

## Antecedents of Sustainability in Cross-agency Information-based Networks

Jane E. Fountain, Robin McKinnon, National Center for Digital Government,  
John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and Eunyun Park, Cornell University

The principal research questions addressed in this ongoing study are: What are the correlates of successful information-based, cross-agency collaborations across government agencies? What are the reciprocal relationships among information technologies, business processes and organizational structure? In the proposed poster we report, as one part of the broader study, the frequencies of responses to an online survey of the universe of project participants in the U.S. federal government's 25 Presidential Management Initiative cross-agency e-government projects. These projects were formerly known as the Quicksilver Projects.

The federal projects studied are depicted in the figure below which arrays projects by the participating agencies. The lead agency for each project is marked by an "x" in bold type.

Projects / Departments	DOC	DOJ	DOE	DEI	DI	DOJ	DOL	DOT	EP	FDIC	FEMA	GSA	<b>HHS</b>	HUD	NIH	NSA	NRC	NF	OP	SEA	Smithsonian	SSA	State	Treasury	USAD	USDA	VA
Consolidated Health		X											X														X
Disaster Management	X	X			X	X		X			X	X	X	X						X		X				X	X
E-Authentication	X	X		X		X		X	X			X	X									X		X		X	X
<b>E-Grants</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X		X		X		X			X	X	X
E-Payroll		X	X																X			X		X			
E-Training		X					X	X				X							X			X		X			
E-Travel		X						X				X						X						X			X
E-Vital		X		X		X	X						X							X		X		X		X	X
E-Records Mgm't		X	X		X			X	X						X									X		X	X
GovBenefits			X	X			X				X		X	X								X	X			X	X
Expanding Exec. Tax																						X		X			
EZ Tax Filing																						X		X			
Federal Asset Sales		X		X						X		X		X						X				X			X
Geospatial	X	X	X		X			X	X		X		X	X		X	X			X						X	X
Integrated Acquisition	X	X			X			X				X		X						X						X	X
EHR		X																								X	
E-Clearance	X	X	X			X												X		X				X	X		
International Trade Process	X					X														X				X	X	X	
One Stop Buisnee Compliance	X						X	X	X											X				X		X	
Online Access for Loans				X						X		X	X							X						X	X
Online Rulemaking						X	X	X														X	X	X	X	X	
Recreation OneStop	X	X			X			X													X	X		X	X	X	
Recruitment One Stop	X	X			X		X	X	X					X		X				X				X		X	
USA Services						X					X	X	X							X		X				X	X
Project SAFECOM	X	X			X	X		X			X	X	X							X		X		X		X	X

The research strategy employed is multiple method and longitudinal. We have undertaken archival research to analyze institutional changes in executive management structure, in oversight practices and in legislation guiding e-government. We conducted an online survey of all project participants in spring 2003 which included federal managers as well as technical specialists on project teams. We obtained responses from 124 public managers and from 22 of the 25 projects. Subsequently, we have interviewed approximately 50 public managers engaged in the cross-agency projects in face-to-face interviews and used the survey results to inform the interview data gathering process.

The survey items were constructed based on a review of the literature on interorganizational relationships. We do not propose to report the literature review in the poster session. To summarize greatly, we hypothesized, based on the review, that the following variables would be related to sustainable information-based, cross-agency initiatives: experience of participants, tenure in position, time devoted to the project, adequacy of staffing, adequacy of funding, recognition by external actors of the importance of the project, perceptions of success of the project, and perceptions of congressional support for the project. Project participants responded to the survey with self-report responses regarding these variables. We also collected their subjective perceptions of the success of their project. We will use multiple regression analysis following the initial frequency analysis to examine the

relationship between objective measures of project performance collected by OMB and self-report perceptions of the independent variables.

We found that 40.7 percent of the respondents are assigned to their cross-agency project full time. This indicates that staffing levels might be too low for complex projects. Surprisingly, we found that nearly 50 percent of the respondents have more than 20 years experience working in the federal government. Another 29 percent have between 10 and 20 years experience. This indicates that more senior, experienced civil servants have been assigned to the cross-agency projects. However, it may be that the projects lack staff with the most current expertise in information and communication technologies. This lack of expertise might hamper the progress of information-based projects and could introduce flaws in design that would be difficult to correct once sunk costs were accrued.

Thirty six percent of respondents reported that the overall importance of the project is a “ten” on a scale of one to ten with ten having the highest importance. Seventy five percent gave the projects an “eight” or higher in their rating of importance. These findings indicate that the projects are viewed by participants as highly important initiatives. Ratings of perceived success of the projects were more variable and display a bimodal pattern with modal responses of “five” and “eight” on a scale of one to ten with ten being the most successful rating. The mean response of the success of the projects was 6.3, or slightly above average.

In terms of impact of project participation on one’s career, 61.3 percent of respondents reported that working on the project would have a “beneficial” or “highly beneficial” impact on their career. Only 8.9 percent of respondents indicated that their participation on one of the PMI initiatives would have a “detrimental” or “very detrimental” effect on their career. In terms of recognition for their work, 81.4 percent of civil servants in the response pool reported that their work on the projects is “recognized and valued.” Although 18.5 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that their work is “recognized and valued.” We will need to sort responses by project to determine whether systematic differences occur among projects. We also plan to disaggregate the data to examine responses of technical specialists versus program managers and other civil servants engaged in the cross-agency projects.

Among the other findings based on an analysis of frequencies of survey responses, we found that respondents were split with respect to their perceptions of the congressional support and adequacy of legislation for the cross-agency projects. Slightly more than half, or 56.9 percent, indicated that their projects lack adequate funding. But slightly less half, or 47.9 percent, reported that their projects lacked the necessary human resources for success.

One of the most important findings may be that 75 percent of the project participants who responded to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “I think the culture of government is changing to favor more cross-agency initiatives in the next five years.” But the comments provided by respondents correspond to some of the bimodal distributions in responses: “This time OMB seems to be serious and is trying to drive the process to completion. ***There may be a significant change in the way the government actually does business.***” “. . . ***The projects are being forced into a mold,*** although the needs across agencies, even within a particular area, are diverse. I have not seen an effort to find the right answer. More a matter of getting the “success” to check off a box than to “get it right.” “Too early to tell. The Clinton Administration was never successful in bringing the issue to the power structure of govt (PMC) where this Administration has been more disciplined in communicating and engaging the Deputy Secretaries’ attention. I think the real impact will be to cut back on redundancies and overlap, sharing best practices, and improving the customer experience with government. Some of this is maturation, new technology, and ***dogged commitment of a few.***” These empirical results shed light on some of the micro-processes by which the federal government is undergoing structural change.