If you think about public relations and communications the only really important theoretical insight that’s come up is the notion of dialogue, rather than monologue, and symmetric and asymmetric communications. Technology actually makes
asymmetric communications impossible, so for local government, it doesn’t matter whether it’s the siting of a playground or the formation of a budget or a new planning policy, there’s the opportunity to engage in dialogues that never were possible before’ (Participant 6).

Three interview participants (public relations, website and academic consultants) observed that online communication enables more people, with a range of different viewpoints on an issue, to have a voice and engage in decision-making, rather than just the pressure groups or regular contributors who may only represent one part of the community.

‘E-participation opens up a whole world and allows government to get to those moderate voices, to hear what people are saying, who may not be comfortable writing a submission or standing up in public meeting or wouldn’t take the time to lobby parliament’ (Participant 2).

‘It broadens participation in decision-making, gathers community thoughts on issues, provides more opportunity for personalised information, more informed council decision-making and a more accountable government’ (Participant 13).

Through the convenient and immediate access that online communication offers, more people with a range of views can comment on an issue to contribute to decisions. It is easier and faster to post a comment online (any time of day or night) than to write a letter or drop into a service centre or meeting, and it is more democratic to have those views expressed in an open environment so that the broader community can see the range of debates. The result is potentially a more well rounded consideration of an issue obtained by tapping into the views of a range of people who might have previously been excluded from discussions. For example, consultation on a policy document for sustainable transport infrastructure affects a number of different user groups. One section of the community may want to comment on the importance of more bike tracks
and road lanes, and an organised action group, such as the Bicycle Users Group, is likely to provide a strong voice on this issue. However, there may also be people who would like safe walking paths, or people who would prefer money to be spent on getting more buses and train services, or who would prefer to use electric or share cars. Online capabilities can provide for inclusive discussions in public spaces, in addition to traditional forms of consultation such as surveys, letters, petitions and meetings, which might only attract those who have the time to devote to them. The benefit to the council is that a range of voices is heard, tapping into the silent majority, rather than the vocal minority, and that the information is openly accessible and easy to contribute to through a wider range of options.

Despite the potential of online communication and engagement, ten interviewees felt that online communication was still predominantly one-way with a low level of engagement and community input into council decision-making. This perception matched the statistical evidence from the 2009/10 benchmarking study (Chapter 4), which highlighted a low level of presence of two-way communication features such as the ability to post comments, which was present in only 25% of websites. By contrast, more private and direct avenues of feedback to council were measured at a high level of presence: for example, online forms and surveys were present on 84% of sites and email interactivity on 98%. These are not able to be viewed by the public, but only by the council recipient.

Interviewees offered a range of explanations for this situation. A consultant suggested that:

‘A lot of councils’ communications consist of online surveys and a lot of people find that comfort zone of doing surveys rather than allowing freedom of speech to discuss things in the forum...’ (Participant 2).

For local government to be open or interactive and allow comment means giving up control. This means that the discussion cannot be screened as it currently is with traditional forms of communication (such as media releases and publications). This
represents a significant move from formal bureaucratic processes for managing consultation and engagement on a council project or policy, towards more informal open communication and greater freedom of citizen input as an aspect of democratic participation. It requires a significant change in the organisational mindset, from the leaders at the top of the organisation through to those responsible for planning and implementing the consultation. It also assumes that council organisations possess the skills and knowledge to establish and run such forums. Moreover, as in other services industries, there are many who believe that some services are better provided face-to-face when relationships are key.

However, to emphasise what is possible, several examples of online forums or interfaces were cited in the interviews as successfully using two-way online engagement and consultation. These included a Future Planning Process with the use of a Wiki, engaging up to 7,000 people online; consultation for the redevelopment of a major inner city street involving approximately 5,000 people commenting online on various options; and a small coastal city with a dedicated, targeted website based on a precinct that discusses projects and planning applications and allows users to add comments, driven by the community and with links to the Council website.

A number of interviewees specifically cited the City of Melbourne website as a great example of interactive communications online, with the use of Facebook, Twitter, forums, blogs and various other forms of social media.

A coastal city website includes five different projects that people can get involved in and comment on in an interactive forum:

‘We have five people responsible for each project, so each month we are uploading new information on that project, so people know if they go on that website they’ll always get the latest information. This is what’s made it work. We are finding that people are going to the website and making comments on various things. The other thing that we’ve done very effectively is we’ve linked it in many ways to the council
website, with Development Applications (DAs). In the precinct we list DAs on our website, so people can see ‘this one is relevant to me’ and they can click on it. We’ve linked it to a Google map so people can see where the site is and what it looks like, and we’ve also got all the relevant documents. There are quite a few comments and what we’ve found is that it has been quite a great tool for us because its enabled us to involve people in our precinct who wouldn’t normally be involved’ (Participant 8).

‘We ran a government forum. The government brief was to engage and interact with communities and the only way we could do that was via online, by establishing a unique website, giving it Facebook status, giving it Twitter, getting media involved in the event. Actually hosting parts of the conference with open lines to Twitter to the outside world meant that school groups and community groups from all over the country were interacting with the platform on the day’ (Participant 1).

‘There are some standout examples around...the classic one in the UK is the “Fix my Street” type of activity. At a local council level they are using websites to post a photo of something broken in your street and the Council looks at it, fixes it and comments’ (Participant 5).

‘In Edmonton they were talking about a Twitter stream. One of the snowploughs had gone down the street and snow was blocking driveways. Someone tweeted about it and the council had the plough back there in half an hour and got enormous kudos on the internet on various pages on what they’d done’ (Participant 2).
The more recent website reviews undertaken in January 2012 (outlined in Chapter 4) also indicated that more councils have taken up interactive tools such as discussion forums and social media. For example, the City of Kingston in Victoria and Mosman Council in New South Wales have employed these tools, and a range of other councils are engaging the services of companies that specialise in these areas, to provide the tools via their systems and with their help. There are more rural councils with social media pages in 2012, taking the opportunity to engage with citizens through cost-effective and immediate channels. Furthermore, there is the very high profile example of emergency management, in Brisbane council’s use of social media during floods, which was an exemplary way of communicating with people in an emergency.

The suitability of placing services online depends on type, complexity and relationship needed

The provision of interactive online services means the user can complete or receive a service online from beginning to end, such as paying rates, submitting a form or making a job application online. The interviews presented a diverse range of views on the effectiveness of the services provided. A total of twenty online communication and service tools were cited in interview responses as examples of interactive communication and service delivery from councils, including: feedback forms; online forums; online surveys; online library services and databases; development applications online; email alerts; e-newsletters; videoing council meetings; videoconferencing; linking to Google Maps; a wiki; online portals for businesses; online consultation; dedicated websites allowing user comments; online payments (such as rates); Facebook; Twitter; email; pet registration; and SMS to report parking meter faults.

In the interviews, some of the online service tools were referred to as problematic, including online planning (due to it’s complexity) and online forms (most cannot be fully completed online), whereas others were regarded as more effective, including online payments and library services (such as reserving or finding a book). One person suggested that it was the simpler processes that have been automated:
‘It works best for simple things like paying your rates and getting a registration for your dog or cat...I don’t think we’re at the stage where planning matters are necessarily there’ (Participant 6).

Some interviewees suggested that, while electronic communication is dramatically changing the way councils interact with their community, the extent of communication and service delivery online is limited to some degree because council organisations are not only high-touch service providers in many ways, they also build significant social capital that cannot be created online:

‘A lot of the services that councils provide are two dimensions: one is the service, whether its home care or home cleaning, but the other thing is about social integration to the extent that councils services create social capital by creating social interaction. That’s something that can’t ever be put online’ (Participant 6).

‘For some people the technology can be alienating. And for a lot of the people both internally and externally, face-to-face contact, human interaction, is important to them. So if you cut out the human interaction the message could be hollow’ (Participant 10).

‘Some communication is just the transfer of a piece of information whereas relationships are about a much richer dialogue and about engaging people so they feel part of the process’ (Participant 10).
‘I am a big believer in face to face communication....There is a level of comfort and trust that you can get out of meeting face to face .... It’s about laying the foundation of the relationship rather than just relying on electronic communication’ (Participant 12).

‘Most of the electronic communication that we use has minimal capacity for nuance so it’s fairly easy for messages to be misconstrued’ (Participant 10).

Through meeting in person, body language and interpersonal rapport can be built between people, which can assist in fostering trust in the delivery of services. In contrast, the online landscape is less personal, can be problematic for finding the specific service needed and can present risks in communicating or conducting transactions via a website. People need online cues such as privacy statements, security statements, easy to navigate structures and clearly labelled services to enhance confidence to carry out transactions online. All of these pose issues of governance, as well as of technical functionality.

The business of analysing and agreeing upon what is appropriate for a particular community is very complex when considered in its full social context. Most of those interviewed were very clear that technology should inform strategy, not be the strategy.

‘E-communications and IT are terrific but ultimately the strategy and the quality of the relationship and the form of the communications should drive what you deliver. Rather than starting with the technology, you start by segmenting the stakeholders and then actually say which are important and how do we deliver on those relationships. Then you say what’s the best way: is it IT or is it something else’ (Participant 6).

This is consistent with Grant and Chau’s (2005) view that technology should be seen as an enabler and not a driver of communication and service delivery.
The view that many aspects of service delivery should not change is reinforced by the reality that many council services do involve physical activities like fixing roads and drains and providing home care. However, the 2009/10 website benchmarking study highlighted significant differences in online service provision from one council to the next. While one council had one service available online, another had 17 services available, demonstrating the capacity to place a significantly higher number of services online than the average of five services (measured across 100 websites). Furthermore, there were more than 45 services being actively promoted on UK websites (as indicated in the 2012 Website Review), despite the fact that many council services are physical, interpersonal or high-touch. At the very least, some of those examples suggest that disaggregation of supply and logistics chains in physical service delivery reveal elements in those service chains that certainly lend themselves to electronic management (as in the example previously cited, in which online citizen action triggers repair work). To go further, it is possible to interpret the differences in take-up in the 2009/10 benchmarking study as reflecting differences in organisational capability and confidence, rather than access to technological capability. Issues such as work practices, culture and leadership, as well as the business model of the council, become important. These are issues taken up later in this chapter.
Cluster 2. Understanding and engaging the user, customisation and responsiveness: engaging stakeholders, customising and personalising websites for democratic outreach, and responsiveness to target audiences.

This cluster concentrates on functional capabilities for identifying the needs and preferences of people in relation to online services and providing targeted information and customised services for particular groups, rather than mass communication approaches.

Questions 4 and 5 in the interview schedule most particularly drew out these issues.

Question 4: the stakeholder expectations of electronic technology services
Question 5: the impact of e-government on stakeholders.

The majority of those interviewed believed that the technology being adopted in other organisations, and the user’s experience with this technology, has raised the level of expectation that local government will be able to provide similarly targeted services. Expectations are particularly high with regard to online services, interactive contact and functionality, a theme also noted in the literature (Chapter 2).

‘Highly sophisticated technology users expect to have exactly the same relationship with council as they would with their bank, where they can go and do all their banking online’ (Participant 4).

‘The expectation levels are very, very high. They are getting that from their single service providers, such as their banks, the Federal government, Medicare, insurance companies’ (Participant 3).

‘People draw on previous experiences and have a set of assumptions they expect to be replicated’ (Participant 9).
‘Given the revolution in social networking, people are looking for more than just a static website, they want more interactive contact with government and that means there is going to be more pressure on governments to have websites updated regularly, with news, comment and the ability to interact through forums, surveys, engagement and comment’ (Participant 1).

There was some qualification of this view. One person interviewed said such expectations were

‘directly relevant to their level of competence with electronic information ...If they have the capacity for electronic communication they want to be able to do everything sitting in front of their computer. They don’t want to have to come to the council. They want to be able to talk to you electronically’ (Participant 4).

At the other end of the spectrum, four interviewees said that online capabilities in the community vary considerably from council to council, according to demographics.

‘We have a low English proficiency community, high levels of unemployment, low levels of university qualifications, poor levels of internet usage at home, we’re behind the State average in all of those things. So for our community it is still a way off’ (Participant 3).

‘You have to understand who you are communicating with and their preferred method of technology. We’re in a totally new era of communication that we’ve never seen... we’ve got to get a gauge on where the community is at with it all. There has to be a marriage on what’s required and how quickly people are adapting to this’ (Participant 7).
Some councils may have a younger population requiring more mobile-based communications or social media-based preferences, others may have a culturally diverse community requiring more translations or video-based communications.

It was the opinion of most interviewees that the effectiveness of local government websites, online communication and online services is linked to directing the right information and service to the right people, rather than providing everything to everyone. In comparison to commercial organisations, councils provide over 100 services to communities within a geographic area. This means a diverse stakeholder base. It also means that council websites have many different topics competing for space and making navigation difficult. Interviews noted a strong move towards decentralisation as segmentation of information and services occurs (such as the creation of specific audience websites for businesses and tourists), and a small but intensifying focus on customisation and mobilisation of smaller, relevant chunks of information for smartphones.

One participant commented that:

‘The government has just adopted all of the recommendations of the Federal ‘Government 2.0’ Taskforce and all of the recommendations of the review of public service that talk about opening up government and putting more stuff online. One of the things that I’m concerned about is that they’re interpreting this as making more information available, putting everything on the website, and we’re not going and asking people what they want’ (Participant 5).

The point being made is that government is not asking people what they want to receive or have available, and not listening:

‘I think the public wants governments to listen more and I think that’s why things like ‘FixMyStreet’ have been so successful: ordinary citizens can go in there and say this street sign is broken, and then want someone to listen to that and fix
it, and when they do, they get quite excited that someone’s listened to them. People just need relevant information, two-way, and they want governments to listen more’ (Participant 5).

The unique benefit of online communication is the ability to allow people to get involved in specific issues of interest, when they choose.

‘Reach people the way they want to be reached according to the importance of the engagement’ (Participant 9).

This means understanding the audience, how they want to communicate or engage (whether online or offline) and choosing the appropriate channels to do this, to ensure people can be heard.

The segmentation of some websites was indicated in the 2009/10 benchmarking study and reinforced in the more recent website review, with separate websites or applications being created for a range of target audiences such as events, libraries and arts. A number of councils are creating websites that can be selectively altered to provide topics of choice. The use of RSS (web updates on topics of interest that users can select), and subscriptions to e-news also offer people the option of selecting only the information relevant to their interests. Targeted consultation forums are now being implemented online. Mosman Council includes one such example through which people lead ‘hot topics’ and ideas for their community, rather than just contributing to discussions. This really embraces the nature of online communication, by means of which people can create content as much as they are involved and engaged in discussions on local issues.

Mobilisation was another trend seen through the 2012 web reviews. The use of the smartphone and i-phone technologies has seen an increase in the creation of mobile websites, applications, or ‘apps’, for specific services (such as events and arts), and QR codes which can be scanned by mobile devices to bring up a range of information in video, audio or information formats. These features cater for people on the move, who prefer small, relevant chunks of information and services.
However, as already indicated, the issue of the digital divide (the gap between those who have access to, or skills for online technology, and those who do not) arose in several interviews, along with the points that traditional communications are still needed or that electronic communication has to be located within a broader, rigorous community engagement and participation framework, not relied upon as the only method of participation, to ensure equitable access. Consideration of the ability of the customer and their access to technology was presented as a key issue here:

‘Technology has dramatically enhanced the ability of the community to engage and participate in council activities, as long as they’re competent to use the technology. Most of them are; that’s what motivates them’ (Participant 4).

‘It has engaged the ‘technologically savvy’ who like to do things quickly without human interaction. For others it is perceived as complex and alienating’ (Participant 10).

‘One of the impacts is that e-government risks alienating those that are not computer literate. Over time that will become more, not less, of an issue’ (Participant 1).

Compliance with World Wide Web Consortium (2010) or ‘W3C’ website accessibility standards is essential for councils in order to ensure that their websites can be accessed by all people, whatever their hardware, software, network infrastructure, native language, culture, geographical location, or physical or mental ability. The standards imply that not only does the technology need to be accessible, but the organisation’s careful consideration is needed to ensure that information, communication and services are suitably designed and delivered for all segments of the community, at a much deeper level. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 also provide a wide range of recommendations for making web content more accessible (World Wide Web Consortium 2010).
There were varying degrees of accessibility on websites in Victoria and New South Wales in the 2009/10 benchmarking study. Overall, only 48% of websites had accessibility standards applied or promoted. Most Victorian websites (68%, or 34 of 50) included a statement of W3C or features promoting accessibility. In New South Wales, only 28% of websites (14 of 50) included an accessibility statement. Language was another accessibility issue raised by two interviewees, where communities and communications needs are diverse. The use of translated websites is still new for Australian councils and there was little evidence of this occurring, although 29% of council websites benchmarked in 2009/10 included some translated messages. The data on accessibility represents an increasing risk to councils from a human rights perspective, a legal perspective and operational perspective.

There is a potential and significant irony in this situation: councils might be more reluctant to take services and interactive communications online in case they are perceived to be inaccessible to some parts of the community, reinforcing a mindset that prefers traditional communications. The inevitable conclusion, however, is that there needs to be room for both, as parts of the community become more technologically savvy than ever. Moreover, this in turn presents local government with challenges that are, arguably, significantly more complex than those facing commercial organisations of comparable size. Honouring the social contract between local government and its citizens means meeting the needs of specific groups with specific needs. Technically it means the development of individual websites and specific communications channels: the segmentation and management of not only one main council website, but a range of websites and tools such as e-newsletters, mobile applications and RSS feeds (for business, for youth, for arts and so on). Among many other organisational implications, it means decentralisation of decision-making, relying upon more people across an organisation to manage a variety of relationships in a range of ways.
Cluster 3. Connecting government services, collaboration and integration: The existence of integrated portals that provide a one-stop-shop and connectedness behind the scenes.

This cluster refers to the functional capabilities needed to connect services across the local area and other levels of government to maximise the benefit to the user and improve efficiencies between government agencies.

Questions 6 and 7 in the interview schedule related most particularly to this cluster.

Question 6: the management issues emerging with e-technology and communications; and systems, skills, processes or solutions needed to address these.

Question 7: the models and issues guiding current approaches to e-government.

The idea of connected services behind the scenes and shared services (where a number of councils as a group can operate from one platform to provide a similar service) was raised by three interview participants. One of the interviewees provided background from his research to explain the international models that have guided Australia’s position in e-government, particularly in relation to the notions of seamless service delivery.

‘The Australian Government 2.0 taskforce was guided by the UK. The UK had over 4000 government websites, they couldn’t find anything and didn’t know which Department to go to. They set up the Power of Communication Taskforce in 2009 and the Australian Government 2.0 taskforce was very much modelled on that. It recommended collapsing over 3500 into less than 1000 websites, so instead of going through a department you could go through a single portal and use natural language. You could say you ‘I want a Visa’ and you didn’t have to know what department it was, whether it was Department of Immigration or Department of Trade’
There is also discussion in the literature about the attention paid by the Federal government to seamless service delivery across agencies, where many different agencies are electronically linked. While there is some evidence at the Federal government level that there are individual agencies that enable customers to log in to portals for a wide range of online services and customised account information (for example, the sophisticated Australian Taxation office and Centrelink websites), it is less evident across different agencies with totally different organisation structures, record systems, databases, technology platforms and people.

At local government level the concept of connected services is well understood, according to one interviewee who said:

‘There is a lot of sophistication there now that says, we expect you to have a very good info system behind the scenes that is able to connect all my threads together. So they almost want, instead of customer service, a case manager. They expect us to be able to treat them as a case, so if I get on the end of the phone, I open up a file, I’ve got their dog registration, their bin day, their enrolment in kinder, everything on the screen, so I can manage their issue. The expectation when they ring council is that council will know exactly what they want, and it will be dealt with by the first person that picks up the phone, so they don’t have to tell the same story over again’ (Participant 3).

However, in practice, seamless service delivery is still aspirational at the local level. The website benchmarking study results showed that of 100 websites audited across Victoria and New South Wales, none had a portal that linked council services together behind the scenes. A low number, 3%, had website personalisation or customisation features, to enable people to chose which information, services and tools are relevant to them, and 92% provided links to other websites (such as State Government, Federal
Government, Emergency Services and other linked agencies). There were no websites found that accessed a particular service with a range of different agencies connected online behind the scenes. The closest examples found included online payments and integrated library services. One person interviewed said: ‘Victoria’s integrated library systems works well. You can order anything from libraries in Victoria, from home’ (Participant 6). Another example offered was in the area of online payments: some councils have services from banks or Australia Post (PostBillPay) connected to the site, to allow payments (such as rates) to be made.

One interviewee drew attention to the success of shared services, a model in which a number of councils can operate from one platform to provide a similar service. He said:

‘Councils will go out separately and buy a ‘fit-for-purpose’ system that generally will not be state of the art, but by aggregating 36 together under a shared services model, operating from one platform, they acquire state of the art technology’ (Participant 11).

A key issue surrounding seamless service delivery is the consolidation of content, which means bringing together information and services to operate as a single point of entry through one platform rather than segmenting it across a range of platforms. The evidence obtained through the website benchmarking study suggested a trend towards segmented sites. The new mobile technologies available (such as i-phones, smartphones and apps) embody mobilisation, where telephone-optimised websites are packaging smaller pieces of information to meet user needs, stepping away from a single website offering a range of information covering the 100 or more services that a council offers.

However, what the interviews and the literature suggest is that the implementation of an integrated portal has proven to be a challenge, not in relation to the technology, but for the organisation: the actors and the processes involved, and the underlying cultural issues regarding and assumptions about change, roles and impacts on individuals. The second part of this chapter explores this further.

This Cluster refers to the functional capabilities that ensure the services are easily accessible, trustworthy, safe and responsive.

While no direct questions were asked about these functional capabilities, issues of governance were raised implicitly by the interviewees themselves. Those issues are referred to in the second part of the chapter, which follows next.

The implications for organisational capability

Nearly all interviewees, at some point in the conversation, made the point that the use of electronic technology for interactive dialogue between a customer and an organisation means that the message is delivered immediately and frequently creates an expectation of a very fast response.

'It puts greater demands on service expectations for short turnaround times. The expectation in the community is that an organisation will respond much faster than they’ve ever done before. With email and SMS people can fire stuff off as it pops into their head and expect it to rebound immediately. Stakeholders can demand faster action, for example, send an email at night and expect an email back next day no matter what the workload’ (Participant 11).

'It is one thing to have the channels, it is another thing to operate them in an effective way...waiting two weeks to get a response is tantamount to waiting two hours to get served’ (Participant 9).

'The speed of which the community expects us to respond to
written correspondence ends up being a two-way conversation, with email exchanges which can be time-consuming and debilitating’ (Participant 3).

However, speed of response is not the only issue. Seamless service delivery and connected services imply redesigning processes, redeveloping people’s roles and sharing information between departments.

‘What we are seeing in the shared services project that we are running at the frontline is the stress about the need to change the business model significantly to change the efficiencies over time, and what that does to your staffing structure, employment outcomes, and the fine detail of the way our systems have operated and been embedded for years. I would argue there is a lack of willingness to turn those things on their ear. It is a cultural thing. When we’ve got 18 councils with their heads wrapped around shared services at the moment the tension points are all around: “Am I going to have a job? What does my job look like? What’s the organisation chart going to look like? Will we be doing this locally or off-site?” There’s a massive organisational change process in dealing with any of these things and to an extent that’s been the major impediment to the roll out of a lot of the technological shifts in our sector. Because to actually make the change is seen to be such a hard ask and benefits are not delivered instantly ...rarely in our sector do we take a long-term view or medium-term view. It’s all very short term; one-year, two-year, or the election cycle’ (Participant 11).

Bekkers and Homburg (2007) emphasised that the redesign of the front office inevitably triggers redesign of the back office of agencies to actually deliver services. Delay in coming to terms with this reality compromises the effectiveness of service provision,
but the extent of the necessary changes might not always be immediately obvious. Baldersheim and Ogard (2008) suggest that

the full realisation of the potentials of digitalisation of local government operations will require thorough changes at the front and back office levels of the municipal organisations as well as in roles and relationships among groups of actors. Therefore, a well designed and well functioning web site is an indication of capability of deep-going organisational change (Baldersheim & Ogard 2008, p. 126).

Moreover, others interviewed were very clear about what is in play here:

‘There is a fundamental divide among government authorities between those that acknowledge and value the input of the community and have community engagement practitioners there working hard to engage with the community, and get them involved; and those that view the community as a nuisance. That divide reflects itself back into the world of e-stuff. People who are adopting and picking up community engagement technologies are the same ones determined to hear others’ (Participant 2).

‘My analysis suggests most governments want to engage citizens, and use social media but they are reluctant to adopt the practices and protocols of social media, which is to be open, interactive, and to allow people to comment even if it’s negative’ (Participant 5).

‘Our traditional communications and media teams have been brought up on a diet of ‘starved of oxygen, don’t comment, pump out spin’, those sorts of things, whereas when dealing on web, there is little control: you need to be monitoring what’s
being said about you on an ongoing basis. People need to be empowered to engage on the web on an hourly basis as issues come up. A lot of councils in Australia use twitter to broadcast but not monitor what comes back towards them. The web allows issues to blow up quickly so the whole way government deals with communications needs to change. They need to become much more agile’ (Participant 2).

These are very challenging issues. Some of what is implied here is a re-writing of the idea of what a local government organisation is, or at least what its boundaries are, what can be thought of as being inside the organisation, what it can be held to be responsible for, and what responsible governance is. Permeability of boundaries means the opening up of what can be controlled, the heightening of uncertainty and risk, and the involvement of everyone:

‘If you want to embrace it, you’ve got to lose track of any command or control management system, while at the same time managing to preserve probity and regulatory and legislative oversight’ (Participant 6).

‘Online communication should be internalised within everybody’s job, including the next generation of managers and leaders, so that it is not left with others to fix’ (Participant 6).

This is a balancing act and difficult for organisations to practice, recognising the importance of governance issues such as accuracy and appropriateness of information, responsiveness to customers, professionalism, privacy and confidentiality, security, and the management of organisational reputation. The presence of privacy and security features for user information was measured in the 2009/10 benchmarking study, as important indicators of effective e-government (and with significant legal implications). Privacy statements were featured on 93% of websites, reflecting the importance of keeping the details of individuals secure and confidential. However, with the rise of
social media, and more councils going into this space, the lines are blurred between official council websites and informal, socially-based external websites such as Facebook, where rules, standards and responsibilities are more ambiguous.

The capacities to engage with these issues are both strategic and operational: connection with community, the design of business models and processes, effective governance, development and acquisition of appropriate skill sets and cultures, while understanding and acquiring the rapidly changing technology. They imply skills in leadership through change:

‘It’s never about the box, the software, it’s about the people and change management, and the process we’ve got to deal with it. It’s the people’s approach to change and embracing new ways of doing things. We have different levels of sophistication about treating every business re-engineering process as a change management exercise’ (Participant 3).

Berryman (2004) argues that all local government areas, regardless of their stage of development, will have to cope with a range of complexities, including: a lack of shared, reliable computing and network infrastructure; need for resources; human and organisational resistance to change; and technological and legal complexity. The Business Council of Australia has highlighted the importance of a skilled workforce, effective workplace relations system and management capabilities, and a strong corporate leadership in delivering a culture of innovation (Howard Partners Pty Ltd 2006). Technology expert Jeffrey Rayport suggests that the biggest change for people dealing with technologies is no longer just about building infrastructures; ‘rather it is business-model innovation to take advantage of technology …. That’s a strategic change and it’s about management, culture and organisations, not technology’ (Brown, Klein & Top 2005, p. 68). Baldersheim and Ogard (2008) also highlights the critical role of leadership in this respect. Communication technology enables more customer-oriented approaches toward service provision, but it requires leadership in the right direction to make the change:
Like digitalisation of other municipal operations, the establishment of municipal web pages requires a complex set of competences, from technical and legal know-how to organisational change expertise. The digitalisation process will depend on the municipality’s ability to mobilise and apply the necessary competences (Baldersheim & Ogard 2008, p. 126).

The advice of those interviewed

Interviewees were specifically asked for their advice to councils regarding how to manage issues relating to e-government, and engage at both the strategic and operational levels (Questions 6, 7 and 8).

A total of 10 guidelines could be crafted from responses to questions 6, 7 and 8 in the interviews, including: reviewing the business model; conducting research to identify customer needs; identifying services; developing a plan; setting objectives, choosing the right channel of delivery and targeting; understanding and choosing the right technology; establishing a governance framework with protocols; managing resources in terms of people, skills, empowerment, culture and responsiveness; evaluation, analysing data and reporting.

They suggested that one of the first places to start is by reviewing the business model. This is about identifying opportunities for improvement in the organisation and creating the mindset around what services and communications can or should be delivered online, and where the business entry point is: not through the doors of the council reception area, but through an entry point on the website. This means analysing each of the service processes, from end to end; identifying the issues, gaps and needs; and re-modelling services. The points made through the interviews were that many solutions available for a process may be online, or at least some parts of the service delivery can be managed more efficiently and conveniently online.

Conducting research to identify customer needs was recommended in order to ensure that the organisation identifies the needs and expectations of its customers. More
specifically, this advice focused on understanding the users of the website in terms of their gender, age group, cultural diversity, attitudes, preferred method of technology, capabilities, and their communication and service needs. Interviewees reinforced the importance of asking for, and listening to, community feedback, involving the community in plans and testing, and undertaking continual improvement. It was also suggested that using reporting tools to measure usage of the website and gathering data with intelligence about what people are using most or least, and why, would be fundamental.

Understanding and selecting the right technology is important if the continual development and delivery of services and interactive communication online is to be ensured. Interviewees recommended drawing up a clear set of specifications for a website solution, identifying all current and future needs; looking for partners to help deliver and design it; and choosing a content management system that takes into consideration all the functionality needed. In considering these dimensions, it is also important to ensure that navigation is user friendly and accessible. It was mentioned that, where possible, if the IT capability of the organisation allows, it would be better to build sites that can be controlled rather than other sites on which rules shift (e.g. Facebook). Undertaking testing before a site goes live can ensure the website and features successfully meet the needs of users.

Establishing a governance framework with protocols was highlighted as critical in ensuring the success of online services and communication, whilst protecting the interests of both citizens and organisations. By putting in place moderation tools and policies around rules of use and disclaimers, issues can be more easily monitored and managed. From a user perspective, ensuring security, privacy and confidentiality is critical. Policies and processes need to be articulated to cover content management and publishing (with a focus on being responsive and timely); the capture and archiving of records; definition of online customer request standards outlining timeframes and processes of authority (particularly with regard to the more informal social media tools); moderation and monitoring of comments; and design of rules and processes around online etiquette about what will and will not be accepted or published.
Managing resources was raised as a key issue that is critical to the effectiveness of e-government. Staff need to be provided with appropriate training and support to cater for the growing and constantly evolving changes online. They need to be given clear guidelines and training so that they are both competent and empowered to use the technology, and people need to have the appropriate attitude and culture to be responsive and open. From a management perspective, empowering staff with regard to what they can say is important, as is the policy that guides the way they operate. People in all parts of an organisation need to be prepared to respond immediately to customer enquiries. Moreover, while technological capability is important, online communication and engagement needs to be driven by people who are communicators, rather than technology experts. Creating a culture of empowerment and trust for staff to respond to online requests is crucial.

Finally, regular evaluation, analysis of data and reporting are important if organisations are to continually grow and remain up to date with online trends and new technologies as they evolve. It is also important to ensure that organisations continue to listen to what citizens are saying they need.
Conclusions

Online communication and service delivery presents the opportunity for councils to engage more in two-way communication with the community, to present interactive online services and encourage participation in decision-making. The 30 features reviewed through the 2009/10 benchmarking study map the functional capabilities required from a local government organisation to achieve successful e-government. However, as the interviews suggest, the development of these functional capabilities goes well beyond issues of technology and brings into play fundamental organisational capabilities of skill, agility, confidence, learning and cultural practice.

There is a wide gap between the aspiration to achieve e-government and the reality that it means significant changes to the way an organisation operates. For this researcher, the most striking thing about the issues identified by those interviewed is the intrinsically complex nature of the dynamics created by many of the aspirations for local e-government.

For example, while online technology has significantly transformed the possibilities for communications and engagement, existing processes of vetting, scripting, approving and controlling communications that are important for accountability and quality control are no longer viable in an immediate and interactive online environment. In addition, the characteristics of online communication create tension for local government where interpersonal relationships and social capital are valued over the less personal dialogue proposed online.

There is a strong argument for face-to-face communication in which building trust is a key factor and richer dialogue is essential. While these arguments are important, there are still many elements of service delivery that can be placed online. By conducting a business model review and analysing services from end to end, online solutions can be found, leaving the critical relationship aspects to be undertaken in the traditional way while extracting the simpler processes and administrative tasks (such as registering via online forms, making payments and submitting requests for services) to be delivered online. However, the notion of trust makes some of this problematic: from the community’s point of view, what constitutes a critical relationship? Is this uniform
across the community? Do councils know enough about what mediates trust in their dealings with diverse and changing communities? What are the markers that are sensitive and reliable? And present in all discussions of on-line communication and delivery is the complexity of the digital divide: the challenge for council of meeting the high bar of expectations from the digitally sophisticated without alienating, marginalising and profoundly disadvantaging those who are not part of the digital world. These are not technical issues, rather, they are issues of social relationship and cultural practice.

Clearly, while community demands for online services appear to be growing due to experiences with other service organisations, there is work to be done to determine what citizens prefer and trust in relation to local government. However, one of the possible lessons from the overseas innovations presented in the last chapter is that councils also need to take the initiative and give their communities the experience of sophisticated ways of interacting with council, while being careful to be explain what is on offer, create realistic options so that people do not fall between the cracks, and monitor the impacts of what is done.

All of this significantly challenges local government organisations to move from traditional methods of service delivery, and gain the skills and capabilities needed to develop and implement the new tools, accept the increased workload and achieve the levels of responsiveness required by citizens who lodge online requests, and work through changes to business processes in a constantly evolving online landscape. Furthermore, while organisations prepare to go online with more services and open communication channels, the supporting governance environment needs to be created to underpin the organisation’s online journey. Online government has the potential to substantially reframe how hierarchical bureaucratic processes need to work. Inviting citizens to genuinely participate in decision-making challenges the formal processes around communication, decision-making, delegation and approval. In practice, this means fostering an understanding of e-government at all levels of the organisation, developing the skills and confidence to work with it, and possibly changing deep-seated assumptions and cultural practices about job roles and responsibilities.
The 30 features reviewed through the 2009/10 benchmarking study map the functional capabilities required of a local government organisation if it is to achieve successful e-government. However, as the interviews suggest, the development of these functional capabilities goes well beyond issues of technology and brings into play the fundamental organisational capabilities of skill, agility, confidence, learning and cultural practice.

Schein (2010) has suggested three levels of culture in an organisation, which help in understanding the complex dimensions that surround e-government. At the top level there are artefacts (such as technology, tools and architecture, processes, structures and rules). At the second level are espoused beliefs and values. At the third level are the underlying unconscious assumptions that reflect the distinctive identity of the group and the way it positions itself, relative to its environment, including its stakeholders. Seen through Schein’s three levels of culture, the website benchmarking exercise that formed part of this research focused on artefacts (such as the presence or absence of fully-executable online services or interactive communications tools such as social media). Arguably, the interviews draw attention to the underlying assumptions, beliefs and values that people hold about using technology to deliver services, about change and about risks.

As the next chapters suggest, the recasting of understanding of organisational capabilities such as culture and leadership emerges as a key factor in attempting the kind of change that e-government represents, for both the staff of local government organisations and, just as importantly, for the citizens who make up the communities of local government. Inviting people to participate more directly and continuously in decision-making certainly challenges the mindset that councils can ‘allow’ (rather than enable) online discussion, or even that communities are a passive ‘audience’ (rather than active contributors) in relation to communications and council decisions. Cultural practices of communication focused primarily on sending out a carefully scripted and filtered message to an audience via a communications channel such as a newspaper, are very different from those appropriate to the second media age of open dialogue, with many people able to communicate freely and provide feedback directly and immediately, bypassing any intermediary. The notion that leadership is something that happens primarily at the top of an organisation, and that it comes from the organisation...
rather than the community, is another example of what needs to be recast in the world of e-government. It is to these issues that the thesis now turns.
CHAPTER 6. REFLECTIONS

This chapter teases out the implications of the issues identified in the previous two chapters, drawing on literature to assist in this sense-making. It particularly considers the organisational and systemic capabilities that were raised in benchmarking study and in the interviews (both implicitly and explicitly) as the necessary enablers of the functional capabilities explored in the first chapter.

As the previous chapters have indicated, the vision and possibilities articulated for e-government in the literature, and in practitioner commentary, stretch to the transformation of local government from the traditional town hall to a seamless, virtual customer service centre, online 24/7, coupled with the capacity for citizens to discuss issues, present ideas, contribute to local decisions, collaborate with others, and shape their local communities through genuine participation in e-democracy.

The earlier literature and studies on e-government anticipated that local government (and in fact all levels of government) online would progress through a number of stages to arrive at a customer-centric, participation-enabling, seamless-service-delivering, transparent, flexible and accessible state of democratic government online. The findings of this study suggest that while new technologies are available to councils that enable social networking, instant chat, mobile tools, engagement, dialogue, online transactions and linkages with a range of services, the rate of adoption has been uneven in the councils studied in New South Wales and Victoria. This study has also offered a mapping of the functional capabilities required to access the full potential of e-government, as we are currently able to envisage it. Moreover, while cataloguing and exploring the functional capabilities of effective e-government provides a road map of what needs to be put in place, this is a road map that also alerts the traveler to the difficult nature of the terrain being traversed. The potential of e-government for local government, and the challenges involved in realising that potential, present complexities that extend much further than the adoption of new technological tools that can improve efficiency and effectiveness in communications and service delivery. The implications for the enabling capabilities required by local government organisations and the systems in which they operate are profound, calling into question the structures, leadership, cultural attitudes, systems and processes that are thought to have served local
governments well over many decades.

Exploring organisational capabilities:

As noted in the literature review chapter, a number of writers have suggested that the continuing focus of e-government on service delivery (an early phase of what is envisaged for e-government) hints at issues behind the scenes that are limiting progress:

Service delivery alone is no longer an adequate role for local governments as councils are increasingly under pressure to modernise their structures through information and communication technologies (ICTs) in order to execute a broader range of tasks. Tensions existing between different governmental roles have to be addressed if ICTs are to be used to strengthen local government operations (Freeman 2011, p. 182).

Pina et al (2010) also note the use of technology within pre-existing social and political structures, with no substantial changes in the style of the government to citizen relationships. The websites studied were mainly non-interactive, which was seen to be limiting the e-government potential to transform the relationships between citizens and public administrations. The internet is an aid but, is not yet running as an effective medium to facilitate citizen consultation, policy discussion, or other deliberative democratic inputs into the policy-making process (Pina et al. 2010, pp. 16-17).

However, having investigated local authorities in the UK, Irani et al. (2005) have pointed out that even the creation of a relatively simple web site can place new demands on services, strain existing administrative structures and present new strategic challenges for local authorities. Furthermore, Berryman (2004) predicted that all local government areas in Australia, regardless of their stage of development, would have to cope with a continuing and significant range of challenges from limited funding and
infrastructure, through resistance to change, to evolving legal complexities.

Norris and Moon’s (2005) examination of the adoption and evolution of e-government by local governments in the US has helped to explore some of the ways in which these realities have played out in practice. Initially they identified increased and changing demands on staff as the most pressing issues, followed by the reengineering of business processes. Over the two years of their study, however, they noticed that the number of governments listing these as barriers had declined. Fewer governments said the need to upgrade their technology was a barrier, or that they lacked staff with adequate skills. At the same time, the percentage of governments citing privacy and security as barriers increased. As noted previously, their study found that adoption of e-government was progressing rapidly (if measured by the existence and operation of web sites), but that the movement toward integrated and transactional e-government was progressing much more slowly.

Increasingly, writers are speculating about what might be playing out here. The administration structure and style, not only of individual organisations, but of entire systems, has been identified as one major influence on e-government development in relation to electronic service delivery and interactive communication and engagement, despite the fact that the same sorts of technological tools and opportunities are available to all. Pina, Torres and Royo (2010) contend that in Germanic and Southern European government organisations, initiatives seem to depend on the individual political will and administration style of each local government. In the UK, on the other hand, central government provides guidance about the contents and structures of local government websites, which, they suggest, explains a greater uniformity of uptake in that country. They also argue that e-government leaders at the local level in the EU (the UK, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Finland) are also those most widely known for the implementation of public sector reforms and their citizen participation focus. Thus, the implementation of ICTs has aligned well with these countries. This indicates that their administrative styles are already more geared towards citizen-centric initiatives, that they are accustomed to change and, as a consequence, that they present an easier way of bringing government closer to citizens without significantly altering their organisational structures. ‘Therefore, the differences across governments that have been found in e-government research do not come from different uses of ICTs but from the public...
administration styles and the legal requirements of each country’ (Pina, Torres & Royo 2010, p. 16). Closer to home, Freeman (2011) has pointed to the role of policy and strategy in Australia which is evident at the Federal Government level, but not so apparent at the local government level, suggesting that this has contributed to ad-hoc implementation of local e-government across the country.

The role of strong strategic, managerial and leadership skills, both systemically and organisationally, appears in many of the discussions about the implementation of e-government. At the organisational level, what is suggested is nothing short of the realignment of the organisation’s business model and culture to operate successfully in a continually changing technological environment and to build organisational capability through change. Brown, Klein and Top (2005) present an interview with Jeffrey Rayport, Chairman of Marketspace LLC in Information Week, who suggested that the biggest change for people dealing with technologies was no longer just about building infrastructures, but about business-model innovation, management and organisational cultures. Baldershiem and Ogard (2008) highlights the critical role of leadership in shaping change and moving people in the right direction:

The full realisation of the potentials of digitalisation of local government operations will require thorough changes at the front and back office levels of the municipal organisations as well as in roles and relationships among groups of actors. Therefore, a well designed and well functioning web site is an indication of capability of deep-going organisational change …. Like digitalisation of other municipal operations, the establishment of municipal web pages requires a complex set of competences, from technical and legal know-how to organisational change expertise. The digitalisation process will depend on the municipality’s ability to mobilise and apply the necessary competences’ (Baldershiem & Ogard 2008, p. 126).

The importance of skilled, capable people who can influence and lead change has been highlighted by Howard Partners Pty Ltd (2006), who have taken the view that ‘business innovation in some circumstances has more to do with the human capital of its
employees, and how their skills and capabilities are applied and managed, than it does with technology and invention’ (Howard Partners Pty Ltd 2006, p.12). Howard Partners Pty Ltd (2006) highlight the importance of effective management capabilities and strong leadership, as well as a skilled workforce, in creating and delivering a culture of innovation.

However, organisational culture is a complex phenomenon in its own right. Sometimes culture is represented as a fundamental but unconscious driver of organisational behaviour – especially normative behaviour around the way people approach their work, and interact with each other – and of expectations of how organisational members should behave in order to ‘fit it’. However, Schein (2010) has suggested that culture is best understood as operating at three levels simultaneously. At one level, culture is represented in the organisation’s artifacts (such as technology, tools and architecture, processes, structures and rules). At another level, it is reflected in the organisation’s self-talk about its espoused beliefs and values. At a third level are the underlying (but not necessarily conscious) assumptions and practices that reflect the distinctive identity of the group: the distinctive ways in which it chooses its mission, solves the problems it faces and positions itself relative to its environment, including the way it deals with its internal and external stakeholders. Schein’s presentation of culture is helpful in understanding the range and levels of the work of leadership in realising e-government. It is also a useful way of charting the territory that has been covered in this thesis. Seen through Schein’s three levels of culture, the website benchmarking exercise focused on the artifacts of functional capability (such as the presence or absence of fully-executable online services or interactive communications tools such as social media), while the interviews drew attention to the organisational and systemic capabilities associated with the other two levels.

When it comes to the development of innovative cultures, Moon and Norris (2005) suggest that local governments approach managerial and technological innovation from a variety of perspectives, have different degrees of tolerance of risk, and vary in their entrepreneurial orientation and receptivity to innovation and new practices. At a purely individual level, managers vary greatly in their experience in using technology and their beliefs about computer technology. Collectively, differences in orientation might also be a response to their reading of the larger community culture. They might also be
informed by the organisational cultures associated with government administrations and, in turn, reinforce those cultures. They also argue that ‘cities with professional city managers introduce managerial and technological innovations more readily into the public sphere because they have been trained to value professionalism and efficiency’ (Moon & Norris 2005, p. 48) and are more receptive to managerial reform and innovation.

Of interest, too, is Moon and Norris’s finding that large local governments were more likely to be early adopters than their smaller counterparts, as they have more resources (trained staff, larger budgets and established IT departments) to facilitate managerial innovations and technical solutions for e-government. Studying the development of local government websites in California, Musso, Weare and Hale (2000) also found that adopters were more likely to be in larger cities:

The municipalities that adopted web sites are substantially larger in population, and they also have significantly higher levels of government expenditures and revenues. They also appear to contain residents that are more politically active, as evident in higher levels of voter registration (Musso, Weare & Hale 2000, p.7).

Contrary to this view, the findings of this thesis through the 2009/10 benchmarking study, 2012 web reviews and interviews, indicate that while local government in inner urban and suburban areas may be more well resourced, some individual councils had demonstrated that they had made significant innovations, highlighting the potential to advance e-government capabilities regardless of their location. This is likely to be due to their ways of being: innovation, commitment, leadership, vision and courage; and in taking the step to trial new technologies and ways of doing things. The benchmarking study showed that, while e-government levels overall indicated that suburban and inner urban council websites were more advanced than rural/regional councils (with higher overall scores for the 30 features measured), there was very little difference between the different locations, in terms of two key features: the average number of fully-executable services online and the average number of interactive communications features online. Councils in Australia have started to move on from static website adoption into the
more advanced realms of e-government, where the areas of service delivery and interactive communication (and opportunities for dialogue and engagement) change the focus, where the municipal website is not the only platform for delivery, and where social media, templates and other cost-effective solutions have the potential to level the playing field, as witnessed by the use of technologies in rural councils (such as the Shire of Yarra Ranges (2012) Facebook site and the Port Macquarie-Hastings (2012) Consultation Forum).

The importance of resourcing remains central for Moon and Norris, both as an enabler in its own right and as a driver for innovation and risk tolerance:

The extent to which a government enjoys resources is closely associated with its capacity to plan and implement a particular innovation and with its willingness to take a certain level of risk. Extensive research has studied the relationship between resource availability and innovation adoption. Resources may include personnel, knowledge, financial resources or the actual technical assets (hardware and software) of the government. The propensity to adopt e-government may be influenced by many IT-related government-capacity factors, including technical and financial support. Relatively speaking, a technologically rich and resourceful organization may be less concerned about the costs of adoption because of its ability to generate higher, relevant forms of organizational slack. This view describes the resource-push perspective, which hypothesizes a positive association between the implementation of e-government and organizational capacities, such as technical and financial capacity (Moon & Norris 2005, p. 47).

However, the impact of determined individuals should not be overlooked. In an Australian case study of Victorian councils by Shackleton Fisher and Dawson (2005), interviews revealed that internal factors such as the push from staff or councillors often accelerated the e-government towards flexible online delivery. One of the three councils
studied (in metropolitan, suburban and rural locations) experienced some of this in the early stages when an enthusiastic worker took the initiative to develop an initial static web page. In another example identified through their case study, an innovative web site was developed for the By Laws division, an initiative by one staff member that had the support of the innovative division manager and became a benchmark for the rest of the council. In another example, an IT manager engaged staff across divisions in discussion of e-Government issues through his commitment to using technology to support and change business processes within the organisation. His work encouraged council staff across the organisation to question existing service delivery processes and identity how electronic service delivery could be used as a way of improving everyday business (Shackleton, Fisher & Dawson 2005). This study demonstrates how the influence of innovative individuals and leaders can impact on e-government development and is an important flag to practitioners who feel daunted at the extent of institutional resistance.

So far, this chapter has focused on the organisational capabilities required for the development of functional e-government and has drawn out the major challenges identified through this study. The next section turns to a consideration of the systemic capabilities implied by functional e-government at local level.

**Exploring systemic capabilities:**

Systemic capabilities become figural when aspirations for inter-agency collaboration are considered, and when the power of mobile social media is factored in.

The idea of a seamless organisation is one that is also citizen-centric, where a range of services can be accessed through a single point (such as a login page), where all the required information is easily found, where the customer experience is personalised, easy to use, convenient and connected. As Bekkers and Homburg (2007) have noted, this has been one of the continuing aspirations for e-government, but one that has been difficult to achieve in practice. In part, as already discussed, this is because, in order to redesign the front office, it is often necessary to also redesign the back office in order to actually deliver services.
However, Dawes (2008) points out that the process of linking relevant citizen information between agencies has presented a different challenge:

Often some of the information that an agency needs in order to plan, make decisions, or take action is held by other public or private organizations, collected for widely different purposes, and maintained in disparate formats. Environmental management, health care, and emergency response are a few of the areas in which information sharing and integration are becoming essential to effective performance. These integration efforts are technologically, organisationally, legally and politically challenging and therefore often involve the need for cross-boundary governance structures, new work processes, and significant policy attention, as well as technical tools and organizational change that respond to the needs, capabilities, and limitations of multiple organisations (Dawes 2008, pp. 92-93).

Teasing out all the issues implicated by inter-agency co-operation is beyond the scope of this thesis. Understanding the politics of inter-agency co-operation alone would make an interesting study in its own right. It should be noted, however, that travel, banking, airline, security and intelligence organisations across the globe routinely achieve millions of integrated activities at most levels of complexity on an hourly basis every night and day of the week. For this writer it is hard to believe that local government, even with all its multi-dimensionality, is not capable of mobilising and focusing effective effort in this direction.

However, an interesting conceptual and practical framework that will be referenced here is the notion of organisational boundedness, as framed by Hernes (2004). Table 8 was constructed by Hernes as a focused way of representing the complexity and richness of organisational boundaries – and of the implications of being unbounded or having ambiguous boundaries – when the ordering, distinction and threshold qualities of boundaries are considered across physical, social and mental dimensions. The questions Hernes poses in each part of the matrix are all relevant and helpful in mapping the
fundamental ways in which e-government will challenge the boundedness of local government organisations. For example, it is arguable that the desire for systemic connectedness through the internet, together with the rise of social media in connecting individuals and agencies, have changed the meaning of organisational boundaries that formally denoted what was ‘inside’ and what was ‘outside’: the qualities of distinction and threshold.

Table 8 Framework for interpreting boundaries (Hernes 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relate to:</th>
<th>Physical Boundaries</th>
<th>Social Boundaries</th>
<th>Mental Boundaries</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ordering</strong></td>
<td>Bounding of core ideas and concepts that are central and particular to the group or organisation</td>
<td>Identity and social bonding tying the group or organisation together.</td>
<td>Formal rules, physical structures, regulating human action, interaction in the group or organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The extent to which boundaries regulate internal interaction</td>
<td>To what extent are main ideas and concepts decisive for what members do?</td>
<td>To what extent do structures regulate the way groups are socially bonded?</td>
<td>To what extent do formal rules or physical structure regulate the work of members?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distinction</strong></td>
<td>The extent to which boundaries constitute a clear demarcation between the external and the internal spheres.</td>
<td>To what extent are core ideas and concepts distinctively different from those of other groups?</td>
<td>To what extent does our formal structure set us apart from other groups or organisations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The extent to which core ideas and concepts are distinctively different from those of other groups?</td>
<td>To what extent are we socially distinct from other groups?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threshold</strong></td>
<td>The extent to which boundaries regulate flow or movement between the external and internal sphere?</td>
<td>To what extent can outsiders assimilate core ideas and concepts?</td>
<td>To what extent do formal structures hinder the recruitment of outsiders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent is it possible for outsiders to be considered full members of groups?</td>
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Questioning of the notion of boundaries can begin with the notion of significant partnerships; the importance of external providers or partners who work with councils or provide platforms that enable e-government solutions:

Local governments are increasingly outsourcing work on their websites to external companies and organisations with more specialised expertise. Some have sought private companies to develop and maintain their entire website, while others have sought help on particular services (Hammerman 2005, p.18).

Further examples identified through the website benchmarking study and reviews highlight a number of interactive features that have been delivered through partnerships, including interactive consultation forums, and facilities for making e-commerce payments, conducting regional campaigns and using mobile applications, in addition to the development and design of websites. Over the years most local governments have introduced some e-commerce capabilities through their websites to allow residents to pay utility bills, fees or parking infringements. To enable citizens to make these payments online, local governments need to implement secure payment websites to protect the personal name and address information of residents, as well as their credit card data. Creating and maintaining this functionality can be a burden on communities, so numerous municipalities have sought the services of external providers. The unbounded nature of partnership is strikingly implied where councils outsource the redevelopment of their websites every few years, when all content, databases and materials can shift to new partners, requiring the re-statement of rules around confidentiality, privacy, accessibility and security; or when a council comes up with a design or solution for a particular function, which could be used by a commercial partner as an offering to all.

While, on the surface, these partnerships maintain quite clear boundaries, they represent relationships, in which staff from one organisation spend much of their time in another, both taking on the data sets, culture and expectations of the host organisation and being subject to the same rules of communication and reporting. When things go wrong, working through and separating respective liabilities can become the focus of extended
and expensive litigation. Identity (who and what belongs where?), accountability, liability – even ownership of resources – become contested through testing the boundaries. What seemed like an issue of organisation has become a systemic matter. Supply chains of any complexity also move the organisation into the systemic space of significant interdependence. In Hernes’ terms, both physical and social boundaries are in question around the qualities of distinction and threshold.

Challenges to the notion of organisational boundaries are raised by e-government at many other levels: for example, the boundaries between private life and life at work, between private and public identity, or between being an elected representative and an empowered citizen. For local government, the nature of the web and social media means that the traditional concept of the local town hall, located within clearly defined physical municipal boundaries, now translates into something that is located both globally in cyberspace and in a customised portal for individuals. Websites open up councils to viewers across the world through the public domain, well beyond their own constituency, a public domain that might include a hostile website or a campaign created by people with global rather than local concerns offering running commentary on the competence and integrity of staff members, as well as the collective intentions and actions of the organisation. They create a different, potentially more immediate, sort of relationship with council’s own citizen stakeholders. Furthermore, the deliberate use of externally controlled social media sites, forums and tools by a council further extends those boundaries, involving the rules and regulations of other domains, such as Facebook, Twitter and You Tube.

Is it possible to have a truly professional profile, created in the interests of the organisation, that is not blurred by the informal social nature of Facebook, Linked In and Twitter? Personal, social and professional lives become intertwined, connecting to colleagues, friends, family members, employers, potential employers, suppliers, business interests, competitors, campaigns, causes and a multitude of strangers, through its collaborative nature. The implications for legal responsibility, privacy, security and probity pose immediate practical issues, as well as conceptual issues that promise to keep academics and commentators engaged indefinitely.

The idea of borderless organisation also has significant implications for how democracy
is understood. As Cammaerts and Van Audenhove (2005) point out in their commentary on online political debate and unbounded citizenship:

Citizenship has always been a dynamic notion, subject to change and permanent struggle over its precise content and meaning. Recent technological, economic and political transformations have led to the development of alternative notions of citizenship that go beyond the classic understanding of citizenship relating to nation states and rights (Cammaerts & Van Audenhove 2005, p. 179).

While these writers go on to question whether the internet can create a unified transnational public sphere, they do describe the ways in which the notion of citizen becomes contested in the age of the world wide web and pervasive social media. Even regimes deeply committed to restricting the access of their own citizens to the global dialogues that have become commonplace find it increasingly difficult to do so.

People in many countries have a voice through online media, online forums and citizen groups, outside local government, with a potential audience of everyone in the world, with direct access to electronic media or the media to which it is linked. By changing the modus operandi from council informing people of policy and decisions, to inviting them to be involved from the conceptual stage and to responding to citizen-led issues, e-government can enable a broader range of people to access and become involved in local issues so that they can submit and share ideas, vote on the ideas of others, and can help shape the future of their municipality. Previously, people might have participated in a forum or focus group or public meeting attracting small numbers. Now, thousands have the potential to get involved, to generate their own agendas through rallying support, lobbying and advocating. This requires a radical reconsideration of the management of policy, consultation, engagement and decision-making. It challenges conventional ideas of protocol, due process, hierarchy, the control of information and the need to know. Freeman (2011) states that: ‘By combining participatory online practices with electronic service delivery, local governments can address their public policy-making and local democracy roles through two-way civic consultation’ (Freeman
2011, p. 182). However, as studies like that of Dawes’ (2008) assessment of e-governance in US States and local governments suggest, ‘the greatest investment and progress has been made in enhanced public services and improved government operations... the least progress appears to have occurred in enhancing democracy and exploring the implications of e-governance for administrative and institutional reform’ (Dawes 2008, p.86).

The 2009/10 benchmarking study reported in this thesis confirmed this low level of interactive participation for Australian local councils. However, more recent efforts by a small number of councils (particularly Melbourne, Mosman and Kingston) reveal the potential for allowing citizens to generate ideas and vote on others, collaborate with their community and participate in decisions. Electronic democracy means topics can be raised, discussed, shared and debated in an open forum. The use of online media for campaigning and advocating is also a powerful means of enlisting supporters and applying pressure. In the spirit of democratic opinion sharing, views from all sides of an issue need to be published in order to ensure an impartial, fair and open consultation process and balanced decision-making. This can be seen as a threat to the council’s management of its own borders, in the sense that its reputation, and its attempts at gaining identity and credibility through contemporary notions of branding, can be caught in the crossfire of some issues. The extent of its organisational, legal, social and moral obligations in challenging the handling of misinformation that can spread like wildfire to global audiences is also an issue of governance that arises from the blurring of boundaries.

This blurring is not just a concern for the organisation. When citizens set out in good faith to participate not only in e-democracy, but at any level of e-government, how is their privacy and security, on the one hand, and their right to a voice, on the other, to be mediated, controlled or protected, depending on the circumstances? How is their trust and confidence in government to be maintained when they are doing private work in public spaces? Dawes (2008) identified security as the most pervasive issue for e-government, while privacy and identity constitute the second major area of concern. These are boundary issues of the most critical kind, for individuals as well as for the organisations with whom they are dealing, with both technical and moral dimensions.
Personal identity and the ability to authenticate and protect it are issues in the design and delivery of any form of personalised services, as well as being requirements for electronic commerce, and for controlled and trusted access to systems, services and information. The management, use and preservation of information, including electronic records and archives, presents issues surrounding information quality, authenticity and stewardship, as well as strategies for effective information collection, storage and access by government and others. They also include concerns for electronic documents, databases, transaction records, e-mail and multimedia material that need to be archived and protected for future users, even while the technology that created them may change or disappear.

These are fundamental issues of collective and individual practice that will become more figural for local government and that will attract over time a range of approaches to engagement. Any simplistic attempts at offering solutions are neither appropriate nor possible. However, it is interesting to note some of the academic commentary and conceptualisation of issues surrounding the blurring of organisational and individual identities and boundaries. For example, Griffin and Stacey (2005) radically challenge the idea that organisations even exist at some level as things or systems above or outside the people who form them. Instead they theorise organisations as complex and continual responsive processes of relating, in which patterns of relating create further patterns of relating, where nothing exists outside of the interaction. The argument is that there are no detached ways of understanding organisation, because they reside only in human thought and action. In this framing, no one can step outside of the organisation, outside of their interactions with others. The organisation is not a separate thing and there is no overall program or design or plan: these exist only insofar as people are taking them up in their own local interactions.

And following the thinking of Mead (1934) and Elias (1939) on identity formation, it is through relating and groupings of relationships that we co-construct each other, forming and reforming our individual and collective identities. These are also relationships which carry the dynamics of power, the ways in which we enable or constrain others and are enabled or constrained by others in return.
Leadership itself emerges as contingent, contextual, and continually negotiated: its mandate is social and that mandate can be withdrawn at any time. In the face of uncertainty, ambiguity, this negotiation is more evident and the mandate more fragile. Heifetz’ et al (2009) positioning of adaptive leadership (which will be referred to in the next chapter) suggests an approach to the work of leadership that understands its contingent and negotiated nature, and that is very different from idealised leadership which limits the range of what the person can and will attempt to do.

While radical, these perspectives offer the interesting ideas that thinking differently creates the possibility of doing something differently, and that through everyday processes of relating, people in organisations cope with uncertainty. These are potentially powerful and important notions for those leading change in local government.

E-government as a study in complexity:

This chapter has explored the nature and implications of the organisational and systemic capabilities that the findings of this study suggest are required to achieve the functional capabilities of effective local e-government. The striking things that this exploration reveals are the number of variables involved at both organisational and systemic levels, their interconnectedness, and the tensions and dilemmas immediately created or exacerbated by trying to resolve any one of the issues associated with them independently. Taken together, this suggests a domain of complexity in the terms suggested by Stacey (1992). A domain of practice is considered to be complex when there is uncertainty about is happening or will happen; lack of agreement about what should be done or what should have priority; when attempts to resolve an issue produces positive outcomes for some but make others worse off; when there are multiple variables and the relationships between them are not obvious; and when the issues involve serious consequences and impacts. Complex issues represent dilemmas: whatever we do, there will be downsides as well as upsides and it is not an option to deny or ignore them, since they don’t go away but will reappear in other forms at other times and locations. Deferral of engagement means that problems grow worse. Like grit in an oyster, organisations and individuals must grow or regress, but it is not an option to remain neutral or unaffected.
The conceptual positioning of social, economic, geo-political and technological issues as complex has developed momentum in recent years. The appearance in 2011 of the Handbook of Complexity and Management (Allen, Maguire & McKelvey 2011) signaled the development of a critical mass of thinking from this perspective, across several disciplines. Letiche, Lissack and Schultz (2011) explore recent advances in social complexity theory, arguing that despite the upheavals of boom and bust, and the speed and uncertainty of change in modern life, management and organisational theory have remained relatively static and unaffected by theories of chaos, nonlinear dynamics and radical unpredictability. Indeed, it can be argued that much contemporary management theorising represents a continual recycling and repackaging of old ideas that simply come and go in popularity.

However, Leybourne’s (2010) commentary notes increased recognition of complexity and ambiguity within the practice of, and in theorising, about both project and change management. This has entailed a reconsideration of traditional mechanistic project-based planning and control processes, and a greater interest in understanding them, in more turbulent environments, as evolving and emergent. This understanding focuses on human dynamics and contextual influences and impacts. As Leybourne puts it, this complicates practice in the ‘plan then execute’ paradigm inherent in the operations-influenced approach to project management. It accepts improvisation, active experimentation; values agility, creativity, intuition and tacit knowledge and experience; encourages multiple dependencies and relationships; and places decision-making and initiative with team members. Described variously as complex, organic, adaptive and emergent, this perspective presents significant challenges for traditional project-based organisations that rely on explicit control mechanisms, authorisations, accountabilities and safety nets. It also offers some useful insights into the challenge of what is involved as organisations and individuals grapple with the complexity of e-government at the local level.

In terms of what is implied for organisational capability, Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997, p. 516) have focused on what they call dynamic capabilities: ‘the ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competence to address rapidly changing environment. Dynamic capabilities thus reflect an organisation’s ability to
achieve new and innovative forms of competitive advantage’. This calls for agility to quickly and effectively mobilise resources, to improvise, and to engage in bricolage. Long ago, Simon (1955) contrasted the idealised, and widely held, view within economic theory that a decision-maker can arrive at perfect decisions, with the perspective that, in practice, decisions can never be the complete or perfect achievement of objectives, but merely the best solutions available under a given set of circumstances, and with a given set of information. In Simon’s terms, the effective economic decision-maker is actually a satisfier who arrives at a decision that is acceptable and workmanlike (the contribution of the bricoleur).

The perspective of dynamic capability also challenges Atkinson’s (1999, p. 337) iron triangle of accepted criteria for evaluating the success of projects: bringing in deliverables on time, coming in on budget, and achieving functionality. For example, one dimension of dynamic organisational capability that has been identified is the capacity to work ex tempore: ‘outside the flow of time’ (Ciborra, 1999, p. 78), beyond the constraints of clock time. As a capability, this means identifying in real time the changing priorities of various stakeholders, rather than relying on rigid and predetermined milestones; handling situations swiftly with running-in time or time for formal decision processes. This involves both discernment about what is happening and emerging right now, and an understanding that aspirations and visions for the future are actually only ever played out in that present. The reality of operating 24/7 highlights in a very practical way that time is always open, not bounded, and that the value that is added is constantly negotiated and re-negotiated in real time. Improvised work involves rapid decision-making about trade-offs between time, money and value as perceived by a range of stakeholders. Plans, rules and procedures are abstract, while improvisation delivers in real, economic exchange time (Crossan et al 1996).

On another front, Leybourne draws parallels with Stacey’s (1992) framing of the management of complex adaptive systems that must continually learn from the collective experience of all those involved, and in the process creating what Stacey calls libraries or repertoires of potentially re-useable actions. This contrasts with some traditional understanding of how organisations learn, most notably the idealised notion of world’s best practice and the importance of copying it. Instead, an important capacity
becomes that of discerning local patterns of tacit expertise that both develop from and enhance improvised action in situ.

Not surprisingly, Karlstrom and Runeson (2005) have suggested that often organisations have serious discomfort with notions of dynamic capability. Some of this unease, they suggest, stems from a deep-seated and shared belief that what is planned and implemented must have more value than spontaneous innovation and adaptive behaviour. With this belief comes an attachment to plans, even when they are not working. Another source of anxiety is the possibility of what could happen if staff step outside the established (increasingly tight) frameworks of risk management, even when it can be demonstrated that more limited action is ineffective or damaging. They suggest that as a result, many organisations attempt to combine agile activity with traditional stage-gate processes. Leybourne’s own substantial contribution is to offer a conceptualisation of a more effective iteration of the two. Called the improvisation matrix, this conceptual framework aims to identify when analytical and creative approaches are needed at different stages and under different circumstances.

The conceptualisation of e-government, and particularly the development of the requisite enabling organisational capabilities, as a domain of complex practice does have the potential to create the serious discomfort that Karlstrom and Runeson referred to. However, it strikes the writer of this thesis that it is also a conceptualisation that does justice to the work involved in realising e-government. And ironically, in some ways the descriptions of blurred boundaries and identities fit the writer’s own experience of what life in local government can be like, even without the possibilities of e-government. By definition, the day-to-day business of government at the local level has always been closer to its community, and communities frequently try to blur and act outside the rules of engagement that council organisations try to prescribe. Its work has always had the potential to be more closely and directly contested.

That aside, it is also likely that local government organisations will find it more comfortable to use familiar frameworks to deal with unfamiliar territory. As Letiche et al (2011) observe, when the game changes enough and an organisation fails to understand what is happening, serious fracturing of organisational capability and limited
effectiveness of organisational effort are inevitable outcomes. In the realm of local government, as both the literature and the interviews undertaken for this study suggest, some of the slowness in the initial uptake of e-government represents a slowness to fully comprehend what is required and what is involved.

Given this, it is fortunate that the complexity literature is starting to answer some of its own questions and produce tools and frameworks of the kind offered by Leybourne. These tools are likely to be very helpful in the transition space, linking old and new practice, and framing both of them as contingent and complementary.

There has so far been preliminary sharing of the findings of this study in two very large forums involving senior executives and councillors from right across municipal, regional and rural Victorian local government in the first half of 2012. These presentations have triggered lively debate in the intermediate space explored by Leybourne. However, there has been general agreement that the industry’s most urgent need is to understand the organisational enablers needed to support the requisite functional capabilities and to find effective approaches to change management and leadership.

At a more personal level, the complexity literature significantly blurs the contributions and boundaries between change managers and project managers, and in the next and final chapter, the thesis turns to the practicalities of working in this intermediate space.
CHAPTER 7 NAVIGATING THE TERRITORY

This final chapter returns to the implications of the issues that have been raised and explored throughout the study, for practice. As the writer of this thesis, I wish to take up my own voice and directly share with other practitioners the insight that has emerged from this study, and the advice that I have already taken into – and tested – in a number of professional senior executive forums in Victorian local government over the past six months. At the time of writing, I have been employed in the field of Communications Management for 18 years across city, rural and suburban councils in the state of Victoria.

Whatever the level of resources available for the task, most commentators agree that simply trying to reinvent an electronic version of the existing organisation guarantees that it will never realise the full potential of e-government. It is more about the journey of changing the organisation culture and business model, empowering people and ensuring governance whilst embracing openness and innovation. Reinventing an organisation in this way is no small task, and requires strong leadership that challenges traditional ways of thinking.

Borrowing the words of Higgs and Titchen (2001), I suggest that the organisational and systemic capabilities required are not only ones of doing (like deploying resources) but include ones of being: significant mindsets and practices that can be clearly articulated and modelled, that are expected of most people, most of the time, and that pervade the way most things are done.

Working at the organisational level

Creating a citizen-centric mind set is arguably one compelling example of organisational capability as a way of being.

Creating a citizen-centric organisation is about seeing things from the citizen’s perspective and changing operations and services to meet their needs. It is about starting from the outside to ask citizens what their needs are, and looking inside the organisation to ask ‘what does our capability need to be?’ This is very different from viewing the
outside world through the windows of the organisation and simply asking ‘what does our existing capability allow us to do?’

There are at least two ways of looking from the outside, and these need to work in tandem for best effect. One way is by monitoring the continually changing electronic environment, looking at best practice examples, learning and becoming aware of innovations that continually improve service delivery through technological capabilities and systems. An organisational capability for continual learning, networking and research is critical: through technology partners, workshops, education and experience through interaction. An interest in keeping pace with the rapidly evolving possibilities and practice, and the capacity to do so, is arguably not just the business of a few specialists in the organisation, but something to which everyone can be alert. Staff are citizens too, living in an electronically mediated world, and having a firewall between life experience and work experience might not be as helpful in this domain as it can be in others. Encouraging people to share experiences is part of building an innovative and intelligent, informed culture. This can be a significant practical change in culture building, not too divorced from an earlier notion that everyone in an organisation is in the business of customer service, whatever their job title says they do.

Another way of looking at the organisation from the outside is by undertaking research with citizen customers, to gauge their levels of satisfaction with service delivery, to explore their experiences, to find out how services may be improved to meet their needs, and to identify issues for possible solutions. Citizens are also customers in a range of other spaces, using varying technological capabilities in their daily lives, at home, at work, in education and for socialising and entertainment. These experiences set their expectations for their dealings with government. Moreover, the functional capacity to customise and personalise services means understanding that citizens are more than individual representatives of collective demographic profiles, market segments, cultures, age groups, lifestyles and preferences. The technology itself increasingly provides the means to customise some interactions, building on the pattern of previous transactions. In this case, the intelligent monitoring of patterns of usage could be illuminating.

Informed by these data, council is well placed to develop a clear and compelling vision
of what it aspires to offer its citizens. This needs to be sufficiently clear to keep the intention in view across the community and at all levels of the organisation, over long periods, while the means to the desired end are continuously evolving. A clear vision translates into proactive planning rather than a reactive response to issues such as external pressure (driven by the community or technology, or motivated by political considerations).

Visions need to be translated into vivid designs (like the architectural drawings for a house) that reflect the purpose of what is intended (to educate, engage, inform, enable convenient self-service or empower). It is at this point that the four functional capability clusters identified through the examination of the literature, and the associated web features used in the benchmarking study, become powerful tools. They map the functional capabilities and features that transform manual service delivery to online service delivery that is accessible, secure, easy and convenient; the functional capabilities and features of integrated and seamless, connected delivery and access; those associated with online citizen participation in decision-making on local issues through online spaces in addition to traditional channels; and finally, those associated with good governance across privacy, security, monitoring, moderation and responsiveness.

The organisation then needs to create the business models that will both reflect and shape the functional capabilities that have been targeted. It must neutrally map out and examine its existing service and supply chains, disaggregating these (just as a commercial organisation would); discovering which ones now need to be connected to service online capabilities; identifying the gaps; surfacing and labeling all the different processes involved; and analysing where online improvements may enhance the service to the customer (and create a benefit to the business). It is equally important to know where online services might be less effective. Sometimes this overall analysis will eliminate the need for customers to contact or visit the council, enabling self-service through fully executable services from start to finish (such as a change of address process online, or a rates payment). However, other services or technological innovations will create work (such as a request to fix a broken footpath). The organisation needs to reassess how services are triggered in an online environment, understand both the social and capital value of what is now possible, and the cost
effectiveness of the value proposition implied by various service standards, while managing expectations and dealing with follow through on requests and complaints. This is an exercise in reinventing the business model from the outside in.

While this is easy to say, it can be very hard to do, cutting across accepted organisational boundaries, recasting roles and dependencies, challenging ownership, accountabilities and organisational politics, creating actual and virtual teams where none had existed before. Reporting structures, delegations and mandates for permissions and decision-making, and informal empowerment of staff to solve problems on behalf of the customer are all implicated in a truly citizen-centric orientation. The question of what is centralised and what is de-centralised is visited, along with a probing and fresh inquiry into what is meant by control and good governance. The implications for skill sets, staff confidence, and education and training requirements are also in the mix.

As noted in previous chapters, there can be strong philosophical and principled objections to e-government that trigger active resistance to change. It can be argued that many local government services are too physical in nature to warrant consideration of online service access (such as cleaning drains, personal care or maternal and child health). There is also debate around the social capital created by face-to-face or voice-to-voice encounters, and the value of interpersonal relationships that have been the foundation of many council services for many years. There is also the counter-argument that by putting some components online (such as reminders, notifications, fee payments and requests for service), precious human resources can be redeployed to contacts that really do make a difference to the lives of citizens, in ways that the citizens themselves can and will verify.

Given the earlier observation that change on this scale cannot be undertaken radically and in any case is never complete, what are the core mindsets and practices that can help? Contemporary understanding of leading and managing people through the uncertainty and challenges of complex practice opportunities and challenges speaks of adaptive leadership (Hiefetz, Linksky & Grashow 2009; Clawson 2009). One of the key characteristics of adaptive leadership is the ability to clearly communicate the intent of any ongoing work, and to keep communicating. Even if there is uncertainty and volatility around how things are to be done, nobody should be in any doubt as to why it
is important to start on the journey and to keep going: the vision should be clear. Another important characteristic is the ability to create hope and confidence that people can, and will, do what they say they will do. Yet another is the recognition that, while we might create motivating and exciting visions for the future, the time frame of daily life is only ever now, and that now must make sense in its own right. In other words, there must be a strong bridge between later (the vision ahead) and now (the current climate and actions needed), a bridge strong enough to resolve the contradictions that may appear when people are asked to do things today that, on the surface, seem to be disconnected from tomorrow’s dream. This bridge building and sense-making cannot be left to chance. It is a job that requires both continual being and doing.

Adaptive leadership is also distributed: it is not something that is the work of a few designated executives and middle managers. The importance of mandating and skilling front line leadership is emphasised, as is the public recognition and mandating of the thought and practice leadership (leadership by example) of innovative individuals. Adaptive leadership is capable of thinking both strategically and operationally: in the case of e-government, both envisaging citizen-centric e-government and doing the detailed diagnosis entailed in disaggregating the existing business and organisational models and re-designing them, drawing on the intelligence and sense-making of everyone who can help, inside and outside the organisation. Adaptive leadership treads the fine line between having a grand plan and a grand vision, and orchestrating the phases of development, the manageable stages (rather than ambitious and ill-conceived leaps) through which it will be realised.

Adaptive leadership in the area of e-government can be enacted at a range of levels, through innovative partnerships with external agencies that can facilitate the change, through the innovative communications or IT manager who successfully engages people, or through the chief executive who undertakes a total reform of organisational structure, processes and roles. By establishing a cross-functional team of people from many parts of the organisation, and commencing with a small number of prioritised projects, the change management process can begin.
Working at the systemic level

How are practitioners to engage with issues that are systemic and that challenge the notion of organisational borders? The short answer that occurs to this writer is: not alone.

These are technical, legal, moral and ethical issues that call for whole-of-industry consultation, sharing of information and practice wisdom - and possibly the development of industry codes of practice, common platforms and other sharing of resources - through industry associations, forums, special interest groups and informal networking and consultation. They also call for serious collaboration with other industries, other levels of government, other countries and with the academic community, bringing multiple lenses to bear on issues that themselves cross many boundaries. The good news for local government in Australia is that it is highly unlikely that it will have to find effective ways to engage with these dilemmas alone. The tensions between freedom and security, transparency and privacy, beset every aspect of modern life, and many of these tensions are not driven by modern technology alone, although modern communications technology can rapidly amplify what is at stake. Even within one organisation, regular consideration of these issues on a collective basis, at many levels of the organisation, would seem to be appropriate.

However, possibly the most obvious consultation and collaboration necessary is with the community itself. Just as technology can sometime solve the problems it presents, so too can the community help to resolve or at least manage the tensions inherent in e-government and e-democracy. Community has a long history, dating from long before the internet and social media arrived, of living with the limitations and privileges, the freedoms and opportunities, that sustained democracy entails. It seems to this writer that it is easy to simplify, stereotype and diminish the capabilities of community life by fearing what it can do at its worst instead of cultivating the things that it does well, in terms of moderating itself in the face of far greater challenges than those presented by e-government. Ironically, however, the idea of genuine collaboration with communities can challenge a deeply ingrained mindset that communities are to be managed, not empowered. One of the key issues identified through the interviews as part of this study was the reluctance of local government to stop trying to control messages, and to find
ways to operate within the socially-based framework that new media presents and expects, allowing citizens freedom of speech to contribute views on local issues with genuine intent. Inside the organisation, this also means empowering and skilling staff to respond, and to develop the right processes and policies that will allow them as much freedom to do so as possible, whilst putting in place the safety nets and recognising where an issue needs more formal and strategic approach. The nature of social media cannot wait for the traditional formal approval processes that have dominated communications practice for many years.

The conclusion that I have come to is that the organisational and systemic capabilities required to effectively and constructively realise the full potential of e-government (as it is currently understood, let alone as it develops into the future) are about engaging adaptive, distributed leadership; collaborative intelligence gathering and sense-making, problem-solving and innovation; and partnership with community in framing and resolving the tensions that community engagement and e-democracy seem to create. These capabilities require an appreciation of the importance of both doing: in terms of implementing the technological and organisational systems and solutions that these significant, ongoing issues require; and an appreciation of being, particularly in terms of reciprocal trust; high levels of self-awareness around personal intent, assumptions about self and others, and integrity.

The focus now shifts to the implications of e-government for the traditional role of communications manager.

**On being a manager of communications in local e-government**

I have experienced the move from more traditional forms of communication (such as advertising, print publications and media publicity) to more dynamic, immediate and customised approaches, including the use of the internet, e-services, digital communications, online consultation and social media. As this has changed, so too have the channels available to citizens, elected Councillors, news media, employees and government agencies.

Each organisation that I have worked for has found itself in a time of rapidly developing
online opportunity. Not unlike the various stages of website maturity mentioned in the models of e-government earlier, local government websites were initially developed and hosted by in-house IT departments as technical tools. Responsibility then gradually shifted across to Public Relations and Communications Departments, as the use of websites became more about regular updating of information, and as user-friendly content management systems became available. The focus over time has expanded to service provision (particularly electronic payments and forms) and more recently the gradual adoption of interactive communications tools and social media, with more external private organisations (partners) developing customised websites, solutions, features and platforms.

Traditionally, communications practice (and public relations) has involved careful preparation, editing and formal approval processes for communications materials: key messages, scripted media releases, announcements, campaigns, direct mail publications and advertising materials, often taking days or weeks to finalise and being one-way and limited in their distribution boundaries. Materials in the environment of web 2.0 (let alone the next stage web 3.0) and social media are immediate and take on an entirely different tone, being short, catchy and brief, less formal, sometimes conversational, socially focused and enticing a response and dialogue, often without approvals or editing, and potentially engaging a global audience through boundary-less cyberspace. This concept is challenging for local government organisations to navigate and can be difficult for communications practitioners to put into practice, where, as the frontrunners and experts in communication, they need to play a leading role in educating, innovating and influencing their organisations to continually progress within the new online era, whilst protecting and enhancing organisational image and reputation. I believe that there has been a trend towards employing some dedicated digital communication staff, but outsourcing key functions and capabilities and fostering of partnerships with external providers to manage this territory. Specialists employed within local government organisations to develop policy and strategies to guide local e-government at the organisational and industry levels remain scarce. Moreover, many traditional practitioners continue to grapple with the challenges. Sometimes the innovations are driven through other departments in a council organisation, such as libraries, through special events or emergencies, through political pressure, IT initiatives, or through citizen demand.
With the move to more public forms of social media, local government organisations have had to consider the implications of opening themselves up for scrutiny as well as for business in the public sphere, where people now have the power to say exactly what they think about an organisation and its services, and share it with the world, directly, with no intermediary. Social media means that an issue can be raised by a resident one minute and broadcast to the world the next, with many discussions taking place within and outside the council’s own social media channels, where individuals, rather than intermediaries such as journalists, now have the capability to make news, collaborate with others, have a view and share experiences. In the private sector this can make or break a business but, managed well in local government, it has the capacity to save lives through emergency management, create opportunities for individuals, businesses and communities, and enrich the practices of democracy.

All of this cuts to the very essence of the traditional role of public relations practitioners around the world in providing, mediating and managing communications between the organisation and its publics. Reputation management becomes more risky, and more ‘front-of-mind’ in the everyday space, where the power of the internet enables people to post comments and images to an audience of millions in an instant, sometimes without context and sometimes to the detriment of government organisations.

As the role of the communications manager evolves to advise on or assist with aspects of community engagement, digital service delivery, change management, policy making and guardianship, it is reasonable to ask the question: how is the social obligation of the council to its citizens mediated and managed by the manager of communications? Furthermore, how is this obligation prioritised relative to the perceived needs of the organisation that employs the communications practitioner? What is the commitment to the provision of fearless advice as compared with reputation management, as traditionally understood? I believe that this is a core practice issue for people who take on this role, as it moves from being a manager of communications channels and relationships, to an advisor on and facilitator of a whole range of complex issues that are of concern to both the community and to the organisation.

Theories of organisational communication have changed significantly.
Earlier linear communication theories, such as the Hypodermic Needle or Injection models - saw communication as a one-way process from the sender to the receiver .... They assumed that the receiver would absorb everything that was sent and understand it exactly as the sender intended .... More recent views of communication see it as a two-way process, often circular, which requires the participation of both the sender and receiver. The feedback loop is seen as a critical part of the communication process, meaning that each person involved in the communication is both a sender and a receiver. And that each person needs to be concerned about whether they are using the right means to communicate their message effectively (Tymson, Lazar & Lazar 2006, pp. 6, 7).

The more recent two-way communications model (facilitated by innovative technologies) emphasises feedback, open dialogue between council and citizens, and gateways to consultation, engagement and participation, and ultimately e-democracy.

In its traditional form, consultation is mostly conducted in a prescribed formal or semi-formal manner, such as through written submissions, inquiries, hearings, reviews and in meetings. In contrast, discussion in interactive online environments occurs in a dynamic, open and often colloquial conversational way (Macnamara 2010, p. 230).

However, the real complexity of online communication was highlighted 12 years ago by Haig (2000), who believed that it completely changes any simple conceptions of one- and two-way channels, enabling communication to occur on a one-to-one or mass scale, or by narrowcasting messages to groups within the same audience, bypassing the intermediary and communicating directly. (It should be noted that not everyone agrees with this. Haugtvedt, Machleit and Yalch (2005) present an opposing view, suggesting that the same basic communication rules apply for both traditional offline media and online media, and that human characteristics remain constant over time, presenting limits for new media. This is a debate that might well be resolved by those who study
human behaviour and neurological functioning in the online environment: a theoretical and empirical development that takes communications as a field of study and practice to a very different sphere).

All of this makes me very conscious of the differences in the way I would now understand e-government, having undertaken this research project, being exposed to the literature and being enlightened by conversations with leading practitioners. I would like to emphasize that e-government, within the context of the continual evolution of technological innovation, presents exciting opportunities and challenging problems that involves both doing things, and finding ways to engage honourably and ethically with the competing tensions presented at the organisational level (ways of being).

With regard to the profession, the role of the communications manager in this complex and dynamic space is redefined as it grapples with e-government. A fundamental shift is needed from the traditional specialist role to a leadership/advisory role that will encourage and ‘coach the team’ in navigating through the multi-dimensional terrain. To embrace the benefits of new media and digital communication, there are a plethora of issues to be addressed around business modelling and analysis; organisational culture and change; leadership at all levels; organisational identity and branding; resourcing, hiring the right people equipped with the skills to manage new forms of communication; ensuring that planning, policies and procedures are in place to ensure that appropriate tools are used; ensuring responsiveness, monitoring and record keeping; and empowering and training staff to provide services to their customers in new ways. All of these issues involve mobilising and orchestrating the efforts of many people, and this is the work of the executive team, and of the kind of role I have in mind.

Through my experience I have been impressed with the tremendous contribution that local government has made, and will continue to make, to contemporary life. This experience has reinforced for me a great sense of the privilege entailed in serving communities, just as my thesis journey has added the scholarship of others to my understanding of this enormously exciting field of practice. In many respects, e-government at the local level epitomises many of the opportunities and problems of our age. Faced with blending rapid technological change with the qualities and aspirations of our humanity, and taking responsibility for facilitating many of the requirements of
local communities, local government is arguably right at the heart. I believe that e-government has the potential to revolutionise our understanding of what it can really do with us and for us.
REFERENCES


Ciborra, CU 1999, Notes on improvisation and time in organisations. *Accounting, Management & Information Technologies*, 9, p. 77-94.


Howard Partners Pty Ltd 2006, New concepts in innovation: the keys to a growing Australia, Business Council of Australia, Melbourne.


Intergovernmental Advisory Board 1999, *Integrated Service Delivery: Governments Using Technology to Serve the Citizen*, Intergovernmental Advisory Board, Fairfax, VA, USA.


Smith, A 2010, ‘Government online: the internet gives citizens new paths to government services and information’, Pew Internet and American Life Project,
Washington, DC, viewed 14 April 2012,


**Australian Local Government Websites and Web Pages**

**New South Wales Council Websites**


215


Mosman Council 2012, Big Ideas Forum, viewed 9 January 2012


Port Macquarie-Hastings Council 2012, Facebook Page, viewed 2 January 2012,


**Victorian Council Websites**


Shire of Yarra Ranges 2012, Facebook Page, viewed 9 January 2012 (http://www.facebook.com/yrccouncil)

Shire of Yarra Ranges 2012, Twitter Page, viewed 9 January 2012 (http://www.twitter.com/#!/yrccouncil)


**International Local Government Websites**

**UK**


Warwickshire County Council 2012, Iphone Applications, viewed 9 January 2012
www.warwickshire.gov.uk/iphone

**USA**


**CANADA**

**Other Websites**


Appendix 1. Darryl West Web Audit Tool

Percentage of Websites Offering Publications and Databases

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Phone Contact Info.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Publications</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Audio Clips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Video Clips</td>
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9. Presence of Services online and Number of services online

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<tr>
<td>One Service</td>
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<td>Two Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or More Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ten Most Frequent and Visible Online Services

- File taxes
- Order publications
- File a complaint
- Vehicle Reg/Renewal
- Order Hunting License
- Request Forms
- Order Fishing License
- Order Vital Records
- Register for Seminars, Conf
- Shop Online
Privacy and Security Policy indicators

Assessment of E-government Privacy and Security Statements

10. Prohibit Commercial Marketing

11. Prohibit Cookies

12. Prohibit Sharing Personal Information

13. Use Computer Software to Monitor Traffic

14. Websites with Privacy Features
15. Websites with Security Statements
16. Disability Access

State and Federal Government Websites Having Four Types of Accessibility

17. TTY/TDD Phone Lines

18. Bobby Approved

19. W3C or Section 508 Compliant

20. Text Version

21. Foreign Language Access / Translations
22. Advertisements
23. User Payments / Fees
24. Links to a Government Services Portal
25. Digital Signature
26. Credit Card payments
Democratic Outreach

State and Federal Government Websites Offering Democratic Outreach

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Comments Forms</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Broadcast of events</td>
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<td>32.</td>
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Email Responsiveness

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<td>Three days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six days or more</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix 2. Adapted Benchmarking Tool

Date:
Name of Council:
Location:
Population Size:
Category:
Web address:
Time Start:

Features Being Measured

*Websites Offering Contact Information, Publications, Multimedia Options and Databases*

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Type/Comment</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Address Info.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Email addresses / Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Links to Other Sites - Online service portals (one stop shop website that integrates e-government services)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Publications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Databases</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>E-news</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Audio Clips</td>
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</tr>
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**USABILITY / NAVIGATION**

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</thead>
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<td>Site Map / Index</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Search Capability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
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Content Structure Notes
FULLY TRANSACTIONAL ONLINE SERVICES

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Number of fully executable online services

Government Sites Offering Online Services (end to end complete services)

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Two Services</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three or More Services</td>
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</table>

Types of online services

Ten Most Frequent and Visible Services

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<tr>
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<th>2</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
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SECURITY AND PRIVACY

Websites Showing Security Policy Statement

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Websites with Privacy Policy Statement/Features

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Assessment of E-government Privacy and Security Statements

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<td>Prohibit Cookies</td>
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<td>Prohibit Sharing Personal Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use Computer Software to Monitor Traffic</td>
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<td>Disclaimer</td>
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ACCESSIBILITY
### Websites with Disability Access

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### Types of Disability Accessibility

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<td>W3C/WCAG Standards Met</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Version without graphics</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text size</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Other (alt tags - labeled data/graphics for screen readers, contrast etc)</td>
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### Websites with Language Translation Services

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<tbody>
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### INTERACTIVITY BETWEEN COUNCIL AND CITIZEN

### Government Websites Offering Democratic Outreach

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<td>19</td>
<td>Post Comments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Email Updates (RSS feeds)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Broadcast (Blogs, chats, discussions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Website Personalization/customisation features</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Online Forms/Comment Forms/Surveys</td>
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<td>24</td>
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### E-COMMERCE

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<td>Portal Link</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Digital Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Credit card</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### INSERT Screen Shots of Website and Innovative Examples

### INSERT Copy of Privacy/Copyright Statements

### INSERT Notes
Appendix 3: Recommended changes to the benchmarking tool

The benchmarking tool used for the 2009/10 website audits was based on most of the elements identified by Daryl West (2001), in his study of Federal and State Government websites in the United States. The auditing tool is three pages in length and takes up to two hours to undertake, depending on the usability of the website being measured.

Essentially, it is a checklist (simplified in table 8) that involves viewing each website, starting from the home page, and seeking the key features identified on the list. On some websites, many of the features are on the front page. On other websites the features can be found using the search functions, quick finds, or going through the menu/navigation.

The tool can be used by either an individual council looking to use the data as a benchmark that can be measured against each year, to link in with an e-government or digital communications strategy, or it can be used by each State, or by municipal associations to encourage best practice.

Following the benchmarking study undertaken in 2009/10, a number of modifications are recommended:

• Checking for the presence of mobile websites and mobile devices or applications.
• Identifying new technologies that are to be measured (e.g. QR codes).
• A specific topic for ‘Social Media’ presence – outlining the key tools/sites being used on the checklist and room for ‘others’.
• Recording the number of external sites/specific sites.
• Determining whether the site is a template or a customised site.
• Including measures of ‘responsiveness’ – such as subscribing to a newsletter and success of this.

It is recommended that this audit tool be taken to representatives of the industry to consult on suitable measures, if it was to be used across the board.
# Table of Features to measure

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Phone information</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Email information</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Links to other sites</td>
<td>CON/INT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Publications</td>
<td>GOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Databases</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>e-news</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Audio/Podcast</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>UC&amp;R</td>
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<td></td>
<td>USABILITY/NAVIGATION</td>
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</tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>SiteMap</td>
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<td>FULLY TRANSACTIONAL ONLINE SERVICES</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Post Comments (Social media/Consultation)</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Email Updates/RSS</td>
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<td>Broadcast (Blogs, Chats, Discussions, Twitter)</td>
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<td>Website Personalisation/Customisation</td>
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<td>UC&amp;R</td>
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<td>26</td>
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<td>e-services</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Portal Link</td>
<td>CON/INT</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Digital Signature</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Credit Card use</td>
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</table>

NUMBER OF FEATURES PRESENT
LEVEL OF E-GOVERNMENT
Appendix 4. List of 100 councils surveyed, grouped by State and location (Suburban, Regional/Rural and Inner Urban)

VICTORIAN COUNCILS (23 Regional or Rural, 22 Suburban and 5 Inner Urban including Melbourne)

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<thead>
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<tr>
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<td>Ballarat (R)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Bass Coast (R)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>BawBaw (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Bayside (S)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Boroondara (IU)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Brimbank (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Cardinia (R)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Casey (S)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Darebin (S)</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>East Gippsland (R)</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Frankston (S)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Glen Eira (S)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Hepburn (R)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Hobson’s Bay (S)</td>
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<td>33.</td>
<td>Monash (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Moonee Valley (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Moreland (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Mornington</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Moyne (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Nillumbik (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Port Phillip (IU)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Shire of Yarra Ranges (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>South Gippsland (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>Stonnington (IU)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Surfcoast Shire (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Swan Hill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Warnambool (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Whitehorse</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>Whittlesea</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>Wyndham</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>Yarra (IU)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NEW SOUTH WALES COUNCILS (28 Regional or Rural, 15 Suburban and 7 Inner Urban)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>State</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Albury (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Auburn (S)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Ballina (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Bankstown (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Bega Valley (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Blacktown (S)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Blue Mountains (R)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Bombala (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Broken Hill (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Byron (R)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Camden (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Canterbury (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Cessnock (R)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Fairfield (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Gundagai (R)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Hawkesbury (R)</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Holroyd (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Hornsby (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Hurstville (S)</td>
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<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Kempsey (R)</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>Kuringai (S)</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Lachlan (R)</td>
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<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Leichhardt (IU)</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>Lismore (R)</td>
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<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Liverpool (S)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Maitland (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Manly (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Mosman (IU)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Newcastle (R)</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>North Sydney (IU)</td>
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<td>31.</td>
<td>Orange (R)</td>
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<td>32.</td>
<td>Parramatta (S)</td>
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<td>33.</td>
<td>Port Macquarie (R)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>35.</td>
<td>Richmond Valley (R)</td>
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<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Rockdale (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Ryde (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Shoalhaven (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Snowy River (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Sydney (IU)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Tamworth (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>Tumbarumba (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Tweed (R)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Urrala (R)</td>
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<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Wagga Wagga (R)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>Warrington (S)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Waverley (IU)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>Willoughby (IU)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>Wollongong (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>Wyong (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5. Benchmarking Example: City of Boroondara

City of Boroondara
***Blogger, Facebook, Twitter, RSS
***Careers website

Date: 23 December 2010
Name of Council: City of Boroondara
Location: Inner-Eastern Melbourne
Population Size: 165,000
Category: Inner Urban
Web address: www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/
Time Start: 12.00pm

Features Being Measured

Websites Offering Contact Information, Publications, Multimedia Options and Databases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Description</th>
<th>YES/NO</th>
<th>Type/Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Phone Contact Info.</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Address Info.</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Email addresses/Information</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Links to Other Sites - Online service portals (one stop shop website that integrates e-government services)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Publications</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Databases</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>E-news</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Library e-news, RSS, Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Audio Clips</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Video Clips</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

USABILITY/NAVIGATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Description</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>What?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Site Map/Index</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>sitemap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Search capability</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>A-Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Quickfind</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>A-Z</td>
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</table>

Content Structure

Beautiful layout, unconventional, user friendly, tab layout, clear and uncluttered, professional. Navigation focused on end-user

FULLY TRANSACTIONAL ONLINE SERVICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Description</th>
<th>YES/NO</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Presence of fully executable online services</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of full executable online services

**Government Sites Offering Online Services (end to end complete services)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Services</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>One Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Two Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Three or More Services</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Types of online services

**Payments**

- Animal registration, rates, parking, infringements (e.g. click through to Australia Post)
- Online Planning Register
- Careers

**Ten Most Frequent and Visible Services**

1. Tabs: latest, news, events, have your say, meetings
2. I want to…(e.g. Immunise my children)
3. Building and Planning
4. Payments and Rates
5. Waste and Recycling
6. Jobs
7. (Specific projects)
8. Residents
9. Business
10. Our City
11. Your Council
12. Libraries

**SECURITY AND PRIVACY**

**Websites Showing Security Policy Statement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>N</td>
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</table>

**Websites with Privacy Policy Statement / Features**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>YES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessment of E-government Privacy and Security Statements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>YES/NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prohibit Commercial Marketing</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohibit Cookies</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohibit Sharing Personal Information</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Computer Software to Monitor Traffic</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclaimer</td>
<td>?</td>
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</table>
**ACCESSIBILITY**

*Websites with Disability Access*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>What?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>16</td>
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</table>

**Types of Disability Accessibility**

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<tr>
<th>TTY Phone Lines</th>
<th>?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W3C / WCAG Standards Met</td>
<td>mention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Version without graphics</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text size</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (alt tags - labeled data/graphics for screen readers, contrast etc)</td>
<td>Not on front pages but on some other pages</td>
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*Websites with Language Translation Services*

<table>
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<th>No.</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Yes Limited – message with phone number</td>
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</table>

**INTERACTIVITY BETWEEN COUNCIL AND CITIZEN**

*Government Websites Offering Democratic Outreach*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>What Type?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Post Comments</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Email Updates (RSS feeds)</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Broadcast (Blogs, chats, discussions)</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Website Personalization / customization features</td>
<td>no</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Online Forms / Comment Forms / Surveys</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Web-based campaigns</td>
<td>no</td>
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**E-COMMERCE**

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<td>Ads</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>User payments/ Fees</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Services</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Portal Link</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Digital Sig</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Credit card</td>
<td>Yes via links to make payments</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Appendix 6. Individual Council Results for 30 online features grouped by location (Suburban, Regional/Rural and Inner Urban)

### VICTORIAN COUNCILS: RURAL/REGIONAL (23)

<p>| FEATURES | Appen Shire | Ararat | Ballarat | Bass Coast | Bendigo | Cardinia | East Gippsland | G/Bendigo | Geelong | Hervey Bay | Latrobe | Macedon | Mornington | Moyne | Nillumbik | Otway Ranges | Surfers Paradise | Surfcoast Shire | Swan Hill | Warrnambool | Wellington | TOTAL | % RURAL COUNCILS VIC |
|----------|-------------|--------|----------|------------|---------|-----------|----------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|---------|------------|-------|---------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1. Phone information | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 23 | 100% |
| 2. Address information | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 23 | 100% |
| 3. Email information | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 23 | 100% |
| 4. Links | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 23 | 100% |
| 5. Publications | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 23 | 100% |
| 6. Databases | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 23 | 100% |
| 7. E-news | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 22 | 96% |
| 8. Audio/Podcast | N | N | Y | N | N | N | Y | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | 2 | 8.6% |
| 9. Video | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | 3 | 13% |
| 10. SiteMap | N | N | Y | N | N | N | N | Y | N | N | N | N | Y | N | Y | Y | N | N | N | N | Y | Y | 9 | 39% |
| 11. Search Capability | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 23 | 100% |
| 12. QuickMind | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 22 | 96% |
| 13. Fully-executable services (and number of services) | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 106/23 | 100% |
| 14. Security Statement | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | Y | Y | N | N | N | N | Y | N | N | N | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | 13 | 56% |
| 15. Privacy Statement | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 22 | 96% |
| 16. Accessibility – Disability | N | Y | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | Y | N | Y | Y | 14 | 61% |
| 17. Language Translations | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | 0 | 0% |
| 18. Email interactivity | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 23 | 100% |
| 19. Post Comments (Social media/Consultation) | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | 1 | 4% |
| 20. Email Updates/RSS | Y | Y | Y | N | Y | Y | N | Y | N | N | N | N | Y | N | N | N | N | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | 10 | 43% |
| 21. Broadcast (Blogs, Chats, Discussions, Twitter) | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | Y | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | 1 | 4% |
| 22. Website Personalisation/Customisation | N | N | Y | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | 1 | 4% |
| 23. Online Forms/Surveys | Y | Y | Y | N | Y | Y | N | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 20 | 87% |
| 24. Website Campaigns | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | 0 | 0% |
| 25. Advertisements | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | 0 | 0% |
| 26. User payments | Y | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 21 | 91% |
| 27. e-services | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 23 | 100% |
| 28. Portal Link | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | 0 | 0% |
| 29. Digital Signature | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | 0 | 0% |
| 30. Credit Card use | Y | Y | Y | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 22 | 96% |
| <strong>TOTAL FEATURES (LEVEL OF E-GOVERNMENT)</strong> | 18 | 18 | 22 | 15 | 19 | 19 | 19 | 19 | 19 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 17 | 18 | 11 | 16 | 19 | 18 | 15 | 17 | 14 | 16 | 19 | 21 | 401/23 | 17 AVE |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES</th>
<th>Barnsley</th>
<th>Barwon</th>
<th>Casey</th>
<th>Darebin</th>
<th>Frankston</th>
<th>Geelong</th>
<th>Glen Eira</th>
<th>Greater Dandenong</th>
<th>Hobsons Bay</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Kingston</th>
<th>Knox</th>
<th>Manningham</th>
<th>Maribyrnong</th>
<th>Maroondah</th>
<th>Monash</th>
<th>Moorabbin Valley</th>
<th>Moreland</th>
<th>Werribee</th>
<th>Wyndham</th>
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51. Albury
52. Auburn
53. Ballina
54. Bankstown
55. Bega Valley
56. Blacktown
57. Blue Mountains
58. Bombala
59. Broken Hill
60. Byron
61. Camden
62. Canterbury
63. Cessnock
64. Fairfield
65. Gundagai
66. Hawkesbury
67. Holroyd
68. Hornsby
69. Hurstville
70. Kempsey
71. Kuringai
72. Lachlan
73. Leichhardt
74. Lismore
75. Liverpool
76. Maitland
77. Manly
78. Mosman
79. Newcastle
80. Nort h Sydney
81. Orange
82. Parramat ta
83. Port Macquarie
84. Randwick
85. Richmond Valley
86. Rockdale
87. Ryde
88. Shoalhaven
89. Snowy River
90. Sydney
91. Tamworth
92. Tumbarumba
93. Tweed
94. Uralla
95. WaggaW agga
96. Warringah
97. Waverley
98. Willoughby
99. Wollongong
100. Wyong
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29.7.10, 7.30pm
31.12. 10, 7. 35a m
31.12. 10, 8. 30a m
24.7.10, 1.23pm
29.7.10, 8.10pm
20.7.10, 1p m
26.7.10, 2.21pm
20.7.10, 7p m
20.12. 10, 1 0.30am
20.12. 10, 2 pm
13.11. 10, 8 am
22.12. 10, 7. 30a m
24.7.10, 12. 10p m
25.7.10, 2.53pm
28.7.10, 3.24pm
22.12. 10, 1. 30p m
19.12. 10, 5. 30p m
24.7.10, 2.45pm
24.7.10, 8.29pm
20.12. 10, 8 pm
25.7.10, 6.02pm
22.12. 10,8. 22am
30.12. 10, 8. 20a m
20.12. 10, 8. 20a m
22.12. 10, 1pm
21.12. 10, 7. 40a m
24.7.10, 5.49pm
21.12. 10, 1 2.15pm
24.7.10, 3.30pm
25.7.10, 3.32pm
22.12. 10, 5 pm
20.7.10, 11 pm
22.12. 10, 9. 30p m
31.12. 10, 1 2pm
19.12. 10, 8. 40p m
31.12. 10, 7 pm
30.12. 10, 7 am
22.12. 10, 6. 35a m
26.7.10, 3.27pm
21.7.10, 8.10pm
21.12. 10, 8. 45p m
21.12. 10, 9. 35p m
24.12. 10, 7. 20a m
23.12. 10, 8. 10p m
23.12. 10, 9. 05p m
24.7.10, 7.39pm
20.7.10, 9.46pm
24.12. 10, 6 pm
24.7.10, 5.14pm
21.12. 10, 1 0.30pm

Audit Re sults - 3 0 Featur es
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## Statistics

| FEATURES | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| TOTAL FEATURES PRESENT NSW | 50 | 50 | 50 | 42 | 50 | 46 | 26 | 6 | 11 | 37 | 48 | 39 | 48 | 8 | 44 | 14 | 8 | 50 | 17 | 28 | 17 | 2 | 38 | 5 | 2 | 45 | 48 | 0 | 0 | 45 |
| TOTAL FEATURES PRESENT VIC | 50 | 50 | 50 | 50 | 50 | 49 | 26 | 14 | 13 | 26 | 50 | 47 | 50 | 35 | 49 | 34 | 21 | 48 | 8 | 44 | 14 | 8 | 50 | 17 | 28 | 17 | 2 | 38 | 5 | 2 | 45 | 48 | 0 | 0 | 48 |
| TOTAL FEATURES ACROSS 100 COUNCILS | 100 | 100 | 100 | 92 | 100 | 95 | 52 | 20 | 24 | 63 | 98 | 86 | 17 | 2 | 38 | 5 | 2 | 92 | 98 | 0 | 0 | 93 | 87 | 19 | 17 | 11 | 13 | 37 | 26 | 50 | 50 | 50 | 50 |

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<th>No.</th>
<th>Feature Being Measured</th>
<th>% of features across 100 Councils</th>
<th>NSW Councils</th>
<th>VIC Councils</th>
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<td>Address Information</td>
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<td>Email Information</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Search Capability</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>48</td>
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<td>QuickFind</td>
<td>98%</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Presence of fully-executable services</td>
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<td>Security Statement</td>
<td>84%</td>
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<td>Privacy Statement</td>
<td>93%</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<td>Accessibility - Disability</td>
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<td>Language Translations</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<td>Email Interactivity</td>
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<td>Post Comments (Social media/Consultation)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Email Updates / RSS</td>
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<td>Broadcast (Blogs, Chat, Discussions,Twitter)</td>
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<td>Website Personalisation/Customization</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>e-services</td>
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<td>48</td>
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<td>Portal Links</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Credit Card use</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>46</td>
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| NUMBER OF FEATURES PRESENT LEVELS OF E-GOVERNMENT (AVERAGES) | 1819/100 (18 ave) | 874/50 (17 ave) | 945/50 (19 ave) |
Appendix 7. Application for Ethics Approval

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL of a RESEARCH PROTOCOL

SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION

This application form should not be used for research involving clinical trials or ionising radiation. See below.

PROJECT FULL TITLE
The implications of innovation in e-government and communication in Australian Local Government organizations: An investigation of current and emerging practice.

APPLICANT DETAILS
DBA Candidate: Ms Beige Pureau

RESPONSIBLE SWINBURNE FIRST INVESTIGATOR / SUPERVISOR
Name & Title/Position: Dr Nita Cherry, Professor Organisation and Leadership
Tel No(s) +61 3 9214 5901
Email: ncherry@swin.edu.au
Fax +61 3 9214 5645
Faculty / School / Centre / Institute: Swinburne University, FBE
Swinburne Status: ☒ Swinburne Staff Member ☐ Adjunct Staff Member

Address for correspondence:
Main Student Investigator(s): Beige Pureau
Email bpureau@optusnet.com.au
Tel No(s) 0437 101 272
Student ID Number 5445418
Fax (03) 9214 5645
Degree Being Undertaken: DBA

List below the names of other Chief/Associate Investigators and Research Assistants (including those with access to identifiable data).

Name & Title: Dr Nita Cherry (Supervisor) Professor Organisation and Leadership
Institutional Address: Swinburne University
Tel No(s) +61 3 9214 5901

[Date Received ………… HREC No:………]

Proposed Human Research Activity Approval is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Period During Which Human Research Activity Approval is Required:</th>
<th>From 1 12 2009 to 1 7 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Type of Activity (Select as many boxes as applicable)

☑ Research by Staff Member
☐ Contract Research (Attach copy of contract)
☒ Supervised Postgraduate Research
☒ Supervised Undergraduate Research
☐ Supervised Class: No of students involved:

Subject Code & Short Title:

[Doubled-click on YES/NO ‘check box’ to select box, then enter Default Value as Checked ☑ or leaving as Not Checked ☐]
Broad Category of Research
Select one category box which best fits the application:
☐ Social/Cultural/Humanities  ☒ Business/Management  ☐ Education/Training/Program Evaluation
☐ Psychological/Brain/Neuro-sciences  ☐ Health/Safety  ☐ Engineering/Science/Technology
☐ Other (please specify) ……………………………………………………

[** For research involving Clinical Trials or Ionising Radiation, please contact the Research Ethics Officer.]

Official Use Only:
☐ Higher Risk/Impact  ☐ Minimal Risk/Low Impact Research Only
☐ SUHREC  ☐ SHESC (HBS - A / B)  ☐ SHESC (SBT - A / B)  ☐ Other

Human Research Risk/Review Classification (Nb Checking to be consistent with published risk criteria.)
To enable a determination as to whether prima facie your research activity is Minimal Risk and/or Low Impact, please clarify by selecting [X] any one or more boxes below as to whether your research activity involves:

[Double-click on YES /NO ‘check box’ to select X by entering in Default Value as Checked ☒ or leaving as Not Checked ☐]

☐ Vulnerable participants, children or those dependent on care*  ☐ Indigenous Peoples* or Special Cultural/Ethnic groups
☐ Externally funded research requiring HREC-level clearance*  ☐ Multi-centre/Other sites requiring HREC-level approval*
☒ Research conducted overseas  ☐ Conflicts of interest or dual researcher-professional roles
☐ Data access/use without an individual’s prior consent*  ☒ Data access/use subject to statutory guidelines &/or reporting*
☐ Identification of participant individuals/groups in research outcomes without full consent or there is unclear consent for this*
☐ Sensitive information/issues vis-à-vis context/impact (legal*, regulatory compliance*, commercial, professional, cultural, etc)
☐ Personally intrusive/confronting or quite inconvenient/embarrassing questioning or other activity
☐ Physically confining/invasive techniques or significant physical contact/stimulation (TMS*, Xray*, CT scan*, MRI*, clothing change, etc)
☐ Working in hazardous environments (asbestos dust*, infectious disease*, war or civil strife*, etc)
☐ Handling hazardous substances (eg, asbestos*, radioactive material *, explosives *, etc) or equipment
☐ Administration of medical/herbal substances*/treatments*  ☐ Administration of other (non-medical) substances/treatments*
☐ Health/medical diagnosis*/therapy*  ☐ Non-minimal impact therapeutic or other devices*activity*
☐ Screening for healthy participant inclusion/exclusion  ☐ Medical or psychiatric assessment/conditions*
☐ Serious psychological profiling, investigation or exploration  ☐ Withdrawal of treatment/services or use of placebo
☐ Withdrawal/substitution of educational/professional/commercial/recreational/other programs or services
To date a literature review has been carried out and a website audit of 200 Australian local government websites (publicly accessible, official sites) is being finalised, measuring 30 features of online interactivity.

This ethics application is for the interview stage of my research. I plan to interview 15 key experts in the areas of communications, electronic communications and government by telephone, and three of the participants may be from UK, Canada and USA. The rest are within Australia. Interview letters, questions and an “agreement of participation form” are in the Appendices – as well as other relevant information on this study. The duration of interviews is approximately 90 minutes.

These activities form the key components of my research.
A1 WHY IS THE PROJECT TO BE UNDERTAKEN

Summarise in sufficient detail why the project is being undertaken. If references are quoted, full citations should be given. Include the educational and/or scientific aims of the project (boxes will expand for your text)

There is a significant gap in research undertaken on e-government and electronic communications at the local government level. Local government organisations have an increasing role in managing innovative technologies as methods of communication and service delivery change. This study aims to investigate the implications of innovation in e-government and communication in Australian Local Government organisations – looking at current and emerging practice.

A literature review has found that, while Australia has introduced a range of e-technology initiatives at federal and state levels, local government is still very much in its infancy, with most councils providing basic websites that direct one-way communication, rather than providing fully transactional e-government services. (Australian National Audit Office 2004-05).

The study has also found that e-technology is transformative, affecting the management of human, technological, and organizational resources. (Grant and Chau 2005). Even the simple creation of a website can distort local government administrative structures, create new demands on services, and present new strategic challenges for local authorities. (Irani, Love, Elliman, Jones & Themistocleous, 2005).

The integration of electronic communications has become a key goal of the Australian federal government’s agenda – with the aim of linking together different services, agencies and information systems to make it easier for customers to access via one point in a new age of service delivery which is less bureaucratic and more geared towards streamlined electronic service delivery, providing a ‘one-stop-shop’. (IPAA, Australian Journal of Public Administration). Local Government is not effectively linked to State and Federal strategies and levels of e-government is a gap that needs to be researched.

This study has investigated e-government at the local government level based on an audit of 200 publicly accessible ‘official’ council websites across Australia – measuring 30 features of e-government and interactivity online. An investigation of current and emerging practice now needs to be undertaken through 15 in-depth phone interviews with key experts in the areas of communications, government and technology.

Council websites vary significantly across metropolitan, rural and suburban areas, and across states. There is no strategic framework guiding practice in Australia, however, there are many examples of best practice in the USA, Canada and UK. The findings of this study will inform the development of a strategic framework that will assist Australian Local Government in managing effective communication and e-government in a dynamic technological environment – and aims to provide a framework of best practice.

A2 WHAT - BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

In plain English

The study aims to investigate the implications of innovation in e-government and communication in Australian Local Government organisations and explore current and emerging practice.

A literature review has been completed and was presented at the European Conference of Knowledge Management at Southampton in the UK, in September 2008. The literature review has identified the key issues and themes affecting e-government and electronic communication at the local government level and the models guiding practice.

Following the literature review, this study investigates e-government at the local government level based on an audit of 200 publicly accessible, official council websites across Australia, measuring 30 features of e-government and interactivity online. The audit is modelled on an e-government study undertaken in the United States, by Darrell West of Brown University (2001) which measures e-government online features available in state and federal government websites.

ETHICS APPLICATION COMPONENT OF RESEARCH:

This study also aims to include 15 in-depth interviews with key experts in the areas of communications, government and technology – within Australia and overseas (including the countries UK, USA, Canada). The interviews will explore the findings and issues raised through the literature review and the website audit data, and will examine how contemporary practice is responding to these issues. The interview subjects have been selected for their leadership in the fields of government services and communications and/or electronic communications and innovative technologies. (Senior representatives of key organisations and industry associations, and major commentators/leaders). Interviews are to take approximately 90 minutes, and are to be undertaken by phone. PLEASE REFER TO APPENDICES for interview letter, agreement form, questions and other materials.

The findings of the study will inform the development of a strategic communications framework that will help to guide communications managers through relevant e-government and innovative communication issues. I also plan to present the final framework to the LGPro (Local Government Professionals) Public Relations Network group for practical application.


A3 HOW - PROCEDURES

Please detail clearly and sufficiently the proposed research/statistical method(s), procedures and instruments to be used in the project, including all screening and research ‘procedures’ to which the participants will be subjected, and asterisk those which may have adverse consequences.

Please include as appendices all screening instruments, questionnaires, interview protocols etc (at least in draft form if not finalised).

STAGES OF RESEARCH

1. Literature Review
2. A Website Audit and content analysis of 200 websites gathering statistical data across a significant number of Australian Councils (rural, metropolitan and suburban) in Victoria and New South Wales
3. Qualitative research through in-depth interviews with 15 key experts in communications, electronic technology and government
4. Development of a Strategic Communications Framework
1. LITERATURE REVIEW
The key areas of study are based on the following key themes emerging from the literature review:

- Stakeholders and consumer behaviour/expectations;
- Innovative technologies and Models of e-government;
- Global studies - best practice communications technology / e-government;
- Communication Theory / Strategic Communications / PR Models;
- Government in Australia - Internal Organisation (Structure, Skills, Infrastructure).

2. CONTENT ANALYSIS – COUNCIL WEBSITE AUDIT
This study comprises of an audit of 200 State and Local Government websites in Victoria and New South Wales (rural, suburban and metropolitan) measuring 30 features of e-government and online interactivity. It gathers statistics/measures to identify patterns and trends, and provide an overview of the situation of e-government in Australia. The audit also informs the next stage of the research (interviews) and then this will feed into the development of a strategic framework.

The websites are publicly accessible and constitute desk research.

3. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS
A study including 15 in-depth telephone interviews with key experts in the areas of communications, electronic technology and government, comprising 8 key questions over a 90 minute duration.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were selected to ensure greater accuracy through triangulation and to ensure statistical and in-depth analysis of the key issues surrounding innovative technologies, communication and e-government.

The data will identify the key components of an effective strategic framework to manage effective communications, e-technology and e-government at a local government level.

A letter is prepared, along with an agreement form and a list of interview questions (Refer to Appendices).

4. BUILD A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK
This stage will involve the development of a strategic framework for Local Government communications and e-government, informed by literature review, analysis of content analysis results and interviews.
A4  DESCRIBE ANY RISK THAT MAY ARISE TO THE PARTICIPANT / DONOR?
Risk to participants (and to researchers) can be real but does not need to be physical. Risk includes such as self esteem, regret, embarrassment, civil or criminal liability, disease, physical harm, loss of employment or professional standing, etc. Please consider such possibilities carefully.
SOME research activities may put the participant at risk through what is being done or simply through their participation.
Please describe the risk you perceive and the protective measures to be taken.

All measures will be undertaken to ensure confidentiality of information. The anonymity of individuals and their remarks will be protected through the use of fictional identities. The actual identities of the participants will only be known to the researcher and supervisor. There is no obvious risk to the participants whose opinions are being sought.

A5  DESCRIBE ANY RISK THAT MAY ARISE TO THE RESEARCHER / ADMINISTRATOR?
SOME research activities may put the researcher at risk through what is being done or simply through their participation.
Please describe the risk you perceive and the protective measures to be taken.

No Risk Anticipated.

A6  WHAT BENEFITS ARE ANTICIPATED FROM THE PROJECT
Ethical principles would require that benefits flowed from the activities - but please avoid grandiose claims.
(a) To the Participant (what and how so)

A strategic framework will be prepared for the benefit of local government managers and communications practitioners to guide best practice.

(b) More generally (to society, profession, knowledge, understanding, etc, and how so.)

The development of the framework and communication of this study will help improve the level of electronic service delivery and electronic communication standards and consistency – which will ultimately improve services for customers, accessibility, quality information and participation of communities in local government.

A7  POTENTIAL PROBLEMS
From time to time in the course of a research project important information, such as an individual found to be at risk, or entirely unforeseen events may come to pass. What procedures are in place to handle unexpected or particularly significant personal or other information that may come to light through the project, eg, unknown medical/psychiatric condition, a particularly distressed participant, civil or criminal liability, etc.

Timeliness of response. Inability to get all responses from participants due to unforeseen reasons.

A8  PROFESSIONAL/ETHICAL ABILITY & TRAINING
(Researchers/Students/Assistants)
NS 1.15 Research must be conducted or supervised only by persons or teams with experience, qualifications and competence appropriate to the research … using (appropriate) facilities … and with appropriate skills and resources for dealing with any contingencies …

(a) Sufficiently detail what investigators/assistants will do in this project and their expertise/competence to do so.

I am the sole researcher/investigator for this study and have the expertise and competence to do so, through my professional background as a manager in communications, within the local government industry for 15 years to date and as a member of the Public Relations Institute of Australia for that same time, and as a Candidate for the DBA at Swinburne for the past 4 years, with prior experience in research through my Masters in
Marketing at Monash University and BA in Public Relations degree at RMIT.

I have prepared the draft interview questions and will need to test these.
I have prepared the list of interview subjects and will need to contact them to explain the study, and request participation.
I need to create fictional identities for the 15 participants for the purpose of note taking.
I need to write/finalise the draft letters (see appendix) and distribute, along with agreement form (see appendix)
I need to undertake follow up calls
I need to conduct interviews and record information
I will maintain privacy and confidentiality of individuals and their comments, and maintain all records securely – under lock and key at Swinburne for 5 years minimum.
I will need to analyse the data.
I wish to report back to the interview subjects involved directly– with outcomes of the study and to thank them for participation.

(b) Sufficiently detail any further training/qualifications required for investigators/assistants to carry out the project.

None

A9 FUTURE USE OF DATA

Will any of these data be used by yourself, your students or others for any purpose other than for this project as described in the protocol? If so please describe.

Possible use in conference presentations and for journal articles – but all confidentiality and anonymity of individual participants and their comments is assured. Participants, their organisations, and their responses will be fictionalised.

A10 EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT

Is a body external to Swinburne involved in initiation or support of the project?

☐ Yes Name of body/organisation: .................................................................................

If an external body is associated with the project you must provide the HREC with detail of the arrangements, including details of any funding or other resources being provided. A copy of relevant pages from the contractual arrangements should be attached.

☒ No. However, Manningham City Council previously supported me (financially and with study leave) in 2008 to present my literature review findings at the European Conference of knowledge management at Southampton University, UK.

A11 EXTERNAL APPROVALS

Projects involving other organisations or entities may require approval from other institutions or their ethics committees, etc. for such things as access to prospective participants, contact lists, data, facilities, etc. A copy of such approvals may be required to be provided to the HREC at the time of application or be made available as soon as possible. In which case, the project may not commence, until such evidence is provided.

Please indicate, as appropriate, if formal clearance/permission has been obtained or sought:

| Institutional | Yes ☐ | Documentation Attached ☐ or to follow ☐ |
| Next of Kin (for special groups) | Yes ☐ | Documentation Attached ☐ or to follow ☐ (estimate when likely to be obtained) |

☒ No (please explain)

Individual experts (rather than organisations) are being sent a letter for their individual involvement and participation in this study. An agreement form for their permission to participate will also be sent along with the letter.
A12  RESEARCHER / SPONSOR RELATIONSHIP

Is there any relationship or association between the sponsor and any of the researchers listed in Section A of this form, for example are any of the researchers directors, officers, employees, shareholders or promoters of the sponsor or do they receive any personal benefits from the sponsor under any other contracts or arrangements?

☒ No
☐ Yes (please explain the relationship(s), including how a vested or a conflict of interest situation does not arise.)

SECTION B: ETHICAL ISSUES OVERVIEW

B  ETHICAL ISSUES

[Double-click on ☐ YES/NO ‘check box’ to select box, then enter Default Value as Checked ☒ or leaving as Not Checked☐]

(a) Non-Limited Disclosure or Deception: Is any detail in relation to research purposes, methods or questions being withheld from participants? Or will deception of any kind be involved? Or any covert/undeclared observation? (Refer National Statement Chap 17)

(b) Does the data collection process involve access to confidential personal data (including access to data provided for a purpose other that this particular research project) without the prior consent of subjects?

(c) Will participants have pictures taken of them, e.g., photographs, video recordings?
If "YES", please explain how you intend to retain confidentiality and ultimately dispose of the material.

(d) If interviews are to be conducted, will they be record by electronic device?
If "Yes", please explain how you intend to retain confidentiality and ultimately dispose of the material.

(e) Will participants be asked to perform any acts or make statements which might compromise them, diminish self esteem or cause them embarrassment or regret (minimal, moderate or significant)?

(f) Might any aspect of your study reasonably be expected to place the participant at risk of criminal or civil liability (not just immediately or directly)?

(g) Might any aspect of your study reasonably be expected to place the participant at risk of damage to their professional/social/cultural/financial standing or employability?

(h) Will the research involve access to data banks subject to privacy legislation?* (NOTE: Annual reporting to Government may be required on this item. For info: please contact the Research Ethics Officer.)

(i) Will participants come into contact with any equipment which uses an electrical supply in any form e.g., audiometer, biofeedback, electrical stimulation, magnetic stimulation, etc.? If "YES", please outline below what safety precautions will be followed.

(j) Will any treatment be used with potentially unpleasant or harmful side effects?
Does the research involve any stimuli, tasks, investigations or procedures which may be experienced by participants as stressful, noxious, aversive or unpleasant during or after the research procedures? [ ]

Will the research involve the use of placebo control conditions or the withholding/substitution of treatment, programs or services (health, educational, commercial, other)? [ ]

Will any samples of body fluid or body tissue be required specifically for the research which would not be required in the case of ordinary treatment? [ ]

Will participants be fingerprinted or DNA “fingerprinted”? [ ]

Are there in your opinion any other ethical issues involved in the research? [ ]

NOTE: If the answer to any of the above questions is "yes", please explain and justify below in sufficient clear detail. (The box below will expand to fit your response.)

Interviews will be undertaken via phone and to ensure accurate transcription of the conversation over an extensive period of time (90 minute interview), permission will be sought to audio record interviews.

In accordance with the University’s Research Policy on the Conduct of Research, audio files will be held by the researcher in a locked cabinet at Swinburne University for at least five years, accessed only by the DBA candidate and thesis supervisor for analysis and publication purposes. Audio files will only be destroyed by incineration when all publication and discussion relating to the project is completed, following the five year period.

SECTION C: PARTICIPANT DETAILS

C1 PARTICIPANT DETAILS

The composition of the participant group may, in some circumstances, distort and invalidate an outcome, and risks may arise through the composition of the participant group.

How many individual participants will be involved? (Number/number ranges for which approval is sought)

| Males: | 10 Approx. | Females: | 5 Approx. | Total participants | 15 |

Over what range of ages?

From (youngest): 25 To (Oldest): 70

If there is a gender or age imbalance in the number of participants please explain why.

I aim to achieve a representation of both males and females, however the ratio of males to females cannot be accurately confirmed until interviews are accepted. Regardless of gender I am primarily targeting leaders in the topics of interest. With my existing list of interview subjects, there appears to be a bias towards males in the target population.

C2 RECRUITMENT

How will participants be recruited/selected?

Please outline the process in sufficient detail how this is to occur. Note: Where participants are obtained from or through schools, hospitals, prisons or other institutions, appropriate institutional or other authority will probably be needed. If soliciting for participants by advertisement or poster please attach proposed copies or text. (See also Project Information Consent Statements and Signed Consent Forms info at the end of this application form.)

Potential participants are being selected from the literature review findings and from publicly available information on websites, including:
Local Government representatives (via associations such as the Municipal Association of Victoria - MAV, Local Government Professionals - LGPRO, Victorian Local Governance Association - VLGA and representatives of major Councils – Melbourne and Sydney);
- Public Relations Institute representatives (President/communications professionals);
- Authors and leaders in best practice organisations emerging from the Literature Review;
- and IT industry executives/leaders.

C3 PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS

In some situations an underlying medical or other significant condition of a participant may result in an otherwise relatively innocuous situation causing excessive stress and exacerbate the condition. Researchers must, therefore, be alert to such situations and be able to address the resulting issues.

Do participants have any medical or other significant condition of which you are aware, eg. diabetes, asthma, depression, epilepsy? What steps are in place to handle any resulting problems (you may need to correlate with A3, A4 and A7 of this form)?

There are no medical conditions to my knowledge.
Phone interviews are being undertaken for a duration of 90 minutes. The nature of the information is not harmful or stressful.
Should any emergency occur during the interview, I will call 000.

C4 DISCLOSURE AND INFORMED CONSENT

How will participants be informed about the project in order to give valid consent:

- Consent Information Statement(s)/Letter(s) and Signed Consent Form(s) will be used. A copy must be attached to your application. A guide to consent instruments is given at the end of this form.
- Consent Information Statement(s)/Letter(s) and consent implied by return of anonymous questionnaire
- Verbal advice (Please explain how and why)
- Other (Please explain how and why)

Participants will be contacted verbally in the first instance to invite participation, then a letter will be sent to confirm this invitation along with a consent form – Agreement of Participation. A follow up call may be undertaken to confirm date of interview. Then the interview will be undertaken. See Appendices for Draft Letter and Consent Form.

Copies of appropriate consent instruments must be attached to your application. Please consult the Guide to Human Research Informed Consent Instruments in carefully preparing informed consent instruments.

C5 COMPENSATION

Consent to participate must be freely given and not induced through the level of reward, perceived reward, or power relationships.

Provide details of any financial or other reward or inducement is being offered to subjects for participation. Indicate the source of the funds.

No Financial or other reward is being offered.

C6 RELATIONSHIP TO INVESTIGATOR(S)

Free consent may be difficult to ensure if the participant is dependent upon the investigator for employment, assessments etc.

Some relationships cause special ethical issues to arise. Are participants linked with the investigator through some particular relationship - eg. employees ultimately responsible to or superiors of the investigator, students of investigator, family members, friends etc.

No
C7 IN VolVEMENT OF SPECIAL GROUPS

Particular issues of consent may arise where special groups of participants are to be involved. There may be, for example, a need to obtain informed consent from persons other than the direct participant. Examples of such special groups include special cultural groups - eg. indigenous Australians; children and young persons (Guidelines section 4.2); groups with special circumstances - eg. persons with an intellectual or mental impairment (Guidelines s. 5)

Please identify and describe the nature of the groups and procedures used to obtain permission.

Note. Persons proposing research projects involving Indigenous Australians should consult with the relevant University manager of indigenous programs prior to finalising definition of the project.

C8 PRIVACY

The University is subject to the Victorian Information Privacy and Health Records Acts as well as the Commonwealth Privacy Act and, in particular, the Information/Health/National Privacy principles (IPPs/HPPs/NPPs) set out therein and is required to report annually on projects which relate to or utilise particular records.

Does the research involve access to data which was collected by an organisation for its own purposes (ie. not specifically collected for this project) such as student records, other data banks, human pathology or diagnostic specimens provided by an institution(s)?

If yes, please indicate source/s.

No. Information that is being gathered other than by the interviews, is by publicly available websites, and through the literature review.

C9 LOCATION OF STUDY

Please indicate where the research will be carried out. If the research will not be on University premises permission of owner / occupier may be required. If so, please indicate what authority or permission may be required and how will be obtained. NB: Where required, please attach to this application evidence of authority obtained or provide the Secretary, HREC as soon as practicable.

Research will be undertaken by me at home, on the phone. My current home location is 167 Hunters Lane Kalimna 3909 VIC (East Gippsland)

SECTION D: DATA & PUBLICATION ARRANGEMENTS (Nb Section D Revised Aug 2007)

PLEASE CONSIDER CAREFULLY YOUR RESPONSES TO THIS SECTION. YOU NEED TO BE CLEAR AS TO WHAT IS OCCURRING WITH RESPECT TO DATA COLLECTION, RETENTION and DISPOSAL.

(In your responses, you should demonstrate familiarity with National Statement requirements for confidentiality, relevant Privacy Principles and Swinburne’s Policy on the Conduct of Research, eg, Sect 4, see URL: http://www.swinburne.edu.au/corporate/registrar/ppo/docs/PolicyontheConductofResearch.pdf).

D1 DATA COLLECTION/RECORDING (Nb Section D1 Revised Aug 2007)

Please note that, with any information or data collected/retained, if any individual can reasonably be identified, the information can be deemed "personal information" or "health information" under National/Health/Information Privacy Principles (NPPs/HPPs/IPPs).

(a) How or in what form will data be collected/recorded?

Telephone interviews will be recorded on audio files. Notes and summary sheets will be made. Subjects will be given fictional identities. The master list with actual identities will only be known to the researcher and supervisor.

Permission will be sought to audio record interviews.

In accordance with the University’s Research Policy on the Conduct of Research, audio files will be held by the researcher in a locked cabinet at Swinburne University for at least five years, accessed only by the DBA candidate and thesis supervisor for analysis and publication purposes. Audio files will only be destroyed by incineration when all publication and discussion
relating to the project is completed, following the five year period.

(b) ..............................................................................................................................................................................

As regards any individual, in relation to any data collection or retention, you need to acknowledge either or both of the following:

☐ An Individual can be identified OR is Potentially Identifiable / Re-Identifiable
   (An individual can be identified at some point or by the very nature of the data collected/retained: at time of an interview, by signed consent form, identified or labelled voice or image recording, pen-and-paper questionnaire, online survey instruments, etc.
   Whilst data may not have (explicit) identifiers, an individual's identity can still reasonably be worked out.
   Or data may have (explicit) identifiers removed and replaced by codes that permit matching of an individual with the data collected/retained, in which case it is possible to identify or re-identify the person to whom the data relates.)

☒ An Individual is Non- or Un-identifiable
   (Data collected/retained anonymously and with no reasonable possibility of being identified.)

Your acknowledgement may require further explanation or clarification; if so, please include in the following box.

The information will be retained on audio file for the purpose of transcribing the interviews correctly. The audio files and transcriptions will be kept under lock and key for five years and are then to be destroyed. No direct quotes or information will be used which identifies any individual. Any information will be fictionalised so the information cannot be attributed to an identifiable figure. Only the researcher and supervisor will know the actual identities. Anonymity will be protected.

D2 DATA SECURITY

Please note that “data must be held for sufficient time to allow reference. For data that is published this may be for as long as interest and discussion persists following publication. It is recommended that the minimum period for retention is at least 5 years from the date of publication but for specific types of research, such as clinical research, 15 years (or more) may be more appropriate.” (Sect 4.3 of Swinburne’s Policy on the Conduct of Research)

Please indicate how data (all types of data, including, eg, signed consent forms) will be securely retained (eg, electronic form in password-protected disk drive, locked filing cabinet, etc) and where? With more than one type of data, will the types be separately stored? In your explanation, you will need to make clear how due confidentiality and/or anonymity will be maintained.

(a) During the study

Electronic form and transcripts/notes – kept on disk – password protected files and hard-copies kept in locked filing cabinet, separately stored at Swinburne University for a period of five years and then to be destroyed. Confidentiality will be maintained through careful recording and reporting of research results. Anonymity will be protected and no comments will be attributed to individuals. Participants will be fictionalised.

(b) Following completion of study

Electronic form and transcripts/notes – kept on disk – password protected files and hard-copies kept in locked filing cabinet, separately stored at Swinburne University for a period of five years. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. Participants will be fictionalised.
D3 PUBLICATION/OUTPUT (Nb Section D3 Revised Aug 2007)

Please explain in sufficient detail:

(a) What, if any, publication (conference, news media, academic journal, other journal, etc) is envisaged following on or in relation to this project, both in terms of data proper and/or analysis of data?

(b) Will participants be informed about any envisaged research publication/outcome? (This information is normally to be included in the information given prior to obtaining informed consent.)

(c) Would any participants be able to be identified through the publication of data proper or research findings? If so, explain why this is necessary.

(a) No. Any information will be fictionalised so the information cannot be attributed to an identifiable figure. Only the researcher and supervisor will know the actual identities. Anonymity will be protected.

D4 INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Storage arrangements for data relating to research into Indigenous matters must be determined in compliance with the Policy on the Conduct of Research after consultation with the communities involved.

What consultation has taken place and what arrangements have been made.

n/a

D5 OTHER ISSUES (Nb Section D5 Revised Aug 2007)

Are there any other issue relating to data collection, retention, use or disclosure which the ethics committee should be made aware of and, if so, please explain how you are to deal with this.

(Eg. Research outcomes unduly impacting on any individual or group not directly participating, etc.)

n/a

SECTION E: SUBSTANCES & CLINICAL ISSUES

☒ No matters in this section are applicable to the study or

E1 ADMINISTRATION OF SUBSTANCES/AGENTS

Name of substance(s)

Dosage per administration

Frequency of administration

Total amounts to be administered

Anticipated effects:

NOTE: If the research involves administration of foreign substances or invasive procedures, please attach a statement accepting responsibility for those procedures by a medical or paramedical practitioner with indemnity insurance.

☐ STATEMENT ATTACHED

E2 BODY FLUIDS OR TISSUE

What fluids or tissue? How will samples be obtained?

Frequency and volume

How are samples to be stored?
How will samples be disposed of?

Who will take the samples?

What are their qualifications for doing so?

Do participants carry, as far as you know, the Hepatitis B or HIV virus? If so how will the risks be handled?

Do participants carry, as far as you know, any other contagious diseases or viruses? If so how will the risks be handled?

SECTION F Declarations for Signature

1. With respect to this project, I / We, the undersigned Investigator(s)/Assistant(s) agree:

- To undertake human research activity or handle data confidentially in accordance with Swinburne requirements, including any standard or special ethics clearance conditions, under the proper direction of the responsible Swinburne manager and/or principal Swinburne (or other) researcher/supervisor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME:</th>
<th>SIGNATURE:</th>
<th>DATE:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEIGE PUREAU</td>
<td></td>
<td>13 November 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>PROFESSOR NITA CHERRY</td>
<td></td>
<td>13 November 2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All listed applicants must sign. The Chief Investigator/Supervisor is also responsible for personnel subsequently joining the project. Expand this table or duplicate this page as required. NB This information is subject to Swinburne or external audit.

Please note that

PROJECTS MUST NOT COMMENCE WITHOUT PRIOR WRITTEN APPROVAL from the Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) or its appropriate Subcommittee (SHESC)

2. Declaration of Compliance by Chief Investigator(s)/Student Supervisor(s).

I declare that the above project has been developed and will be conducted in accordance with relevant Swinburne standards, policies and codes of practice, including any standard or special conditions for on-going ethics clearance. I further declare that all listed and subsequently appointed researchers or assistants involved in this project will be made aware of the conditions of ethics approval as communicated to me, including approved documentation and procedures.
3. Endorsement of Head of Academic Unit (or Delegate) or Above.

I declare that this project: has been developed and will be conducted in accordance with relevant Swinburne standards, policies and codes of practice; and has research merit, adequate resourcing and appropriate leadership/supervision.

Signature & Date:

...............................

Name of Signatory & Position:

...............................

(Optional) Form checked by a Research & Ethics Advisor (REA)? Yes ☐ No ☐ REA Initials & Date:

...............................

(Please note: This endorsement must be given by an authorised official who is not also a chief or co-investigator of the project and who is not also the supervisor of a student investigator with an interest in the project.)
Appendix 8. Letter of Approval from Ethics Committee

-----Original Message-----
Sent: Thursday, 22 September 2011 9:34 AM
To: Beige Pureau
Subject: Fwd: SUHREC Project 2009/291 Ethics Clearance

Keith Wilkins <KWilkins@groupwise.swin.edu.au> wrote:

To: Prof Nita Cherry/Ms Beige Pureau, FBE

Dear Nita and Beige


Prof N Cherry, FBE; Ms B Pureau
Approved Duration: 08/02/2010 to 31/08/2010 [Adjusted]

I refer to the ethical review of the above project protocol undertaken on behalf of Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) by a SUHREC Subcommittee (SHESC4). Your responses to the review, as emailed on 4 January 2010 and found to be acceptable and feedback from the reviewer sent to you. I acknowledge receipt of the finalised consent instruments emailed on 1 February 2010 in line with the Subcommittee approval conditions.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, the project has approval to proceed in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions here outlined.

- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne’s auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.

- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/ supervisor requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.

- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/ clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events.
which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project.

- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact the Research Ethics Office if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance, citing the SUHREC project number. Chief Investigators/Supervisors and student researchers should retain a copy of this email as part of project record-keeping.

Best wishes for the project.

Yours sincerely

Keith Wilkins for
Kaye Goldenberg
Secretary, SHESC4
************************************************

Kaye Goldenberg
Administrative Officer (Research Ethics)
Swinburne Research
(Mon, Tue, ev. 2nd Thur, Fri)
Swinburne University of Technology
Level 7, Room 60W705a
60 William St. Hawthorn,
Victoria  3122 Australia
Tel: +61 3 9214 8468
Fax: +61 3 9214 5267
Appendix 9. Annual Ethics Review

Human Research Ethics Committee

Annual/Final Report for an Approved Protocol
Application for Extension of Ethics Clearance

1. Project Details – Summary
   Provide the most current approved details of your protocol

   HREC Project No: SUHREC Project 2009/231
   Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Beige Bureau / Prof. Nita Cherry
   Other Investigators: 
   Duration of Project: 2/2/2010 to 31/8/2010

2. Project Status
   Mark with an X the boxes which best describe the status of the human research elements of the project

   - [ ] Project yet to commence**
   - [ ] Project delayed part-way**
   - [x] Project completed
   - [ ] Project abandoned before start**
   - [ ] Project abandoned after start**
   - [ ] Project continuing
   - [ ] Extension of duration to ethics clearance required**

   Explain further any options that are marked ** and provide start and new end date as applicable

3. Compliance with Conditions of Ethics Clearance
   If the project was subject to any special conditions for continuing ethics clearance, including submission of approval letters from other institutions, explain how these have been met

I have complied with the Ethics application and approval.

This ethics application was for the interview stage of my research. I planned to interview 15 key experts in the areas of communications, electronic communications and government by telephone. A total of 13 interviews were undertaken (6 males and 5 females). A few people declined the opportunity as they were time poor, so I achieved as many as I could – two less than the target.

In my application, I mentioned that three interviews were possibly overseas, but this did not occur. All interviews were in Australia due to the relevance of the study on Australian local councils.

I aimed to achieve a representation of both males and females, however as stated in my ethics application (and approved) the ratio of males to females could not be accurately confirmed until interviews are accepted. Regardless of gender I noted that I was primarily targeting leaders in the topics of interest. With my original list of interview subjects, there appears to be a bias towards males in the target population.

The duration of interviews was estimated to take approximately 90 minutes (it generally took between 30 and 90 minutes during the actual interviews – there were a total of 8 questions). Permission was sought to audio record interviews.

Participants were contacted verbally in the first instance to invite participation, then a letter was sent to confirm this invitation along with a consent form – Agreement of Participation. Follow up calls were undertaken. The individual experts (rather than organisations) were sent a letter for their individual involvement and participation in this study. An agreement form for their permission to participate was sent along with the letter, signed and returned to me.

All measures were undertaken to ensure confidentiality of information. The anonymity of individuals and their remarks are protected through the use of fictional identities. The actual identities of the participants will only be known to the researcher and supervisor.

The information was retained on audio file for the purpose of transcribing the interviews correctly. In accordance with the University’s Research Policy on the Conduct of Research, audio files will be held by the researcher in a locked cabinet at Swinburne University for at least five years, accessed only by the DBA candidate and thesis supervisor for analysis and publication purposes. Audio files will only be destroyed by incineration when all publication and discussion relating to the project is completed, following the five year period. No direct quotes or information will be used which identifies any individual. Any information will be fictionalised so the information cannot be attributed to an identifiable figure. Only the researcher and supervisor will know the actual identities. Anonymity will be protected.

4. Modifications to Approved Project Protocols
If there were any procedures and instruments modified during the course of the project, including recruitment and informed consent procedures and instruments explain how/why modifications were undertaken, attaching any new/revised research/consent instruments

No modifications.

Contact resethics@swin.edu.au for advice on how best to forward a separate case to HREC if new modifications are proposed
5. Unanticipated Issues of Incidents

Detail any experiences, incidents or issues (adverse or otherwise), especially with respect to research participants, which were unintended or unanticipated and explain how these were dealt with.

None

6. Participant Involvement

Give the numbers of individual participants involved in the project to date

8 Males 5 Females 13 Total participants

Indicate whether participant numbers to date are consistent with the approved protocol

☐ Yes  ☒ No

If participant numbers have varied, give reasons

I planned to interview 15 key experts in the areas of communications, electronic communications and government by telephone. A total of 13 interviews were undertaken (8 males and 5 females).

I aimed to achieve a representation of both males and females, however as stated in my ethics application (and approved) the ratio of males to females could not be accurately confirmed until interviews are accepted. Regardless of gender I noted that I was primarily targeting leaders in the topics of interest. With my original list of interview subjects, there appears to be a bias towards males in the target population. In the final interviews the bias continued – with 8 males and 5 females interviewed. A few people declined the opportunity as they were time poor, so I achieved as many as I could – 2 less than the target.

In my application, I mentioned that three interviews were possibly overseas, but this did not occur. All interviews were in Australia due to the relevance of the study on Australian local councils.

7. Security of Data (Continuing or Completed Projects)

Explain how research data and informed consent records are being securely retained and for how long. Also indicate expected method of secure data/records disposal (it must comply with Swinburne and Legislative requirements)

The individual experts (rather than organisations) were sent a letter for their individual involvement and participation in this study. An agreement form for their permission to participate was sent along with the letter, signed and returned to me.

All measures were undertaken to ensure confidentiality of information. The anonymity of individuals and their remarks are protected through the use of fictional identities. The actual identities of the participants will only be known to the researcher and supervisor.

The information was retained on audio file for the purpose of transcribing the interviews correctly. In accordance with the University’s Research Policy on the Conduct of Research, audio files will be held by the researcher in a locked cabinet at Swinburne University for at least five years, accessed only by the DBA candidate and thesis supervisor for analysis and publication purposes. Audio files will only be destroyed by incineration when all publication and discussion relating to the project is completed, following the five year period. No direct quotes or information will be used which identifies any individual. Any information will be fictionalised so the information cannot be attributed to an identifiable figure. Only the researcher and supervisor will know the actual identities. Anonymity will be protected.

8. Other Outcomes or Issues (Continuing or Completed Projects)

Outline any other issues or outcomes of relevance to the Ethics Committee, especially ethical issues that have arisen during the course of the project.

None
9. **Research Outcomes and Benefits (Completed Projects only)**

Outline any benefits and outcomes for the project (anticipated/not anticipated, including student course submissions, research publications to date or to be published, etc.)

The results of the interviews will help to inform the development of recommendations to the Local Government industry on managing e-government and electronic communication in councils.

10. **Declaration of Compliance**

I/we, the undersigned, certify continuing responsibility for the conduct of this research in accordance with the principles contained in the National Statement and any other conditions specified by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University.

Name of Principal Investigator/Supervisor

Signature

Date 22/1/12

Student Investigator (Required for HDR Projects)

Signature

Date 23/11/12

*Please return the completed and signed form to: Swinburne Research, Research Ethics Officer (Mail H68)*
Appendix 10. Letter to Interview Applicants

Name
Title
Organisation
Date

Dear xxx

I am writing to request your participation in my Doctoral Research Project on the topic of: The implications of innovation in e-government and communication in Australian Local Government organizations: An investigation of current and emerging practice.

My name is Beige Pureau and I am currently undertaking my Doctorate in Business Administration at Swinburne University. I have worked in local government communications and public relations roles for the past 15 years and as a manager have experienced the changing shape of communications tools and strategy, alongside the introduction of electronic communications and service delivery.

This study examines the implications of changing technologies on communications in government organisations and how technological innovation is altering the way government communicates with stakeholders.

A literature review has been completed and was presented at the European Conference of Knowledge Management at Southampton in the UK, in September 2008. Fieldwork is currently underway.

This study investigates e-government at the local government level based on an audit of 200 council websites across Australia, conducted this year, measuring 30 features of e-government and interactivity online. It measures features that aid electronic service delivery and two-way communication/engagement between a Council and its customers. The audit stage of the research is modelled on an e-government study undertaken in the United States, by Darrell West, Brown University (2001) which measures e-government online features available in state and federal government websites.

In addition to the website audit, my study will include 15 in-depth interviews with key experts in the areas of communications, government and technology. This is where I am seeking your involvement.

The findings of the study will inform the development of a strategic communications framework that will help to guide communications managers through relevant e-government and innovative communication issues. I also plan to present the model to a public relations network group for practical application.

I have identified a sample of 15 industry experts in the areas of communications, government and technology to critique the model and provide input.

The research design does not require the identification of specific individuals or institutions. However, if you wish to be acknowledged as a contributor to this study in the front section of the thesis, your permission may be given on the attached consent form.

I ask if you could please read the enclosed material and participate in this study. I would be grateful if you could please phone me on (+61) 0437 101 272 or email me at bpureau@optusnet.com.au to arrange a suitable interview time in the next two weeks.

The interview will be undertaken by telephone and I anticipate that a maximum of 90 minutes will be needed. I will need to take record our meetings and take notes – and will need your written consent to participate. The consent form is attached.

You should note that you would be free to withdraw from the study at any time, but I trust that it would be interesting and your contribution would be greatly valued. If you have any questions about the study, please call either myself, or my thesis supervisor, Professor Nita Cherry (+613 9214 5901) at the Faculty of Business and Enterprise at Swinburne University. In addition, should you have a complaint about the study, you should contact:

The Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee
Swinburne University of Technology
PO Box 218 Hawthorn V/C 3122

I look forward to hearing from you soon.
Ms Beige Pureau
Appendix 11. Consent Form

CONSENT FORM
AGREEMENT OF PARTICIPATION IN STUDY

The implications of innovation in e-government and communication in Australian Local Government organizations: An investigation of current and emerging practice.

I .................................................................................................................................................................. have read and understood the information in the letter sent to me by Beige Pureau.

I agree to participate in this study and I understand that I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the interviews may be recorded in audio format on the condition that no part of it is included in any presentation or public display.

I agree that the research data collected for this study may be published or provided to other researchers on the condition that I cannot be identified and my anonymity is preserved.

I give permission for the researcher, Beige Pureau, to interview me by phone for the purpose of conducting the agreed interview – for a period of approximately 90 minutes.

Name of participant .................................................................................................................................
Signature ....................................................................................................................................................
Date ............................................................................................................................................................

I wish to be acknowledged for contributing to this study in the front section of the thesis.

Name of participant .................................................................................................................................
Signature ....................................................................................................................................................
Date ............................................................................................................................................................

Name of Interviewer Beige Pureau
Signature ....................................................................................................................................................
Date ............................................................................................................................................................
Appendix 12. Interview Questions

The implications of innovation in e-government and communication in Australian Local Government organizations: An investigation of current and emerging practice.

1. How does electronic technology change the way communication occurs? What are the implications for local government stakeholders/communities? For local government organisations?

2. What is the extent of interactive, two-way online communication and engagement in local government and what are the features or tools used?

3. How would you describe the levels of service delivery provided online in Australian local government?

4. What are the stakeholder expectations of electronic technology services? (What services and capabilities do you think customers expect to be provided or available from a website - government or other?)

5. What is the impact of e-government on customers/stakeholders?

6. What management issues are emerging with e-technology and communications, and what systems, skills, processes or solutions are needed to address these?

7. What are the models and issues that are guiding current approach to e-government in local government in Australia?

8. What are the key components for developing a strategic framework to manage effective communications and electronic technology.
### Appendix 13. Interview Analysis Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question/Topic</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Direct Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 How e-technology changes communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Implications on stakeholders and LG organisations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Extent of interactive online communication/engagement features/tools used</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Levels of online service delivery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Stakeholder expectations of electronic technology services (services and capabilities)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Impact of e-government on stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Management issues emerging with e-technology / communications</td>
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<td>Systems, skills, processes or solutions</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Models and issues guiding current approach to local e-government in Australia</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Key components for developing a strategic model</td>
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<td>Themes and key points for analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General Observations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>New issues/concepts raised that I didn’t think of asking</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 14. Table of Interview Results and Coding

**Question 1.** How does electronic technology change the way communication occurs? What are the implications: For local government stakeholders/communities? For local government organisations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>3. Increased interaction with Local Government and ability to provide feedback. &lt;br&gt; 9. Can get feedback / do more surveys, benchmarking and tracking studies, and know if services meet community needs. Reduces research costs.</td>
<td>5. Enables silent minority to have a voice (can speak up online whereas may not attend a meeting or speak in traditional environment, where others may hear opinion). Opportunity to engage more community members in decision-making process. &lt;br&gt; 6. Some communities may not yet be engaged in electronic technology or not able to use electronic formats – so need a balance of electronic communications and traditional methods (e.g. mail out, face to face, letter drops) to meet the needs of all residents</td>
<td>1. Need to employ specialists/additional resources and put training in place (e.g. for social networking/strategies) &lt;br&gt; 2. Immediate access to information for stakeholders</td>
<td>7. Convenience: communication isn’t time or location dependent, can be involved any time/place that suits them &lt;br&gt; 4. Transparency - communities demand it online in a way they couldn’t before &lt;br&gt; 8. LG has an increased need to be accountable &lt;br&gt; 11. Need to track and log all online communications (transparency)</td>
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<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>12. Allowing people to get involved only in the issues that they are interested in. Whenever they choose to get involved. &lt;br&gt; 5. Policy making based on constructive foundation, not just pressure groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. Convenience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>14. A great enabler for a large organisation with geographic spread.</td>
<td>13. Responsiveness / Customer Service &lt;br&gt; It has made everything faster and expectations of the community far greater. The speed of which the community expects us to respond to correspondence is instant - it ends up being 2-way communication / time consuming (Compared to traditional 14 day letter turnaround times).</td>
<td>15. Misuse. From a cultural perspective it can be used as a weapon within the organisation where people have low interpersonal negotiation skills (e.g. using email as a contract to move forward). To try to bring about change, firing off an email is one of the worst things you can do (Impersonal) Broadcast email is not consultation.</td>
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<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>6. Local Government is extending the breadth of the way it communicates (not giving up old ways). Individual services are provided both in traditional formats as well as electronically.</td>
<td>16. What Local Government hasn’t done really successfully yet is work out how to get quality feedback (valid sample)</td>
<td>4. Much greater transparency in providing information that feeds into decisions that are already made. Not willing to share info they are considering.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 5.</td>
<td>Cluster 1: Interactive capabilities; tools, functions, features &amp; 'fully executable' services online. 17. The key difference is Web 2.0 vs Web 1.0. Putting aside face to face communication, the most mediated communication now does happen using digital communications. (1 way vs 2 way communications). Using an example of theory - Mark Poster's definition of the first media age (primarily one-way, centrally controlled, monologue) and second media age (two-way, interactive, dialogue/not monologue, not centrally controlled – bottom-upside to side/not top-down. everyone can speak not just the elite. The second media age is web 2.0. The protocols and cultural practices of communicating have changed in the second media age - many people are only focusing on the technology.</td>
<td>Cluster 2: Understanding and engaging the user, customisation and responsiveness-democratic outreach. 5. With the opening up of social media and online consultation governments are doing any citizen theoretically can have access - a shift away from elitism to democratising communication, giving people a voice. 18. Problems – digital divide, digital enclaves</td>
<td>Cluster 3: Connecting government services, collaboration and integration: one-stop shop. 5. With the opening up of social media and online consultation governments are doing any citizen theoretically can have access - a shift away from elitism to democratising communication, giving people a voice. 18. Problems – digital divide, digital enclaves</td>
<td>Cluster 4: Governance: (accessibility, reliability, usability, privacy, security and responsiveness). 4. Transparency of contact information, budget information, rights, entitlements – made more accessible by e-communications. 7. Convenience – instant access (to up-to-date info, timeliness, accurate information). Greater ability to respond in a timely manner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 6.</td>
<td>Cluster 3: Connecting government services, collaboration and integration: one-stop shop. 3. Capacity to communicate a lot more information through dialogue – to gain feedback. 16. Not everyone has access. Need better broadband. (But council has access through community points/library etc).</td>
<td>18. A lot of people still don’t have access to technology. 7. Convenience. Community can access the information when they want to. 19. Can send information out very effectively and cheaply. 20. People see technology as spam. Getting agreement of emails is sometimes quite a process.</td>
<td>3. More access to information dissemination more information, quickly. 23. (Information overload). So much information that the message gets lost</td>
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<td>Participant 7.</td>
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<td>Participant 8.</td>
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<td>Participant 9.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 10.</td>
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</table>

Participant 5.
17. The key difference is Web 2.0 vs Web 1.0. Putting aside face to face communication, the most mediated communication now does happen using digital communications. (1 way vs 2 way communications). Using an example of theory - Mark Poster's definition of the first media age (primarily one-way, centrally controlled, monologue) and second media age (two-way, interactive, dialogue/not monologue, not centrally controlled – bottom-upside to side/not top-down. everyone can speak not just the elite. The second media age is web 2.0. The protocols and cultural practices of communicating have changed in the second media age - many people are only focusing on the technology.

Participant 6.
3. Capacity to communicate a lot more information through dialogue – to gain feedback.
16. Not everyone has access. Need better broadband. (But council has access through community points/library etc).

Participant 7.

Participant 8.

Participant 9.
21. The advent of social media – the way people are engaging in communication practices is changing.
22. Reach people the way they want to be reached according to the importance of the engagement.
13. (Customer service / responsiveness / process) It is about restructure of internal processes. It is one thing to have the channels it is another thing to operate them in an effective way. A shift in mindset (setting expectations and making sure there is consistency in follow through. Waiting 2 weeks to get a response is tantamount to waiting 2 hours to get served.

Participant 10.
3. It makes interaction between community members and LG easier and quicker.
2. More access to information dissemination more information, quickly.
23. (Information overload). So much information that the message gets lost.
<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23. Information overload – need to be careful about how you provide material to stakeholders. Less is more.</td>
<td>24. Makes people more connected with an organisation</td>
<td>25. Makes people more connected with an organisation</td>
<td>26. It helps if electronic website is updated regularly and people can tell there is someone behind the computer on the other end (e.g. engage in chat / e.g. with librarian)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant 12.**  
6. Provides communications another channel to engage the community/stakeholders  
25. Tone of voice is not there with email. The facial expressions that you would have in a face to face conversation would not be present/nuances of verbal language can be missed out in electronic communication.  
26. Assumptions we have about audience segmentation are premised on homogeneity – and that people who come from a particular demographic, race or ethnicity think the same way.  
27. Issues about language for people whose first language is not English  
18. Issues for people that might not have the technology. Overdependence on electronic technology – assuming audiences receive the information.  
28. It helps if electronic website is updated regularly and people can tell there is someone behind the computer on the other end (e.g. engage in chat / e.g. with librarian)  
19. The implications for us are cost savings. It’s a much more cost-effective way to go because we are reducing our cost of advertising by using these other media but at the same time we are probably getting more of a reach.  

**Participant 13.**  
21 Social Media.  
Electronic communication changes the way communication occurs quite dramatically in the last two years we’ve moved across to a lot of communications online, through Facebook, Twitter and various social media, especially in our attempts to target younger people.  
29 Portals.  
We’ve established a range of portals through which we coordinate information across our organisation, and other organisations, relevant to different audiences. (Portal for businesses).  
40 For a long time we’ve had e-newsletters in addition to hard copy.  
10. Put greater demands on service expectations (short turnaround times). The expectation in the community is that an organisation will respond much faster than they’ve ever done before. (With email and sms people can fire stuff off as it pops into their head and expect it to rebound immediately. Stakeholder can demand faster action e.g. send an email at night and expect an email back next day no matter what the workload.  
15. Internally in an organisation the dynamics shift – less is done face to face, more is done electronically. Requires careful management.
## Summary of Codes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>FREQUENCY APPEARED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Human resources / specialists needed</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Provides immediate access to information/services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Increased interaction with Local Government, dialogue and feedback</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. More transparency</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Enables more people to have a voice / Engages more in decision-making, not just pressure groups/silent minority</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Provides another communication channel; still need to balance online with traditional communications, is online not yet engaged online</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Convenience – can be involved any time/place</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. LG has an increased need to be accountable</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. More feedback and ability to research/survey to find out community needs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. More expectations for councils to engage online (e.g. social networking) like other organisations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Need to track and log online communications</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Allowing people to get involved in specific issues of interest, when they choose</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Responsiveness / customer service; expectations/demands to respond faster &gt; creates internal process changes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Enables communication for organisations with geographic spread</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Cultural shift – requires careful management within an organisation / electronic can be misused / face to face communication on important issues</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Need to get quality feedback / and sample</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Web 2.0 vs Web 1.0 – most communication now happens using digital communication (moved from 1-way to 2-way interactive) Dialogue vs monologue, symmetric vs asymmetric communication</td>
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<td>18. Digital divide and digital enclaves (not everyone has access to online technology)</td>
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<td>19. Cost savings: can send information out effectively and cheaply</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Technology and emails often seen as spam</td>
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<td>21. Adapt of social media changes the way people engage</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. Reach people the way they want to be reached – according to importance of the engagement</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Information overload (message can get lost)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Makes people more connected with an organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. Voice of voice, nuances of verbal language and facial expressions are not present in electronic communication (e.g. email)</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. Audience segmentation is based on homogeneity / assumptions we are all the same (ethnicity/demographics)</td>
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<td>27. Issues about language for people whose first language is not English</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. Importance of a person behind the computer (updating information / to engage in chat with)</td>
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<td>29. Online portal (business)</td>
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</table>
**Question 2. What is the extent of interactive, two-way online communication and engagement in local government and what are the features or tools used?**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1.</td>
<td>30. Online communications almost remains entirely via website. It is still predominantly one-way communication albeit the level of information and detail is greater and technology has improved.</td>
<td>31. Councils allow rudimentary feedback via online forms.</td>
<td>32. Some organisations have online forums</td>
<td>33. One Council has an online community interface they call the “...voice”. They want to engage a cross-section of the community on a vast number of issues. It is used for everything from place-making to alcohol management, to feedback on stuff the government is doing. The initiative is great.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>34. At a communication in government conference, one of the things discussed was the fact that governments could, should and can increasingly use blogs and realise that that can be done safely and that there’s nothing wrong with organisations having the individual voice. You can manage conversations. Blogs are a misunderstood medium, because people think that people can say anything but they are a broadcast medium, so the organisation can control what goes on in them. But it does humanise organisations. If individuals were blogging, talking about their (positive) experiences from government, then people might feel a connection to their council or government agency.</td>
<td>35. I have worked on technologies that facilitate consultation. Consultation management is a great tool. Bang the Table is one.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 2.</td>
<td>36. It is growing from a low base.</td>
<td>31. Extent of LG years ago was use of feedback forms to email and getting information out to people.</td>
<td>32. There have been a one or two councils running online forums that haven’t been successful as they were not user friendly.</td>
<td>35. A lot of councils – their communications consisted of online surveys and a lot of people find that comfort zone of doing surveys rather than allowing freedom of speech to discuss things in the forum. Survey is not a form of engagement, research is something you do to people. Its something you limit what people say to you.</td>
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<td>Participant 3.</td>
<td>30/13. The speed of which the community expects us to respond to written correspondence ends up being a 2-way conversation – with email exchanges which can be time consuming and debilitating. 35. In terms of positive, genuine consultation, we’ve used it a bit through using a survey monkey on the website or a comments page on the website or the opportunity to put submissions and forms on the web.</td>
<td>30. I think that is getting used more and more, but we have a low English proficiency community, high levels of unemployment, low levels of university qualifications, poor levels of internet usage at home, we’re behind the State average in all of those things. So for our community it is still a way off.</td>
<td>30. Control of information. For the Council – who think the community shouldn’t know everything or the councillors – they want to be the megaphone of council and as long as they are controlling the flow everything will be alright.</td>
<td>30. When you get to big election stakes and big national issues the governments don’t seem to want to give up control. That seems to be the big issue. They want to use the technologies but people don’t realise it’s a different set of protocols and practices.</td>
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<td>Participant 4.</td>
<td>30. The knowledge that is out there is significantly enhanced. The difficulty for them is how easy it is for them to get their views back to council. Council hasn’t quite worked out yet how to. Stakeholders know a lot more but may not have an equally improved capacity to have input into the decision.</td>
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<td>Participant 5.</td>
<td>30/36. My analysis suggests most governments want to engage citizens, and use (21) social media but they are reluctant to adopt the practices and protocols of social media, which is to be open, interactive, and to allow people to comment even if its negative. There are some standout examples – the classic one in the UK is the ‘Fix my Street’ type of activity – at a local council level they are using websites to post a photo of something broken in your street and the Council looks at it and comments.</td>
<td>30. It doesn’t happen very well on a mass scale like an election, there’s too much at stake the public interest to broad, when you narrow it down and you run an online communication within a community of interest, community of practice, a specific group, it does seem to work better.</td>
<td>30. Examples (Federal election and Obama campaign)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 6.</td>
<td>30/36. My analysis suggests most governments want to engage citizens, and use (21) social media but they are reluctant to adopt the practices and protocols of social media, which is to be open, interactive, and to allow people to comment even if its negative. There are some standout examples – the classic one in the UK is the ‘Fix my Street’ type of activity – at a local council level they are using websites to post a photo of something broken in your street and the Council looks at it and comments.</td>
<td>5. Consultation processes have the capacity to be coopted by minorities, they’re very expensive, they don’t necessarily provide an opportunity for wider discussion, whereas if you do it online, you might get a lot of terrible muck, but you actually get an opportunity for everybody to have an equal opportunity to participate.</td>
<td>30. I think generally speaking its been limited because consultation processes that have been developed by local govt have tended to be processes.</td>
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<td>Participant 7.</td>
<td>40% online – you get acknowledgement of receipt but the level of follow up is nowhere near as good.</td>
<td>40. Tools - email alerts, meetings/info updates / e-newsletters</td>
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Participant 8. | 36. Precinct website: We have 200 people in our precinct and the local area has 36,000 people. We’ve been able to use an interactive website and use the paper newsletter that goes out monthly to promote what’s happening on the website. What we’ve set up is fantastic because we have a number of vision projects set up this year that are part of the precinct. So there are 5 different projects that people can get involved in and comment on. We have 5 people responsible for each project, so each month we are uploading new information on that project – so people know if they go on that website they’ll always get the latest information. You can add your own personal comments. 39. We list Development Applications on our website. They can click on it. We’ve linked it to a Google map (47) so people can see where the site is and what it looks like, and we’ve also got all the relevant documents. We’re moving towards a link to the relevant DA on the Council website. There’s quite a few comments and what we’ve found is that’s been quite a great tool for us because it’s enabled us to involve people in our precinct who wouldn’t normally be involved. | 42. The ability to engage with people with a disability who are unable to get to the offices and can engage with council from their own home is a benefit. It’s also about timeliness, cost than making a phone call, the internet connection tends to be no extra cost. | 
---|---|---|---|---
Participant 9. | 44. Anonymity is a benefit and a hindrance. If people post negative or derogatory remarks they don’t need to identify themselves – and then how that’s received or responded to is different from a letter or in an office. | 41. Need to understand what the objectives are. It’s not a case of build it and they will come. It’s a case of thinking in what context will this be useful, who would interact and from what platform. It may be suitable for some, not for others. | 
---|---|---|---|---
Participant 10. | 30. Local government is exploring this area. Different councils go a bit further than others. There’s a big opportunity for it. 31. online forms for spons. | 45. Videocasting – very few have it | 
---|---|---|---|---
Participant 11. | 30. Not too much – to an extent we operate in the old paradigm, using new technology instead of moving to the new paradigm. We’re generally laggards - the sector. | 
---|---|---|---|---
Participant 12. | N/A | 

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Cluster 1. Interactive capabilities: tools, functions, features & ‘fully executable’ services online.

Cluster 2. Understanding and engaging the user, customisation and responsiveness/democratic outreach.

Cluster 3. Connecting government services, collaboration and integration: one-stop shop.


Participant 13.

30. I think we’ve got a long way to go, but we are already engaging in two-way communications. The opportunities are much bigger than what we’re taking at the moment but that’s simply because our platforms don’t allow it yet. But that’s what we’d be heading towards.

39. People can upload information to us e.g. apply for permits online, provide comment.

48. During our Future Planning Process we used a wiki and got something like 5,000 to 7,000 people online.

33. Our consultation for a redevelopment was about 5,000 people commenting online, on various options that we were able to make much more explicit to people and provide much more detailed information about.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY APPEARED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J1</td>
<td>Feedback forms online</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Online forums</td>
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<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Dedicated online interface to engage / consult with community (e.g. Voice / Bang the Table) enabling comments online</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Opportunity to use blogs to humanise organisations</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>Online surveys used (e.g. SurveyMonkey) rather than discussion</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Councils don’t want to give up control of information flow (social media – a different set of protocols and practice)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>When you narrow communication run online communication with a community of interest / specific group it works better</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>Online library services / databases</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Development Applications (DAs) / comments</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>Email alerts / e-newsletters</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>Need to understand what the objectives are, what context it will be used, who will use it and how (platform)</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>Ability to engage with people with a disability in their own home</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>Videoconferencing (few have it)</td>
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<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Anonymity is a benefit and a hindrance (cannot be identified when posting negative comments)</td>
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<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Development targeted website allows users to add comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Linking to Google Maps</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Wiki</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>50. It’s very good from my experience. A decade ago governments were struggling with – how are we going to communicate with our audiences and how are we going to get communities to go online. Now when you cruise around government websites you can get just about anything you need. (e.g. ... City Council has an extensive web interface - it has services, information and 52. Payments online. Perth website has detail on services, attractions and interaction with the community is very high.</td>
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| Participant 2. | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 53. one Council used a wiki, superb when you’ve got a closed group if dealing with 50 or 60 people – a community of trust, but in my mind they are far too high risk for broader community engagement. | | | |
| 51. What I’ve seen around is a spectrum from nothing at all, from 54. Putting an email form onto surveys – and 55. At the end of the spectrum, getting towards collaboration in the forums | | | |

<p>| Participant 3. | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 56. Still in its infancy – and one of the great opportunities in local government. | | | |
| 57. There are pockets of really good practice, e.g. Hobson’s Bay’s Green Light Planning Process, they’ve had for 54 years. | | | |
| 58. Correspondence. We are in an extremely high transaction environment. 15000 pieces of outward correspondence a month at our council and of that, you should be able to get 60% streamlined, tailored to a simple business system. | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>59. Forms. We are doing a project at the moment on mapping all our forms. I have 45 different permit applications – footpath, disabled, parking, hoardings, not even planning applications, every one has a paper-based form, paper based payment option and different process. So mapping this to bring it all together and reduce to have some simple online forms online – that should really clean up and be a productivity gain to the organisation.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participant 4.</strong></td>
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<td>51. It varies. It’s inconsistent across councils and within councils.</td>
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<td>52. People in the finance area/rates, levies and so on do all sorts of things online</td>
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<td>57. Planning – is a disaster online. It is particularly difficult. The issuing of permits and the ease of which you can do that and pay to do it is still in the dark ages.</td>
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<td>18. A lot of clients are not equipped to use their service in the way we would expect at the moment, or want.</td>
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<td><strong>Participant 5.</strong></td>
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<td>60. Most people separate e-government from e-democracy, e-government is about service delivery and e-democracy is all about the consultation side.</td>
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<td>50. The reports that I’ve read suggest that Australia is doing quite well in service delivery – federally, at state level and at local level. We are up with most countries in the world in relation to online tax forms</td>
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<tr>
<td>63. online tax forms</td>
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<tr>
<td>64. registrations of pets at local councils,</td>
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<tr>
<td>52. paying things online</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participant 6.</strong></td>
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<td>55/65. It seems, it works best for simple things like paying your rates and getting a registration for your dog or cat. Its the simpler processes that have been automated – the same way that banks are.</td>
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<td>57. I don’t think we’re at the stage where planning matters are necessarily there.</td>
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<td>66. There is a physical problem in that local government is very high touch level of government in that most of the services, whether its pre-school or parks – there’s a very direct relationship between the ratepayer and the resident and the council. A lot of what they expect out of their council is never going to be automated.</td>
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<td>67. Commercial and financial transactions as a minimum.</td>
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<td>68. Most licensing etc ought to be available.</td>
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<td>69. Automated phones: One thing that seems to infuriate people is automated telephone systems. If people can’t do the transaction online and end up with a automated telephone system – it says something about the quality of the relationship between the stakeholders and the council.</td>
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<td>61. To my mind, the failure is when you go to online – using it as a consultation and communication environment, they don’t want to give up the control.</td>
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<td>62. It entirely depends on the director of IT and on the directors of the various services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 7.</td>
<td>50/52. Payments – financial transaction 90%&lt;br&gt;70. Feedback for service on queries raised – not as good.</td>
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<td>Participant 8.</td>
<td>52. Rates bill - you get all the options of how you pay that bill, pay online or face to face etc. Where technology is working very well is that I can actually set it up so that the bill is automatically paid every quarter, so that I don’t have to think about it.&lt;br&gt;71. Need to work out when its appropriate to use technology and when you need paper to back it up.</td>
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<td>Participant 9.</td>
<td>51. It would depend on council to council. Because one council is doing well doesn’t mean others will follow, and execution will differ.</td>
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<td>Participant 10.</td>
<td>51. It’s being made available.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 11.</td>
<td>51. It’s patchy.&lt;br&gt;76. What you find with a significant number of councils is you go to a form online, print it off and then mail it, you can’t actually fill the form in online, you can’t transact online.&lt;br&gt;57. The planning space is patchy. Planning has been problematic because documents that have to be scanned into the system so you can deal with them electronically, is sometimes cumbersome, but it should be there as an option for those people who have the capacity to get those documents into the system.</td>
<td>71. All councils we have a Billpay model but they are not a consistent platform. Sometimes we use Billpay which doesn’t allow credit card. Other times we use Australia Post which allows credit cards. But if you look at seamless operations in the sector from a citizen viewpoint, you would expect that some of these fundamental models would be in place. Like forms online (59) – very patchy, difficult to get off the ground.&lt;br&gt;78. Easybiz has been struggling for traction, its a struggle to get councils to get any forms online through the database.</td>
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<td>Participant 12.</td>
<td>76/56. I think its more a pull mechanism at this stage and if the local council is going to provide new stuff to push the residents for example an election or rate increase or anything – I think first they would use the printed newsletter with all the translations.</td>
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### Interview

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<tr>
<th>Participant 13.</th>
<th>Cluster 1: Interactive capabilities: tools, functions, features &amp; 'fully executable' services online.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56. Probably not very good to be quite honest. I think people are still finding their way with that.</td>
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<td>80. We are starting to look at the moment here at things like reporting potholes in the road.</td>
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<td>81. We are reporting things by text message for example on parking meter faults.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>82. We have the opportunity to report things via communications, without a person intervening, but a person still needs to intervene in the solution to the problem.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Cluster 2: Understanding and engaging the user, customisation and responsiveness/ democratic outreach.</th>
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<th>Cluster 3: Connecting government services, collaboration and integration: one-stop shop.</th>
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<tr>
<th>Cluster 4: Governance: (accessibility, reliability, usability, privacy, security and responsiveness).</th>
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<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>FREQUENCY APPEARED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Levels of Online Service Delivery – ok - good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Levels of Online Service Delivery – varies (from nothing to everything) it is inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>E-service: Online payments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>E-service: Wiki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>E-service: Survey online (fill in form)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Collaboration (forums)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Levels of Online Service Delivery – In its infancy / Not great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>E-service: Online Planning – varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>E-service: Correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>E-service: Online forms</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>e-democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Levels of Online Service Delivery – Failure when it comes to consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Effectiveness Depends on IT director and directors of services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>E-service: Online tax forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>E-service: Registering pets online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Works well for simple transactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>There is a issue about the relationship – Council is a 'high touch' service provider - some things will never be online</td>
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<td>67</td>
<td>E-services: Commercial services</td>
</tr>
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<td>68</td>
<td>E-service: Licensing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Issue: Automated telephones</td>
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<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Feedback for service enquiries (follow up) is an issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Need to work out what is appropriate to go online</td>
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<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>E-service: It comes down to budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Technology / Content Management System / features and functionality will impact on ability of council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>E-service requires: testing and execution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>E-service requires: Resourcing team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Issue: Forms are not fully transactional online</td>
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<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Model of payments are inconsistent across councils. Seamless operations are needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>E-service: EasyBizForms database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>'It is a pull mechanism at the moment'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>E-service: Reporting potholes - being looked into</td>
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<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>E-service: Text messaging is being used to report parking meter faults</td>
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<td>82</td>
<td>People still need to intervene in the solution</td>
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Question 4. What are the stakeholder expectations of electronic technology services?
(What services and capabilities do you think customers expect to be provided or available from a website - government or other?)

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<td>Participant 1.</td>
<td>83. Expectations are extremely high. Given the revolution in social networking, people are looking for more than just a static website, they want more interactive contact with government and that means there is going to be more pressure on governments to have websites updated regularly, with news, comment and the ability to interact through forums, surveys, engagement and comment.</td>
<td>84. People expect that ecommerce will be available for any government service being offered.</td>
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<td>85. The community is used to government websites being complicated and bewildering, framed in bureaucratic terms.</td>
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<td>Participant 2.</td>
<td>83/86. The community is starting to do more and more online, e.g. banking, so much of our interaction is online. The community will have an expectation to deal with government online and to do it simply, easily and in good time.</td>
<td>87. Those days where you had to trip down to the council office to pay the bills or fill form or have your say at a council meeting – they need to go. People will not accept that service level.</td>
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<td>88. They expect high functionality, easy to navigate, manipulate, download, easy to access websites - that provide the front door to your business.</td>
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<td>Participant 3.</td>
<td>83/86. The expectation levels are very very high. They are getting that from their single service providers, such as their banks, the federal government, medicare, insurance companies.</td>
<td>89. There is a lot of sophistication there now that says, we expect you to have a very good info system behind the seams that is able to connect all my threads together. So they almost want – instead of customer service, a case manager: They expect us to be able to treat them as a case, so if I get on the end of the phone, I open up a file, I’ve got their dog registration, their bin day, their enrolment in kinder – everything on the screen, so I can manage their issue. The expectation when they ring council is that council will know exactly what they want – and it will be dealt with by the first person that picks up the phone, so they don’t have to tell the same story over again.</td>
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<td>Participant 4.</td>
<td>Directly relevant to their level of competence with electronic information. If they have the capacity for electronic communication they want to be able to do everything sitting in front of their computer. They don't want to have to come to the council. They want to be able to talk to you electronically.</td>
<td>86. Highly sophisticated technology users expect to have exactly the same relationship with council as they would with their bank, where they can go and do all their banking online.</td>
<td>93. I think the public wants governments to listen more and I think that’s why things like fix my street have been so successful – is that ordinary citizens can go in there and say this street sign is broken, and then want someone to listen to that and fix it, and when they do, they get quite excited that someone’s listened to them. They want govt to listen more, not talk more, and social media is one of the only ways, other than going to face to face meetings, governments can listen. I hear that governments are seeing it as yet another way to talk through.</td>
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<td>Participant 5.</td>
<td>91. I found very little scholarly research into what people actually want. There does seem to be a lot of research on the supply side and not enough on the demand side. There does seem to be a real gap. 92. The government has just adopted all of the recommendations of the Federal ‘Gov 2.0’ taskforce and all of the recommendations of the review of public service that talk about opening up government and putting more stuff online. One of the things that I’m concerned about is that they’re interpreting this as putting more information available, putting everything on the website, and we’re not going and asking people what they want.</td>
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<td>Participant 6.</td>
<td>94. Different stakeholders have different expectations. If it's a home care service for an elderly person, or support for a carer or mobile library service, I think their expectations of online stuff is quite low. A lot of the services that councils provide are two dimensions – one is the service, whether its home care or home cleaning, but the other thing is about social integration to the extent that councils services require to create social capital by creating social interaction. That's something that can't ever be put online. 95. E-communications and IT are terrific but ultimately the strategy and the quality of the relationship and the form of the communications should drive what you deliver. Rather than starting with the technology, you start by segmenting the stakeholders and then actually say which are important and how do we deliver on those relationships. Then you say what's the best way – is it IT or is it something else.</td>
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<td>Participant 7.</td>
<td>83/96. The range of services from billpay to garbage collection information to events. So its council services in a nutshell – they expect to access that instantaneously. Innovative technologies that could be used? SMS or Ipad communication will be the next big thing. 97. Councils will have to break down their stakeholder engagement levels - the young households and the elderly households and work out how they are going to communicate with them, because younger people are demanding more mobile information (phone or IPad) e-news from activities to street closures), whereas retired people receive it online.</td>
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<td>Participant 8.</td>
<td>98. The expectation that people can find things easily under categories, a better understanding of what the general public calls things. There is a lot of jargon in government and the average ratepayer doesn't have a clue.</td>
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<td>Participant 9.</td>
<td>People drew on previous experiences – whether they are on a commercial website or a council website they still have a certain set of assumptions they expect to be replicated wherever they go.</td>
<td>100. We need to be aware of what is out there and what is industry best practice, not just within the one industry but across a multitude of industries.</td>
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<td>Participant 10.</td>
<td>One of the difficulties with the kind of electronic communication that we're using is that people have a very low patience threshold. They expect that if they send an email that there is someone waiting at the other end to reply.</td>
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<td>Participant 11.</td>
<td>My expectation is that I should be able to transact business with my council from my home at 12 o'clock night, 3 o'clock in the morning, irrelevant of the time, make payments, fill out application forms, do my parking permits, do what I need to do at any time, and we're miles away from being at that point. When you are dealing with your bank – and I haven't been into a bank, for I don't know how long – all transactions occur electronically or at an auto teller. I can do the banking whenever I want to do it. The councils are open 8.30 till 5 – if you're not in that window, 5 days a week, you're stuffed!</td>
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<td>Participant 12.</td>
<td>I think it depends who you are talking to, which stakeholder and demographic. People don't really engage with the council unless we have to ask for a permit, or check out the facilities in the community. From a local resident point of view, expectations would always be on access to information, accuracy and easy navigation.</td>
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<td>Participant 13.</td>
<td>There is a very high expectation from the community about the organisation to cater to their access and information requirements online. I think there's sometimes a conflict between what people expect and what they can get online. There are going to be so many variations that it would make an online interface very difficult to cater for.</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>Expectations are high for online services / interactive contact / functionality</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>Expect e-commerce for any government service</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>People are used to government websites being complicated</td>
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<td>86</td>
<td>Community is doing more online (e.g. banking, medicare, insurance) so will expect to deal with government online in a similar way/relationship</td>
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<td>87</td>
<td>The trip to the council office needs to go</td>
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<td>88</td>
<td>Expect high functionality, navigation, and accessible sites</td>
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<td>89</td>
<td>A connected system behind the seams</td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>Expectation is related to level of competence with electronic communication</td>
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<td>91</td>
<td>There is a gap in research on what people want</td>
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<td>92</td>
<td>Fed Gov 2.0 taskforce recommendation – putting more online (but we should ask people what they want)</td>
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<td>93</td>
<td>Government needs to listen more (e.g. fix my street) and social media is one way government can ‘hear’</td>
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<td>94</td>
<td>Different stakeholders have different expectations (depending on the service / social capital or interaction – which cannot be online)</td>
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<td>Depends on the relationship of the stakeholder to Council / the priority – start with segmentation and strategy before the IT/form of communication</td>
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<td>96</td>
<td>Expect access to a range of services / innovative technologies</td>
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<td>97</td>
<td>Need to break down engagement levels e.g. younger people demanding more mobile communication</td>
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<td>Expect to find things easily, under categories/less jargon</td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>People draw on previous experiences (e.g. commercial site / government site) and have a set of assumptions they expect to be replicated</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>Need to be aware of what’s out there / industry best practice</td>
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<td>101</td>
<td>People have low patience and expect if they send an email there is someone waiting at the other end to reply</td>
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<td>102</td>
<td>Expect a range of business transactions with Council (payments, applications, permits) online any time of day/night – like a bank (not have to visit the office)</td>
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<td>103</td>
<td>People don’t really engage with Council unless they have to</td>
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<td>104</td>
<td>There is a conflict between what people expect and what they can get online (so many variations)</td>
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**Question 5. What is the impact of e-government on customers/stakeholders?**

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<td>Participant 1.</td>
<td>I think for those willing and able to engage it provides the ability to (24) connect with the public in a more (7) convenient, timely and (19) cost effective engaging way.</td>
<td>18. E-government risks alienating those that are not computer literate. Over time that will become more or less of an issue.</td>
<td>6. Unfortunately for government there is still the need to undertake all of the traditional forms of communication.</td>
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<td>23. There will be people feeling that they’re being over-communicated with.</td>
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<td>10. E-participation opens up a whole world and allows government to get to those moderate voices, to hear what people are saying, who may not be comfortable writing a submission or standing up in public meeting or wouldn’t take the time to lobby parliament.</td>
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<td>Participant 2.</td>
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<td>106. E-government gets misinterpreted as being about e-democracy. I feel very strongly that E-democracy has no place in our society. We have a democratic society that involves elected representatives. I personally think it’s a really bad idea. The technology really isn’t there yet to have safe / systems that can’t be routed. I have great hope in e-government as long as it doesn’t drown out the democracy route.</td>
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<td>Participant 3.</td>
<td>107. When I think of e-government it is podcasting a council meeting.</td>
<td>108. I don’t think it’s a council issue, it’s a societal issue. Technology is pervasive it enables people to get information at super, super speeds, has created instant experts about everything and everyone’s got an opinion or view and they want to share it with you. Now if we’re not up to speed with that, well we will become redundant.</td>
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<td>Participant 4.</td>
<td>109. Technology has dramatically enhanced the ability of community stakeholders to engage and participate in the activities of council, as long as they’re competent to use the technology. Most of them are. That’s what motivates them.</td>
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<td>Participant 5.</td>
<td>111. I think stakeholders are at grave risk of governments misinterpreting what e-democracy is all about and misinterpreting government 2.0 and thinking it’s about giving the public more information and governments deciding what information to give them – all that will do is cause information overload and chaos and it doesn’t actually help people. People want just the relevant information available and they want it two-way, they want governments to listen to them more. Service delivery - it’s more cost efficient, it reduces paperwork, it’s faster – I’d much rather get my visa online, or apply for my visa online or do my tax online or pay my rates online and eventually vote online. I think both stakeholders and government benefit from service delivery online and I think we’re doing that reasonably well.</td>
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<td>Participant 6.</td>
<td>112. I think one of the problems of e-government gets back to the broad problem about IT generally – a lot of it is dependent on the quality of the contracting and the nature of the projects the government is undertaking. Government wants to have the Rolls Royce solution that nobody has ever had and they get conned by IT providers who say we’re going to sell this around the world. 113. e-government has enormous potential but we’re just at the beginning of it. We’re about at the stage of where the first man or woman started to think about fire and wheels comparatively, in terms of what it might deliver.</td>
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<td>Participant 7.</td>
<td>114. E-government: I think it’s the way of the future, it has a strong and positive impact on the community.</td>
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<td>Participant 8.</td>
<td>115. Depends - a pensioner, who doesn’t have access to the internet, it has no value at all and can be very frustrating to be told to go on the website. For someone who is techno savvy – they would see it as very time consuming and very efficient. So can’t just assume the technology is going to solve everybody’s problems. It is just another one of the communication tools that you can use.</td>
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<td>Participant 9.</td>
<td>116. It's about interacting with local government online and the ways we do interact, do we phone, visit office, or log online, ability to follow a train (receipt number online) – follow up. Easier to log online than other means.</td>
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<td>Participant 10.</td>
<td>115. I think the whole movement has a different impact depending on generations, needs and issues. It has engaged the technologically savvy who like to do things quickly without any direct human interaction. For others it is perceived as being complex and alienating.</td>
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<td>Participant 11.</td>
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<td>117. To actually bring in the electronic model, requires you to re-think your business model. There are significant advantages in that. What it does is change your image with the client. If we were in a model where we had high transaction levels electronically, it would be a clear demonstration that the government sector is operating in a commercial and efficient way. And not a clunky and inefficient way – apart from the operational benefit of it.</td>
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| Participant 12. | 119. I'd think of it as a supplement to a face to face interaction.  
119. It makes a lot of assumptions if you use e-government. You might be only talking to a certain percentage of your demographic. Who are they? Are you able to reach them? and how? Because it assumes you have an email that is regularly accessed by the constituent.  
120. It shouldn't be done in a shotgun approach because that never works – it could backfire. I would make sure there is a clear purpose on why that message is being delivered and why in that particular medium. | | | |
Inter view
Cluster 1. Interactive capabilities: tools, functions, features & ‘fully executable’ services online.
Cluster 2. Understanding and engaging the user, customisation and responsiveness, democratic outreach.
Cluster 3. Connecting government services, collaboration and integration: one-stop shop.

Participant 13.

121. It broadens participation in decision making, gathers community thoughts on issues, provides more opportunity for personalised information, more informed decision making process, and a more accountable government.
122. However, unless you have equitable access to the internet you therefore stand the risk that if that is your only method of participation that you will be discriminating against people who, for whatever reason, aren’t accessing the internet. It has to be put within a broader and more rigorous community engagement and participation framework.

CODE
105 e-participation opens up a whole world and allows government to get to those who might not be comfortable at a meeting / writing a submission / lobbying
106 E-government gets mis-interpreted as being about e-democracy, which has not place in our society. The technology isn’t there yet to have a safe system that can’t be tortured
107 Podcasting council meetings
108 It’s not a council issue, it’s a societal issue. Technology is pervasive and everyone’s got an opinion or view and they want to share it with you – if we’re not up to speed with that, we will become redundant
109 Technology has dramatically enhanced the ability of community to engage and participate in Council activities, as long as they’re competent to use the technology. Most of them are - that’s what motivates them.
110 Both stakeholders and government benefit from service delivery online – everyone needs it (reduces paperwork, faster, cost effective)
111 The risk of government misinterpreting government 2.0 as more information, people just need relevant information, two-way and they want governments to listen more.
112 e-government is dependent on IT, quality of contracting
113 e-government has enormous potential we’re just at the beginning (fire and wheels) in terms of what it can deliver
114 A strong and positive impact on the community
115 E-government is dependent on IT, quality of contracting
116 It’s about interacting with local government online, with ability to follow a train/receipt. Easier to log online than other means
117 Electronic model requires you to re-think your business model / significant advantages in operating efficiently
118 It is a supplement to face to face interaction
119 Assume: You may only talk to a certain percentage of your demographic: who are they? can you reach them? how?
120 It shouldn’t be done in a shotgun approach - make sure there’s a clear purpose, message, medium
121 Broadens participation in decision making, gathers community thoughts on issues, more opportunity for personalised information, more informed council decision making, more accountable government
122 It has to be within a broader, rigorous community engagement and participation framework – not as the only method of participation. Equitable access.
Q6. What management issues are emerging with e-technology and communications, and what systems, skills, processes or solutions are needed to address these?

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<td>Participant 1.</td>
<td>123. Ensuring all communications are being captured for the public record. It’s an issue that needs to be thought through.</td>
<td>124. The practical things such as how do you train to put in place an online social networking policy amongst staff. Particularly because staff are increasing expected to be able to communicate on behalf of the organisation. This is moving away from what is seen as traditional protocol/procedure - we need to lighten up because the reality is that local government is made up of a whole bunch of people who live in the community as well.</td>
<td>125. Empowerment: Because online communication is more immediate we can’t wait for people to get that one person to sign off on everything, or have one person responsible for everything that’s happening on a website. We need to start looking at how we view that trust and approval.</td>
<td>126. Approvals/Responsiveness: Approval process and how can you guarantee a swift response to online queries. If people send an email, they expect a swift response. In the old days when you put a letter in the mail it could take 3 days to get to the recipient, and take a day to turn around. What we have now achieved with e-government is expectation of immediacy and increasing frustration from stakeholders and the community when you don’t get back to them fast.</td>
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<td>Participant 2.</td>
<td>131. A lot of policies in local government seem to be about keeping people off the web. (People have Facebook and you tube blocked at their desk) when we’re actually seeing a lot of interaction with government going on through those platforms.</td>
<td>132. I think fundamentally there’s a generational issue with management, profound resist, or failure to acknowledge some of the benefits to the community.</td>
<td>133. Facebook and Twitter platforms are built for people to have fun and socialise. What we are seeing now with Facebook is a demonstration of why government organisations should never direct people to a site that they don’t have control over. I’ve been inviting people for some time to create a site that you own, that is your space, that you control. Rather than trying to use a platform where the rules are going to shift as you go.</td>
<td>134. Skills: I don’t think there are huge new skills needed but a lot of it is intuitive. I think organisations need to start merging their website teams which often start off in IT with their communication teams.</td>
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Fundamentally the web is about communication and it's not something that needs to be technically driven, it needs to be driven by people who are communicators. There are different skills for web communication.

135. Monitoring/empowerment to respond/More Agile: Our traditional communications and media teams have been brought up on a diet of 'starved of oxygen, don't comment, pump out spin' those sorts of things, whereas when dealing on web, there is little control – you need to be monitoring what's being said about you on an ongoing basis. People need to be empowered to engage on the web on an hourly basis as issues come up. A lot of Councils in Australia use twitter to broadcast but not monitor what comes back towards them. The web allows issues to blow up quickly so the whole way government deals with communications needs to change. They need to become much more agile.

My business partner was in Edmonton where they were talking about a Twitter stream. One of the snow ploughs had gone down the street and snow was blocking driveways. Someone tweeted about it and the council had the plough back there in half an hour and got enormous kudos on the internet on various pages on what they'd done. A great opportunity.

136. I think it's cultural and personality based. Forget e-issues for the moment. There is a fundamental divide among government authorities between those that acknowledge and value the input of the community and have community engagement practitioners there working hard to engage with the community, and get them involved; and those that view the community as a nuisance. That divide reflects itself back into the world of e-stuff. People who are adopting and picking up community engagement technologies are the same ones determined to hear others.

Participant 3.

128. It's never about the box, the software, it's about the people and change management, and the process we've got to deal with it. It's the people's approach to change and embracing new ways of doing things. We have different levels of sophistication about treating every business re-engineering process as a change management exercise.

Participant 4.

137. The single biggest issue is the professional development of staff. Councils are willing to spend the money on the technology. It is about the competence of the staff and the willingness of the staff.
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Participant 5. | 138. Manning – got to find out up front what it is you want to get from your online communication and a lot is done because it’s fashionable, but they haven’t worked out what they can reasonably do online. | 139. Resourcing is important – allocating resources to do it – people to respond to enquiries. | 135. Ability to respond listen and respond – under most government regulations there are strict limitations on public servants. Found public servants were responsible for running blogs and wanted comment on an issue but the public servants were not entitled to make public comment they had to refer to the Minister. Sending something to the Minister or Mayor’s office takes weeks to approve. Expected in social media is hours or a day. The response time of traditional government is weeks or months so there’s a management issue there that may require changes to legislation, changes to employment conditions. | 140. Language barrier – when people communicate online they use different language – they use text type, colloquial language – that’s normal. Governments are used to being formal letters and formal submissions – you don’t have swearing, you use abbrev. You don’t say the policy sux, and a lot of government we’re finding just don’t take that kind of language seriously. And one of our finding is there’s no reason why they shouldn’t. Especially if they’re trying to engage young people. They’ve got to look at that’s the way people talk online and is it any less valid than a formally written submission. | 141. The other more complicated area – consultation – if governments really get into communication on a large scale and then set up a blog or wiki, and they do get a lot of response – say thousands of comments, which did happen in the federal studies we looked at. They actually didn’t have enough people to read the comments. Secondly the volume of text, they had no tools to quickly analyse that. So one of things that came out of MIT research in the US, is that if you get involved in large scale online communications thousands of messages, you can’t read and respond to every one. And the sort of tools that were talking about are text analysis tools, where you can quickly analyse this content to find key messages and key themes, and pick out of it the common threads, and go back and respond in a generic way and say we are getting a lot of comments about this issue. We’re going to look at that. So you don’t respond to the individual issue, you respond to the dominant themes and issues and topics that come up. In a lot of government areas they’re going into this online environment, with not enough people, not enough skills, tools to actually analyse content. Not sure about what language to expect. | 135. There’s a whole lot of management issues, everything from authority to comment to moderation policies that block swearing.
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<td>Participant 6.</td>
<td>142. First issue is in terms of (even though more and more people are developing the skills to use these things), there does seem to be a bit of a chasm between the people who deliver the IT and the people that make the management decisions. And I think one of the big challenges is to internalise it in everybody’s job that will come with the next generation of managers and leaders, so that it’s not left with another group of people to fix.</td>
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<td>Participant 7.</td>
<td>143. Second thing is if you want to embrace it, you’ve got to lose track of any command or control management system, while at the same time managing to preserve probity and regulatory and legislative oversight.</td>
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<td>Participant 8.</td>
<td>144. The third thing is the more transparency and dialogue you create with more stakeholders residents and ratepayers – the more responsive.</td>
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<td>Participant 9.</td>
<td>145. If you’ve got a comprehensive e-government approach – you are less likely to be hijacked by minority groups. If you think about how much management time gets spent – on half a dozen people. You can chat to people and get more hard statistics on what’s important and what’s not.</td>
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<td>Participant 6.</td>
<td>146. Governance: The governance regime around what goes onto that website, maintenance and the online communications aspect of that. And how council is going to deal with the governance aspect – policies – to me it’s the number one priority.</td>
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<td>- Online maintenance</td>
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<td>- Online communication – how often managed</td>
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<td>- Twitter regime – responsiveness / having a person not automatic</td>
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<td>- Timeliness of information / accurate information / management and manning of information</td>
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<td>Participant 7.</td>
<td>147. There’s the infrastructure itself – how do we manage from systems, it’s getting more complicated, more features and functions available – ensuring they’re efficient, functional and scalable.</td>
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<td>148. Then getting around the governance issues, content management/publishing. Make sure content is up to date that we archive, that people respond to queries and questions, how do we moderate blogs. General rules, regulations and processes. All those questions – need policies that cover all these areas and monitor how changing in an ongoing basis.</td>
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<td>Participant 8.</td>
<td>149. We’re seeing a restructure in terms of – e.g. people think if we’re putting it all online customer service should shrink but it actually works the other way. We should be putting more people on the job.</td>
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<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>150. For some people the technology can be alienating. And for a lot of the people both internally and externally, face to face contact, human interaction is important to them. So if you cut out the human interaction the message could be hollow.</td>
<td>151. Most of the electronic-communication that we use has minimal capacity for nuance, so it’s fairly easy for messages to be misconstrued.</td>
<td>152. It is important to understand where you are communicating information in terms of process or procedure, and where you are actually trying to engage with people. You can engage people with electronic technology but it is different and you may very well be working with a different audience. It may well fill the bill for someone who is 17 but might not for someone who is 77.</td>
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<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>154. Writing skills wouldn’t be a bad idea. There is something about understanding the difference between the spoken word and the written word. Is a lot more permanent when it is in writing.</td>
<td>155. In terms of the technology I think it’s about managing the technology and understanding its strengths as well as its limitations. It seems to be ok to leave a message on the phone but if you don’t respond to an email in 10 minutes, people think something is wrong.</td>
<td>156. What we are seeing in the shared services project at the frontline, is the stress about the need to change the business model significantly to change the efficiencies over time, and what that does to your staffing structure, employment outcomes, the fine detail of the way our systems have operated and embedded for 100 years. I would argue a lack of willingness to turn those things on their ear. It is a cultural thing. When we’ve got 18 councils with their heads wrapped around shared services at the moment the tension points are all around, “am i going to have a job? What’s my job look like, what’s the organisation chart going to look like? Will we be doing this locally, offsite? There’s a massive organisational change process in dealing with any of these things and to an extent that’s been the major impediment to the roll out of a lot of the technological shifts in our sector. Because to actually make the change is seen to be such a hard ask and benefits are not delivered instantly ...rarely in our sector do we take a long-term view or medium-term view. It’s all very short term – one-year, two-year, or the election cycle.</td>
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<td>Participant 12.</td>
<td>158. I am a big believer in face to face communication and in my recent chapter, I actually said that what kinds of messages should go with what kinds of medium. Email is the biggest one – if you want feedback to solicit information, you can use email if spread across different geographic locations, but if you are trying to build a team, if you know them and have an established relationship, email should be ok. But if this is a new team that you need to talk to in another location, you need to have that face to face communication. There is a level of comfort and trust that you can get out of meeting face to face. It helps when you do have collaborative work with people in different locations. Electronic communication provides an excellent mechanism to facilitate that kind of work. But again, it’s about laying the foundation of the relationship rather than just relying on electronic communication. 159. People sometimes feel extremely vulnerable because it leaves a document trail.</td>
<td>157. There was an IABC study recently and I was on the panel, which talked about information overload. How do you fine tune and choose a message that is appropriate for the technology or the medium.</td>
<td>160. The continuous improvement method we use analyses process end to end, identifies any issues that form any form of weight and attempts to re-model those services to ensure that weight is eliminated. A lot of the good information systems and decision support tools are necessary to get that process streamlined and efficient. They are the same management issues but many solutions that might be available for a process can be online. 161. The implications of our journey through this process is that one of the things that makes process more efficient is high visibility of where we are in any process. And interestingly enough, too much stuff online or on a system, affects the visibility of process progress. 162. On the one hand the information systems can contribute well to doing things efficiently but in their use for the wrong purpose they can impact upon the efficiency of the process.</td>
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Capturing records

Online social networking policy for staff who are expected to communicate on behalf of the organisation/away from traditional procedure

Empowerment - can't wait for sign-off

Responsiveness to online queries

Allocate more time to fit this into their normal day (e.g. to respond to emails, etc)

People change management

A process for moderating online comments

Need to revisit policies that block staff from using the web/social sites

Generational issue with management - failure to acknowledge benefits

Board sites we can connect rather than other sites we cannot and where rules shift (e.g. Facebook)

Merges IT and communications teams - it needs to be driven by people who are communicating - there are different skills for web communication

Monitoring and agility to respond/engage

Lack of values on engagement - those who adopt community engagement technologies are those who hear others

Professional development - it's about the competence and willingness of staff

Planning what you want to get from online communication

Resource allocation - people to respond to enquiries

The language barrier - recognition of the way people talk online and use text type

Analysis of large scale consultation comments/comments quickly to enable response

Need to internalise it into everybody's jobs (chasm between IT and people that make management decisions)

Embrace the technology - reduce control whilst maintaining probity

Create transparency and dialogue

A comprehensive e-government approach - reach a broader group rather than the minority

Governance (maintenance, communication, responsiveness, timeliness, accuracy, management of information)

The infrastructure - features, functions, scalability

Policies that cover governance, content management/publishing, archive, respond, moderate, rules and processes - and monitoring change

More people/staff for online (not less)

Technology can be alienating - face to face human contact is important for the message

Electronic communication has minimal capacity for nuance. Message can be misconstrued.

It's important to understand where you are communicating information and where you are trying to engage. Electronic engagement might be ok for 17 year old but not be for 77.

In the organisation the issues are about communication (transfer of information) and relationships (other dialogue/engagement).

Writing skills (understanding the difference between the written and spoken word) writing is permanent.

Understanding technology strengths and limitations (phone = leave a message, email = respond immediately)

Shared Services across 18 Councils - means a change of business model affects staff structure and systems. Cultural issues/organisational change process. An impediment to the roll-out of technological shifts in the sector.

Information overload. How do you fine tune and choose a message that's appropriate for the technology/medium.

Messages should match the medium. If you want feedback to solicit information, you can use email across different locations, but if you are trying to build a team/build a relationship you need face to face/build trust.

People sometimes feel extremely vulnerable because it leaves a document trail.

The use of a continuous improvement method analysing processes end to end, identifying issues and re-modelling services. Many solutions available for a process may be online.

Too much stuff online or on a system affects the visibility of process progress.

Information systems can contribute to doing things efficiently but used for the wrong purpose they can impact upon the efficiency of the process.
Q7. What are the models and issues that are guiding current approach to e-government in local government in Australia

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<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>AGIMO might be able to help</td>
<td>No model</td>
<td>No model</td>
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<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>No model</td>
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<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Aware of a couple of models – Ipswich re-engineered the back of the business. They did this from a change management perspective and re-engineering perspective and then used technology as more of an enabler. They looked at every business process and said, do we need to do it for a start, and do it better – second. And that will free up all this labour, then we can use that labour to do other things. So for instance, Band 7 Planner - planning how do we stip out all the other paper handling, filing, stapling, stripping, community liaison away from the decision to ensure the Band 7 Planner is doing the highly involved decision making that they need to do.</td>
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<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>We have to design them. It’s some of the management forums are sharing systems. Local Government is a sharing industry – 1994 first did it – the regional city councils. High country councils etc. The forums for CEOs and Mayors to meet and interact with State government. It allows councils to share and learn from each other. The other thing it’s doing is allowing Victorian councils to act as mentors to the newly amalgamated Queensland Councils. Improved processes have to be an outcome.</td>
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<td>Participant 5</td>
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166. The Australian Government 2.0 taskforce was guided by the UK. The UK had over 400 government websites, they couldn’t find anything and didn’t know which Department to go to. They set up the Power of Communication Taskforce in 2009 and the Australian Government 2.0 taskforce was very much modelled on that. It recommended collapsing over 3500 into less than 1000 websites, so instead of going through a department you could go through a single portal and use natural language. You could say you ‘I want a Visa’ and you didn’t have to know what department it was, whether it was Department of Immigration or Department of Trade. We’re modelled at a Federal level very much on the UK. At local and state government a lot have been very innovative. They’ve looked at what’s happened in Canada and US. Canada was a front runner for many years back in the 90s in individual departments, setting up innovative service delivery and consultation sites, so a lot of individual agencies in Australia copied what a department or local government has done in Canada. Canada didn’t hit any of their targets – they led from the late 80s into the 90s and then didn’t hit promised targets and faded away. Obama’s brought a huge resurgence of interest in the US but I think at the Federal level – the UK – Richard Allan MP in England chaired the power of info taskforce and then came to Australia and consulted to the government here.
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<td>Participant 7.</td>
<td>164. Models: outdated, not up with latest technology.</td>
<td>165. Councils need to survey their community base – stakeholder analysis. Are you corresponding with them in the way they expect. Community survey work.</td>
<td>166. Victoria’s integrated library systems works well. You can order anything from libraries in Victoria from home.</td>
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<td>Participant 8.</td>
<td>167. A lot of it has been driven by technology itself. An interesting one is the release of the Ipad – e.g. car manufacturers already including in the new design of car. Being up to date with what’s available and how to use it, but not fall into the trap of getting too clever, when you’ve got so many things on the site that people just don’t have the knowledge of the background on how to use it.</td>
<td>168. Open data – government has a whole host of data sources available to the public. Open up data sources in a way that’s responsible and accessible.</td>
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<td>Participant 9.</td>
<td>169. Local Government is there to serve constituents, needs to be responsible – part is to ask how do we engage and what’s the best vehicle to do it. E-government is important but its not the only vehicle to consider. Older Australians still do what they want. Internet penetration is high but not 100% in Australia. We need to have a multitude channels – not one or two. Making the interaction with council effective and efficient as possible.</td>
<td>170. Not aware of.</td>
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<td>Participant 10.</td>
<td>171. Not aware of.</td>
<td>172. Another issue is consolidation of content – do we have campaign sites or one big site. Its context specific. Sustainability Victoria has a host of campaign sites – do people know where to go. There’s a push federally for consolidation. Huge topic. “To consolidate or not”.</td>
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<td>Participant 11.</td>
<td>167. Libraries - 36 libraries operating on a common system with a shared library resource model sitting with it so if you are in a council at a particular location, an individual in that location can search the whole 36 councils and get the resource they want delivered in 24 hours. That model is moving into NSW and into other states. 174. Shared Services Councils will go out and buy a ‘fit for purpose’ system that generally will not be state of the art. By aggregating 36 together under a shared services model, operating off one platform, they acquire state of the art technology. So everyone gets access to that and gets the benefits of shared resources. 175. The shared service project is finding areas of common interest amongst clusters of councils in the State. They don’t have to be continuous. One can be in the far west and one can be in the far east, but by putting a grouping of councils together that are interested in a shared services model for finance reporting/accounting, ultimately they will end up with a networked model using the internet as the base to get state of the art AAA class software and systems into clusters of councils running off a single platform.</td>
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<td>Participant 12.</td>
<td>167. Chat room could be explored (e.g. library) Community consultation – why not have a town meeting, online/webinars? Podcast.</td>
<td>172. Models - still at early stages / pretty much one-way</td>
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<td>Participant 13.</td>
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<td>No models</td>
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<td>163</td>
<td>Ipswich, UK example – re-engineered the back of the business from a change management perspective then used technology as an enabler</td>
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<td>164</td>
<td>We have to design models</td>
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<td>165</td>
<td>LG management forums – allow councils to share and learn from each other</td>
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<td>166</td>
<td>The Australian Government 2.0 taskforce was guided by the UK’s Power of Communication taskforce set up in 2009. It recommended collapsing over 3500 into less than 1000 websites, so instead of going through a department you could go through a single portal and use natural language (e.g. for Visa you didn’t have to know what department). We’re modelled at Federal level on the UK. At local and state level they’ve looked at Canada (which lead in late 80s and the 90s, didn’t hit targets) and US – with Obama.</td>
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<td>167</td>
<td>Victoria’s integrated library system works well. You can order anything from libraries in Victoria, from home.</td>
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<td>168</td>
<td>Models: outdated, not up with latest technology.</td>
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<td>169</td>
<td>Councils need to survey the community/ stakeholder analysis.</td>
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<td>170</td>
<td>A lot of it has been driven by technology itself (e.g. iPad) – creating demand / but we must not get too clever if people don’t know how to use it.</td>
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<td>171</td>
<td>E-government is important but it’s not the only vehicle. Internet penetration is high but not 100% in Australia. We need to have a multi channel - making the interaction with council effective and efficient as possible.</td>
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<td>172</td>
<td>Open data – government has a whole host of data sources available to the public. Open’s up data sources in a way that’s responsible and accessible.</td>
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<td>173</td>
<td>Another issue is consolidation of content – do we have campaign sites or one big site. It’s context specific. There’s a push federally for consolidation.</td>
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<td>174</td>
<td>Councils will go out and buy a ‘fit for purpose’ system that generally will not be state of the art. By aggregating 36 together under a shared services model, operating off one platform, they acquire state of the art technology. So everyone gets access to and benefits of shared resources.</td>
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<td>175</td>
<td>Shared service project - finding areas of common interest amongst clusters of councils in the State (e.g. a shared services model for finance reporting/accounting, asset management), a networked model using the internet as the base to get clusters of councils running off a single platform.</td>
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Q8. What are the key components for developing a strategic framework to manage effective communications and electronic technology.

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<td>Participant 1.</td>
<td>See q 6. Training of people, allocation of time in workplace, matrices for message consistency. As we move forward in establishing frames, need to come up with out of the box solutions - technology based.</td>
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<td>Participant 2.</td>
<td>176. Strategy. A lot of what’s done at the moment isn’t based on strategy. It’s based on someone saying they’ve got Twitter lets do Twitter – not thinking about where it fits into their overall framework. 177. Need to acknowledge that e-communication is just communication and that it needs to fit in a coherent way and in a pattern of what council does. 178. In the councils I have come across, those that have a central spot for communication and engagement tapping into all the projects across the organisation, seem to be most successful in getting a consistent level of engagement with the community. That’s important otherwise the community’s expectations are all over the place. That consistency is really critical. It is also important to go back to the community to give feedback. 79. Organisations can identify with the IAP2 spectrum; think about the projects and the way of engaging the community in things that the community are really interested in (bike strategies, parks etc) involve, collaborate. Think about it proactively and about where to tweet, use tools, what to do face to face and online. 180. Councils put consultation budget on projects that are bureaucratic and don’t put budget on things the community are actually interested in. It’s not about the tools (e.g. gotta have Facebook, Twitter, forum), it’s about having a communication team that understands these things and take a philosophy about how council is going to engage and use different tools for different purposes. In different organisations, will use different tools for different things. (e.g. running a barbecue or using online because people don’t have the time to come to things.) Most organisations fit in the middle and need to do a bit of each. 181. If you engage online, when you get input from the community it needs to be carefully moderated to make it safe, have reporting tools built in. (e.g. if 3 people comment, feel like its failed but you go into background and see 800 unique visitors and 400 people taken documents from the site – and that fits in with drop-in sites and public sessions. You can get 100 people in a hall but only 3 have questions after seeing a presentation. When using online tools it’s important to have the right intelligence around them to understand what the real result was. Use Twitter and Facebook to get word out and monitor them and draw to a place where you can monitor conversation.</td>
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<td>Participant 3.</td>
<td>182. Start at the services end and work back. What are the services we’re delivering that are highly valuable to our community? How are we delivering those services now? Can we re-engineer those now to do them better? If re-engineering throws up some information management and access solutions enabled by IT, fantastic, if they don’t, fine it might not be an IT solution that enables it. It’s about service planning and service reviews and process re-engineering. Strategic framework starts at the business end – with the customer at the core. We identify opportunities for improvement. We now draw a set of specifications we would like to see our IT solution deliver. Look for partners to help deliver and design it, and get the functionality – the boxes and wires.</td>
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<td>Participant 4.</td>
<td>183. Competent staff to use technology</td>
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<td>184. Technology to have an effective database of ratepayers and residents that allows e-government.</td>
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<td>185. Sophisticated levels of knowledge on the areas of local government activity that the community want to engage you in. (Relevant to stakeholders – understand/listen to your front desk people and field staff).</td>
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<td>Participant 5.</td>
<td>186. AGIMO Canberra – papers – guidelines</td>
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<td>187. Empower public servants on what they can say and what they can’t say</td>
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<td>188. Culture – to be responsive and open</td>
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<td>189. Resourced</td>
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<td>190. Clear guidelines and training</td>
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<td>191. Careful in what can divulge – privacy and confidentiality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>192. Being clear on terminology (electronic communication) – too broad</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Participant 8.  
193. First – have to be absolutely sure what your objectives are. Like any communications program, unless you say what are the objectives, anything you do will be counter productive.  
194. Second thing is Segmentation – who do you want to talk to and what are their information needs  
195. How to then tailor the program  
196. How to make sure people can provide feedback and recognise they are being heard. Find out what’s appropriate. Example: if you want to deal with aged people who need home care – its face to face communication from the social welfare operators and volunteers, and you can’t honestly believe that e-communication is going to be the answer to that. But e-communication may be it crucial to provide a system whereby you don’t let things fall through the cracks – so that all the volunteers and all of the people ...a system, as long as its confidential, whereby they record the information about Joe Bloggs – that’s part of the feedback, but that’s a management thing not communications thing.  
It doesn’t matter what the communications technology is, unless you know what your objectives are, what you trying to achieve who you’re trying to talk to, what they want to hear from you and what you want to tell them – unless you get that right, you can have the best IT system in the world and it will be meaningless.  
Restructure of local government over the last 30-40 years has meant while local government is still to a large extent the closest level of government to the people, in fact they are quite significant governmental units now. And the assumption that councillors could know their constituents and that managers could have a good handle on everything that’s going on in the community is no longer possible. There is a tendency for people to think local government is close to the people because it is high touch, but the quantum of what’s involved is actually significant. And we have to start thinking about e-communications and local government about resolving the paradox of being close to people in many ways by touching them, while at the same time also becoming large organisations. That’s the central paradox that faces local government - How does it retain its high touch quality and using technology to actually improve transparency and get more feedback. The other thing is geographic spread – the diversity. Some people never go from one side of the city to the other. |
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<tr>
<td>Participant 7.</td>
<td>187. Stakeholder analysis – you have to understand who are you communicating with and their preferred method of technology. Gender-age group % household use of website or other forms of e-technology. Ways and means of communicating in remote areas vs metropolitan areas needs to be a key factor in how they want to communicate. Street closures, emergencies, bushfires, traffic management, alerts on mobile phone if constituents are in particular areas.</td>
<td>190. How often you evaluate – every 6 months / technology / community shifts – keep up to date with trends.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>188. Social media – Facebook etc? Trends need to have greater governance – legislative regimes as to how they can operate. Still need back up of traditional media. We’re in a totally new era of communication that we’ve never seen. We’ve got to get a gauge on where the community is at with it all before embarking on this electronic area. There has to be a marriage on what’s required and how quickly people are adapting to this. I would like to see the local government industry ahead of, or up to date with this whole new emerging technology. It’s going to be really interesting trend to say against my age group vs 20 year old – because they’re downloading everything from songs, to programs to newspapers. In my age bracket we’re still getting the DVD on disk now so were moving slowly but were not downloading that movie lifestyle.</td>
<td>199. Social media – Facebook etc? Trends need to have greater governance – legislative regimes as to how they can operate. Still need back up of traditional media. We’re in a totally new era of communication that we’ve never seen. We’ve got to get a gauge on where the community is at with it all before embarking on this electronic area. There has to be a marriage on what’s required and how quickly people are adapting to this. I would like to see the local government industry ahead of, or up to date with this whole new emerging technology. It’s going to be really interesting trend to say against my age group vs 20 year old – because they’re downloading everything from songs, to programs to newspapers. In my age bracket we’re still getting the DVD on disk now so were moving slowly but were not downloading that movie lifestyle.</td>
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<td>Participant 8.</td>
<td>200. Research is very important. It would be very valuable for the councils to be constantly checking what their stakeholders want, what their expectations are, what they’re looking for and keep up to date with that. Show representatives of the community what their plans are to make sure they are not going too far with them. The little manly website is a very good example of how you can use the internet to involve the community.</td>
<td>201. Cross fertilise communications methods – promote web with newsletter, and newsletter on the website. Use the communication tools to access other communication tools.</td>
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<td>Participant 9.</td>
<td>202. Need to be sensible to give enough research upfront – need to know you are on the right path once we have the features, functions, resources, communication strategy in place, that’s the key element – further validation comes at a later point not when it is too late to change and you end up launching a flawed system. It’s about understanding and articulation of the objectives, engaging with stakeholders. Recognising potential limitations (e.g. being locked in with CMS). External – understand how they engage and how they like to engage. When we run focus groups, the concept needs to change. The way we communicate with different age groups is different.</td>
<td>203. A common problem is a council will make decisions at micro level without considering the macro – e.g. chosen a CMS without considering – other functionality that can’t be done – or engaging a developer before knowing what skills they’ll need. Do more research upfront at expense of later.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 10.</td>
<td>204. Some of it is about understanding the opportunities as well as the risks and local government as a sector is fairly risk averse. For some of the technologies, given they are user driven rather than manager driven, they have the risk for all sorts of things that can go wrong as well as all sorts of things that can go right. If you give people a space and place to exchange information where you may actually provide the community the opportunity to actively participate in that, you’ve got all sorts of issues around inappropriate comments, using it as a way of venting unhappiness, legal issues such as defamation. There are concerns from some organisations that if their staff have access to Facebook etc that’s how they’ll spend their day – you’ve got to weigh up the risk of loss of productivity with opportunity and a better and faster way of engaging stakeholders. Things like Facebook, YouTube are real opportunities to engage with a whole group of people who probably don’t engage a great deal with local government and see it as being a conservative, constrained area of work. It might be a way of opening them up to understanding more about what local government does but also to interact with it. It is also understanding that any one form of communication is unlikely to suit everybody. For some stakeholders, technology is really useful, because they are not looking for a relationship but some of the more personal services people might feel distanced by it. In terms of strategic framework, look at what trying to achieve in any exchange and what the appropriate mediums are. 205. From time to time, follow up to make sure what you are saying is what people are hearing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 11.</td>
<td>206. We’ve got a project at the moment where we are aggregating the procurement of a standardised, state of the art web model. The websites in Victoria were put in 5-6 years ago. The commonwealth threw money at the councils and left it. It stayed static for a period what we need to do is drag them up again. 207. Think about business entry point not being the reception at the council office but the entry point through the website. 208. Generational issues – the kids now are absolutely web-savvy. The fact that we have this new generation coming through with expectations, the councils have to get their act together, got to think about the website as the entry point. Make sure the website is easy to use, has got the right information, has more critical access to providing advice and delivering service, not the seams of the boundary of council – who the people are, who mayor and councillors are and contact numbers.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Cluster 1: Interactive capabilities: tools, functions, features & 'fully executable' services online.

**Participant 12.**

209. Very comprehensive and sophisticated audience analysis. Understanding who your audiences are would be key. Knowing what media usage, what information they need from you. Understand nuances of cultural diversity. We segment on language, diversity, origin. We know the country of origin but we don't know what their attitudes are because we make assumptions that someone from Vietnam will respond in a manner that is more generalistic. But what if someone born in Vietnam has been in Australia for more than 30 years but did some graduate study in the UK – which values inform his/her behaviour/attitudes? We don't know that. We need deeper analysis. People have hearts and minds.

### Cluster 2: Understanding and engaging the user, customisation and responsiveness/democratic outreach.

**Participant 13.**

210. Local government, especially in Victoria, is surrounded by huge legislative framework of privacy and accountability and transparency that no other level of government is obliged to comply with. That is going to be a huge issue and I don't know that the legislative framework provides any guidelines on web and where we want to be in local government in relation to e-government.

211. There does need to be some sort of strategic statement out there, because there are trade-offs. If you are an early adopter of a particular type of technology and a leader, you do so at the risk of high cost and potential failure. And you are playing with ratepayer money. But the community has an expectation that you're not such a lagger – compared to the services they receive in the corporate sector areas. There's some thinking that has to go on to say where does Local Government sit in the stream of consciousness about e-government and a range of applications. What's the role of e-communications in government?

212. IT moves so fast and what you're doing a major business case for last year is irrelevant next year. The requirement for business then balanced with community expectations, whether or not it makes sense is another strategic issue for an accountable organisation like Local Government. The other thing is the reality that Local Government is often a poor position. The sheer cost of developing the platforms to do e-government is something that needs to be addressed with a broader framework for community internet access. There will be many inequalities between small rural councils where it's probably needed most and large city councils.
Councils will go out and buy a ‘fit for purpose’ system that generally will not be state of the art. By aggregating 36 together under a shared services model, operating off one platform, you’ve acquired state of the art technology. So everyone gets access to and benefits of shared resources.

Recognise that e-communication is just one form of communication fit into what Council does.

A central area for communication and engagement tapping into projects across organisation – must succeed in achieving consistent levels of engagement and reporting back.

Identity with the technology – think about the project and the way it is engaging the community. Think about it proactively where to use tools: face to face / online.

It’s not about the tools (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, forums) it’s about a communication team that understands these things and take a philosophy about how council is going to engage and use different tools for different purposes.

If you engage online, when you get input from the community it needs to be carefully moderated to make it safe, have reporting tools built in / intelligence around them to understand what the real result was.

Starts all the business end with the customer. Identify opportunities for improvement. Draw a set of specifications for IT solution. Look for partners to help deliver and design it. Get the functionality.

Competent staff to use technology.

Technology to have an effective database of ratepayer is and residents that allows e-government.

Sophisticated levels of knowledge on the areas of local government activity that the community want to engage you in.

AGIMO Canberra provides guidelines.

Empower public servants on what they can say and what they can’t say.

Culture – to be responsive and open.

Resourced.

Clear guidelines and training.

Careful in what can divulge – privacy and confidentiality.

Being clear on terminology (electronic communication) – too broad.

Be absolutely sure what your objectives are. Like any communications program, unless you say what are the objectives, anything you do will be counter-productive.

Segmentation – who do you want to talk to and what are their information needs.

How to then tailor the program.

How to make sure people can provide feedback and recognise they are being heard.

Stakeholder analysis: who are you communicating with: generational group / % household use of website or other forms of e-technology and preferred method of technology/mode.

How often you evaluate – every 6 months / technology / community shift – keeping up to date with trends.

Social media trends need to have greater governance – legislative regimes as to how they can operate. Still need back up of traditional media.

Research is very important – councils to constantly checking what stakeholders want / expectations and keep up to date with that. Show community their plans to make sure they are not going too far, involve the community.

Cross fertilise the communications methods – promote web with newsletter, and newsletter on the website. Use the communication tools to access other communication tools.

Hashtag – need to know you are on the right path – to have the features, functions, resources, communication strategy in place first.

Don’t make decisions at micro level without considering the macro – e.g. choosing a CMS without considering other functionality that can’t be done i.e. engaging a developer before knowing what skills they’ll need. Do more research upfront.

Understanding the opportunities at what we the make, does technologies are user friendly. If you give people a space to exchange information and the opportunity to participate, you’ve also got issues around inappropriate comments, legal issues such as defamation, concerns of loss of productivity with staff online.

Form time to time, follow up to make sure what you are saying is what people are hearing.

We’re aggregating the procurement of a branded issue, state of the art web model.

I think about business entry point not being the reception at the council office / entry point through the website.

Generational issues – kids now are absolutely web-savvy, we have a new generation coming through with expectations – need to be prepared. More than just information. Make people want to go there.

Very comprehensive and sophisticated audience analysis: media usage, what information they need. Understand nuances of cultural diversity, language, diversity, origin but we don’t know what their attitudes are. We need deeper analysis. People have hearts and minds.

Local government is surrounded by huge legislative framework of privacy and accountability and transparency that no other level of government is obliged to comply with. I don’t know that the legislative framework provides any guidelines on web and where we want to be in local government in relation to e-government.

If you are an early adopter of a particular type of technology and a leader, but you do so at the risk of high cool and a potential failure – with ratepayer money.

I don’t mean so fast and what you’re doing for a major business case last year is irrelevant next year. The sheer cost of developing the platforms to e-government is something that needs to be addressed with a broader framework for community internet access. There will be many inequities between small rural councils where it’s probably needed most and large city councils.
### Appendix 15. Studies of e-government take-up in Australia and overseas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study, Year and Countries</th>
<th>Research Method</th>
<th>Sample Size and Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Musso, Weare and Hale (2000) California, USA Local Government</td>
<td>Content Analysis</td>
<td>270 municipal websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shackleton, Fisher and Dawson (2005) Australia Local Government</td>
<td>Content Analysis, Case Study and Interviews Quirk (2000) model</td>
<td>20 Victorian websites measured three years Case study 14 internal organisational interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam and Featherstone (2007) Australia and USA Local Government</td>
<td>Content Analysis Marketing Readiness Website Indicator</td>
<td>180 website content analyses (60 in Australia: 30 in Vic, 30 in NSW, and 120 in the US cities and counties of California and Alabama)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldershiem and Ogard (2008) Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden Local Government</td>
<td>Content Analysis Examines e-government as a process of innovation</td>
<td>75 city websites and 54 county council websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wohlers (2009) USA and Germany Local Government</td>
<td>Content Analysis</td>
<td>1000 municipal websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith (2010) USA Users of government websites</td>
<td>Survey and interview</td>
<td>Telephone survey of 2,258 adults. 565 interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pina, Torres and Royo (2010) European Union Local Government</td>
<td>Evaluated websites using a five-stage maturity model</td>
<td>75 local government websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmarking Study 2009/10 that forms part of this thesis Australia Local Government</td>
<td>4 clusters</td>
<td>100 websites (50 NSW / 50 Vic) 13 in-depth interviews. Follow-up website reviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 16. West’s Results in 2008 compared the Australian Local Government Benchmarking Study 2009/10

Table A. Websites offering publications and databases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature Measured</th>
<th>West Result State/Fed USA</th>
<th>2008* Government</th>
<th>2009/10 VIC &amp; Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone Contact Info.</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>2002 *</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address Info</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>2002 *</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to Other Sites</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>2002 *</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publications</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Databases</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio Clips</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Clips</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B. Websites offering Electronic Services (fully-executable online Services)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature Measured</th>
<th>West Result State/Fed Government USA</th>
<th>2009/10 VIC &amp; NSW Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Government Sites Offering Online Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No services</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Service</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Services</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more services</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services total</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>2008</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table C. Websites with Privacy and Security Policies / Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature Measured</th>
<th>West Result State/Fed USA</th>
<th>2009/10 VIC &amp; NSW Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Privacy policies</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security policies</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>2008</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table D. Website Accessibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature Measured</th>
<th>West Result</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>2009/10 VIC &amp; NSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State/Fed</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W3C Disability Accessibility Federal</strong></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>48% in local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(down from 54% prev year)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W3C Disability Accessibility State</strong></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(down from 46% prev year)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Foreign language Access</strong></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E. Websites with Ads, User Fees, and Premium Fees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature Measured</th>
<th>West Result</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>2009/10 VIC &amp; NSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State/Fed</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Sites with Ads, User Fees, and Premium Fees</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Fees</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premium Fees</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>-</td>
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Table F. Websites Offering Public Outreach / Interactive Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature Measured</th>
<th>West Result</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>2009/10 VIC &amp; NSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State/Fed</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>2002*</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email updates (register/alerts/RSS)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2002*</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalisation (tailored)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Some features have not been measured since 2002 – to the 2002 result has been provided.*