

PORTALS IN GOL COUNTRIES
Summary report in progress, 31. Aug. 2001

1 INTRODUCTION

This abstract is a product of the GOL portals project. It offers a summing-up of country reports that were produced on the basis of a former distributed template. Country reports have been received from:

- Canada
- Finland
- France
- Hong Kong
- Hungary
- Israel
- Korea
- the Netherlands
- Norway
- Sweden
- UK
- USA

The reports cover how central topics concerning portals are perceived from the responsible governmental department's point of view. It is not the result of independent research. Nevertheless - this overview offers an insight to what is of importance within the member countries' central governments. This document will not go thoroughly through the different country reports. In order to get a more detailed insight into policies, visions and experiences from the contributing countries, it is highly recommended to read the country reports.

This summary will lead you - firstly – through superior political concerns and visions throughout the member countries. Secondly - we look into the portal development patterns, central initiatives taken, like launched top node solutions, developed portal structure and processes on all government levels. Thirdly - drivers of change are in focus – meaning instruments in use and which agents that are perceived as important for the further development. Finally the summary offers an insight into the identified challenges when working with realization of eGovernment and in particular the deployment of portals.

Focus is put on what seems to be of common interest in the member countries, and what may be mutual challenges in the future. This will create a basis for the discussions at the coming GOL meeting in September 2001.

2 STATUS ON PORTAL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

According to the country reports, the deployment of portals stems from various superior political concerns and visions. Realizing eGovernment is one main political concern reported, another concern is realizing national strategies for the Information Society – in other words a broader scope and focus. One central concern mentioned in the reports is for portals to:

Strengthen the relationship between authorities and the citizens by improving services and facilitating participation in policy-making enhancing accountability and transparency. User orientation, efficiency, flexibility, electronic services, electronic commerce and seamless Government services are in focus.

It has been reported that policies on portals are embedded into two main ranges of visions - on one hand modernizing the public sector, and on the other hand improving public services by offering electronic service delivery to citizens and the business sector. It seems that a shift toward more client centered service delivery in general is a central motive for the development of web portals in all countries.

Central government in the member countries have taken several administrative measures to realize the political concerns mentioned above. What seems to be an impression is that a political or official committee is appointed to monitor and oversee the realization of the political action plans.

In all countries a central political and administrative process has been carried out in order to get legitimacy and funding for the central conducted initiatives. What varies, however, is the amount of money allocated to portal development purposes.

One may suggest a possible correlation between the administrative system of governance in the country and the kind of process that has been conducted to implement portal strategies. In countries with rather centralized government administration systems, a top-down conducted development is reported. What is unknown, though, is whether this lead to less local initiatives.

Rather than regulation, voluntary arrangements combined with central governmental measures, is the preferred implementation approach in most countries. Encouraging initiatives through arranging education and training, stimulation through funding options, and making templates and structures to enhance local initiatives, are some of the means in use.

Furthermore cooperation between private and public sector is limited when it comes to realizing portal-projects. Examples of cross agency collaborations are reported mainly on local government levels, for example local service networks initiatives where both public and private actors participate.

2.1 Comments on the suggested definition of portals

In the letter accompanying the country report template, the following portal definition was suggested:

A government portal may be considered to be a dedicated service that coordinates and presents information and services from different, independent suppliers into one interface, typically a web site. The information is categorised in accordance with given criteria, like topics, geography, or other subjects related to the users needs.

Several of the reports do not comment on the definition, other has comments that are minor elaborations on the chosen definition. A more operational definition has been suggested. This definition focuses on features and functionality's in a portal, like catalogues, search engines, personalization and so forth.

Another approach suggested is not to make use of a definition on portals, but use the word in the same way as an entrance to information. The proposed definition uses the word portal quite similar to the word superstructure which gives a somewhat other mental conception than entrance.

It is important to be aware of the different comprehensions of portal as a concept in the coming discussions and exchange of views.

3 DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS/DIRECTION OF PORTALS

All countries have found it appropriate to create a top node for the central government's engagement. The top node are either already up and running or will soon be established. For many countries this top node portal is an example for all authorities web pages. It is consequently not only a technical tool, but also an instrument to encourage new cross-agency portals. Common features in the top node are life cycle structure, extensive use of links and search engines. Some top nodes have a strong search engine while others have search engines with a narrower scope or none at all. Discussion sites in connection with the top node are also reported.

Some make the top node a "root portal" – which offer a unified picture of public services. Others has a governmental publishing system connected to the portal, where all governmental institutions are presented in a unified form. One country has engaged a private operator to operate, develop and manage the public service delivery portal, opening up for additional revenue generating enterprises like advertisements and private sector e-commerce services (e.g. sale of event tickets, registration for educational courses).

There are different portal topographies in the reporting countries. Apart from the top node there are portals for specific citizen groups, specific results/topics or geographical areas and they are structured according to different government systems and

processes. There is also a portal that makes public forms from different authorities available in one single user interface. The diversified development direction suggests that where initiative is taken, a portal is launched.

The portals are seen as a means to enhance horizontal integration – that is, complementing existing work processes, not competing with them. It is also reported that portals have an impact on the Governmental mindset regarding integration of information and services – greater consideration is now being given to the challenge in this respect.

Access for all is also mentioned as an important principle, and this has implications regarding to portal functionality as multilinguality and multi-channel solutions (Internet, telephone, fax, in person contact etc.).

4 DRIVERS OF CHANGE – DRIVING FORCE, INCENTIVES AND MEANS

4.1 Public means

4.1.1 Structural arrangements:

A common instrument is using the top node organization or national councils as catalysts for agencies to use technology to provide more avenues. Another and complementary approach is to monitor Internet use and assess quality of content and technology. In order to motivate, some offer annual awards and prizes for best web site according to quality specifications. Guidelines have been published, for example handbooks and Community Guides, and some practice benchmarking.

4.1.2 Funding:

There is great variance in term of funding. They differ from little or no central funding, to substantial funding for developing the central government initiative. Some projects get a tri-level (central – regional – local) governmental funding. Subsidies for governmental bodies that implement centrally developed service catalogue have also been granted. Supporting and to some extent financing e-enabling infrastructure has been a prerequisite for some countries.

4.1.3 Regulations:

Most countries have initiated acts in order to regulate and stimulate further development. In order to insure an interactive development, regulations dealing with digital signatures already exist or are coming in all countries. To ensure the public access to administrative data, and civil rights on accessibility of governmental information, acts have been carried out in some countries. A regulation dealing with restrictions on personal data is a matter of concern for all countries. Acts on openness seem to function as accelerators to exploit opportunities regarding ICT in some countries. Another example is an act on electronic service in the Administration.

4.2 User orientation

Most countries employ enquiry's in order to monitor user satisfaction. Methods like focus groups, surveys and online polls are in use. They indicate an increasing demand from the users to access info and services online. The expectations are rapidly increasing, both as to content (info and services) and as to flexibility of access. (Multi contact points and channels.)

The user orientation is described in policy statements where in one country it is stated that "The overall objective of the Government is to transform the delivery of Government Services, to be based on customer needs rather than around the organizational structure of government."

The "24/7 access to the government" reform going on in some reporting countries are motivated from user expectations. In Sweden this has materialized in a campaign which is a joint effort involving all levels of government on a voluntary basis.

Several countries declare that access for all is vital – ensuring that all users have electronic access to governmental information, programs and services regardless of mother language, income, disability or location.

Defined categories for the eGovernment initiatives in general are set out to be Government to Citizen (G2C), Government to Business (G2B), Government to Employee (G2E) and Government to Government (G2G).

4.3 Cross-portal standards (applying metadata criteria)

4.3.1 Quality measures

Measures to improve quality of content in portals are common among the member countries. The most common and "mildest" means are guidelines, public expert groups/programs/agency that give advice. A stronger measure is some sort of certification or rating of quality. Awards are also used to encourage agencies to develop quality.

4.3.2 Information structures and standards for information labeling (metadata, XML)

The reports discuss information structure in a wider context than portals, and the following is thus a general account on information structure and labeling.

What is little discussed is *why* one should apply metadata standards. Some countries, though, mention the need for coherent information infrastructure as necessary for automatic processing between independent IT-systems.

Information standards are implemented differently among the member countries, and they vary from mandatory implementation via optional guidelines to no measures at all. Some countries also carry out pilot projects and precursors.

Dublin Core is employed as the metadata standard for resource discovery in most countries. A complementary approach is to establish a registry/repository of XML specifications, schemes and vocabularies in use by government and allow communities of interest to voluntarily form around those standards as suggested from USA. Hungary reports another resembling approach, which is to elaborate meta-records of web pages and other contents in a special portal on metadata. A more specific field of interest that is suggested from one of the countries, is the development of a national standard on electronic forms.

5 REALIZING E-GOVERNMENT – THE USE OF PORTALS IN THE FUTURE - CHALLENGES AND CONTINGENCIES

Having described the status and trends for the development and use of the portals as part of the realization of government services on the Internet, we go on to future challenges.

This subject may be regarded from several angles. One could be from a strategic point of view, another from a user perspective, and a third from a technological or technical point of view. If the vision is clear; – a seamless, user focused, multi channeled, multilingual eGovernment solution, what are the future challenges to be considered?

This abstract is pointing out four subjects of particular interest when looking at future challenges and how they are perceived throughout the member countries.

5.1 User focused service production

According to the reports, future challenges are very much linked up to how to create flexible; user focused solutions that support superior political strategies and visions. Secure flexibility and accessibility, available through a number of contact points and channels, and through a number of languages, are suggested to be some of the presuppositions that must be in place to realize these visions. Content should be current, accurate, understandable, trustworthy, and available in a timely manner. It is recommended that the value for the user must be the one and only justification for a web solution's existence.

How should the Government trace the process of service delivery? The users expectations are to get right and prompt responses. Continued improvement of tools to route feedback to the appropriate governmental department is necessary to make government web sites truly interactive.

A specific challenge mentioned is how the country's top node should be developed. Some intend to develop the top node to become the preferred point of entry for citizens.

Others mention the need for "no wrong door" solutions to government information, contingent of seamless navigation in a decentralized portal community.

Other points out the challenge related to make the top node multilingual and multi channeled with secure access and transaction support - with the users' needs in focus.

5.2 Web service production – organization, content and work flow processes

5.2.1 Central Governance

Aspects of collaboration, co-operation, governance and organizational development, is of great interest to all countries. How to establish sound horizontal governance structures with clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities is reported to be of vital importance to the realization of eGovernment. Some point out the need for a truly intergovernmental governance model to support seamless electronic government. Sustainable funding models are argued for – a systematic funding process to be established in order to ensure long-term development.

5.2.2 Solution structure of portals

It is revealed that concerns are put into how portal solutions develop as to level of integration and complexity. It is suggested that integration should be set out according to the following terms: Information (one-way info. delivery), Interaction (communication adjusted to different extents) and Transaction (focus on support to value added transactions). Arguments are put down to diversify solutions on all levels. Individualized web structure and individualized services are pointed out as main concerns for future solutions.

Vertical and horizontal integration should be combined to form so that one creates logical, uniform, user focused value chains. Expert systems should be set up to implement automated case management and services.

Several countries report that user centric structures like life cycle and horizontal topic structure are widely deployed. One aspect reported, though, is the urge to still preserve autonomy and branding of government departments which could conflict with seamless services solutions.

5.2.3 Work flow solutions

Different sets of strategies to develop adequate workflow solutions are suggested. They may be described on a line from radical changes to accommodated solutions. It is maintained that vertically integrated structures that characterize public sector organizations are unsuited to the digital age. One country points out the need for business transformation of government, processes and organizations, another argues for co-ordination solutions complementary to existing line organization services to create logical, uniform value chains.

Regardless of chosen strategies, it is pointed out that cross-section action and adjusted task management has to be put in place. Quality criteria should be further developed. Commitment from management to ensure that tools and support are available to make the transition to an integrated, on-line workplace is needed. This includes the challenge of finding and retaining skilled staff.

- Involvement from private sector is pointed out as one way of improving information and services.
- Development of back-office solutions to support portals is another central object of concern.
- User modeling solutions (Customer Relationship Management) are additional tools to be considered. Expert systems should be set up to implement automated case management and services.

It is claimed that co-ordination and integrating information and services for citizens will boost organizational efficiency and effectiveness. To provide one-stop seamless access to all government services it is important to develop a collaborative approach with other levels of government.

5.3 eGovernment and the individual – individual rights

eGovernment solutions imply certain aspects concerning individual rights and the compliance of central principles embedded into a country's overall policies. Concepts like privacy, security, access for all, transparency and democracy, equal opportunities, party rights and adequate and just treatment, are all concerns that are reported to be important when developing service production through the new channels.

The privacy principle is of great importance. On-line transactions should respect and maintain privacy of information and function in accordance with the country's adopted legislation.

Security is another vital concern. Ensuring secure on-line services, transactions and communication between the Government and citizens, will be of decisive importance for success. Creating an adequate Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) is therefore pointed out as one central challenge.

Multilingual and multi channel solutions are also mentioned as vital for eGovernment success. On-line government information, programs and service should be provided in all official languages in the country. A central matter is also how to meet requirements from minorities or groups of people who not necessarily understand the official languages. Attention should also be put on other disabled user groups that suffer from one or another handicap that impedes access to on-line information and services in the "normal" manner.

5.4 Technical matters

5.4.1 Standardized metadata

The reports point out a need for common infrastructure like shared government networks and applications that can be re-configured for use in other departments. This is regarded vital to create seamless and cost-effective solutions both on a information level and on a data processing level. Because of the lack of coordination in the field of data collection, the same data are generated by more than one public agency, which means an inadmissible waste of public money.

Applying common metadata (cross-portal standards) is an infrastructural means to realize seamless solutions. To realize an information structure with common metadata requires some sort of central co-ordination measures. Implementation of metadata standards will make data transfer and cross search between sites easier. A related subject is the question of establishing a common search engine for public sector organizations.

5.4.2 Public Key Infrastructure

The importance of developing secure electronic services design and establishment of a Public Key Infrastructure is reported. How to organize a PKI is the main point of interest, but more technical and practical questions should also be of interest.

5.4.3 Multi-channel approach

New communication channels are constantly evolving. This raises the question of an appropriate strategy regarding how the government should respond to this development. New channels and other technical features are also important regarding the access for all principle. One approach to this could be to establish an infrastructure in which the various channels interact and complement one another.

<p>Individualised services</p> <p>It is stated that expert systems should be set up to implement automated case management and services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the main issues to be solved to realise individualised services? (technical like CRM, organisational like....) - In what sectors would case services be of particular interest? 	<p>Norway</p>	<p>“Users will be able to use the forms to both retrieve data from and submit data to the expert systems. This can be integrated with interactive guidance and prepared information. This presupposes that the web solution is integrated with various expert systems within the organisation, and that these expert systems are set up to be able to implement automated case management and services.” (p. 10)</p>
<p>ELECTRONIC SERVICE PRODUCTION</p> <p>Top node approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - top node solutions - are they here to stay? - if yes; what may be the main role and scope for the very top node? (e.g. guiding services vs. one stop shop, preferred top node functionality) - what may be the rational behind this kind of co-ordination grip? (ref. your own country) 	<p>France</p>	<p>“The french administration system is a rather centralised one. A governmental top node was the most efficient solution to give access to the wide public to national regulation based informations and services. Note that the portal is linked to most of towns websites which are providing local services.” (p.4)</p>

<p>Workflow solutions</p> <p>Different sets of preferred strategies for developing adequate workflow solutions are suggested. Some call for radical changes to accommodated solutions and set down a need for business transformation of government, processes and organisations. Others point at the need for co-ordination solutions <u>complementary</u> to existing line organisation to create uniform value chains.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The eGovernment seamless service ambition will interfere with existing public governance principles for today's case procedure management. What are perceived as adequate strategies and solutions to this matter in your country? <i>Discussion focus: One step further from the reports that stated this conflict - contingencies and restrictions in accomplishing the visions. Change management.</i> 	<p>Korea</p>	<p>“Back-office developments and support for government portals, especially for the service portal including transactions and payments, will be one of the most challenging and difficult parts for success of integrated, joined-up government portals. It will need government business reengineering and reorganization as well as simplification of existing stove-pipe government structure, which will inevitably confront resistances from most of existing civil servants.” (p. 3)</p>
<p>Co-operation public - private sector</p> <p>Very little involvement from private sector is reported. Several countries point out the need for closer relations and co-operation with private interests in order to create effective solutions. Others report on successful co-operation already in place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the advantages and what may be the pitfalls in these kind of cross-sector solutions? More about experiences in your country. 	<p>Finland</p>	<p>“The development of the Suomi.fi portal, the companies' portal as well as the development of the national theme portals is carried out solely by the authorities without the involvement of the private sector. But this is not the case with the local or regional portals. Private companies are involved in several ways in the development and running of the regional and local portals. Firstly the private companies offer their business services through the portals. In this case the development is often done in co-operation between the public and private organisations. Secondly the private companies may be responsible for the operation of the portal, for example as in cases such as Koillismaa.” (p.4)</p>

