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SERVICING ADVOCACY IN E-GOVERNMENT: SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES IN CAPE TOWN

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ABSTRACT: Small businesses are widely regarded by national and international bodies, including the South African government, as an "engine of economic growth". However, much available evidence suggests that establishing a new small business in South Africa is difficult because of a lack of appropriate support. The research reported here sets out to examine the actual support that has been available, and the viewpoints of both the support service providers and the intended beneficiaries – small business owners and managers. It was found that government-based support services were predominant in the minds of small businesses and other involved parties, and that much of the interest in these services was based on accessibility via the Internet, a form of electronic government service. However, despite claims of success by e-government service providers, it is found that many small businesses are not aware of available support services, and that, where they are known, there is scepticism about the benefits of engaging with them. As the problems have been found to be centred around a lack of awareness of available services, this article reports on a possible solution, based on a concept referred to here as Servicing Advocacy.

KEYWORDS
Small business development, e-government support services, adequacy, awareness, advocacy.

INTRODUCTION
"For every [South African] small business that closes … 6-8 jobs are lost" (Business Times, 13 January 2008)

The above statement evidences the importance of the small business sector for South African economic development. An organised effort to support small businesses began in 1995, when the new South African government introduced a White Paper on national strategy for the development and promotion of small business (DTI, 1995), acknowledging the importance of this sector and committing itself to the establishment of a number of supportive mechanisms.

THE CONTEXT: SUPPORT FOR SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
Since then, it has been found (Mitrovic, 2009) that a variety of potential sources of support exist for small businesses, principally based upon:

- Seeking advice from other businesses (usually at a cost);
- Working with community-based organisations (within the community in which the small business operates, at very low cost or no cost at all);
- Appealing for help from government (typically, seeking development finance as well as advice, at no cost).

Because small businesses often cannot afford expensive professional consultants and community-based support varies widely and involves many variables, it was decided to focus this study on Internet-based government support services for small businesses. Indeed, government is highly visible, and its actions are closely observed and of particular interest to all. There is a rising level of interest in "e-government", within which small business support services and other initiatives are to be found (HPG, 2000; Hägglund, 2001; Heeks, 2002; CEC, 2002; OECD, 2003).

The decision to focus this study on Internet-based government support services is further justified by the South African government's commitment to the so-called "Information Society" (Mbeki, 2001). Many South African government departments have developed Internet-based services, including the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), the Smart Cape project, and Batho Pele (DPSA, 20008) – "bringing the front office of government closer to the people". In South Africa, e-government has been intended to improve service delivery to citizens and businesses, but – as in the specific case of support services to small businesses – this has not always been the outcome (Bytheway, 2004; HICTE, 2003).

THE PROBLEM: E-GOVERNMENT SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES

A review shows that there are clear perceptions of difficulty and failure to deliver the expected benefits of Internet-based small business support services (hereinafter referred to simply as "support services") – there are even problems in making the existence of these services known to the intended beneficiaries (Irwin, Clarke & Kenyon, 2001; SBP, 2009). Additionally, research shows a very high failure rate for small businesses, ranging from 70% to over 80% at the national level (Baard & Van den Berg, 2004). While recognising that there are many reasons for business failure, some of which are irredeemable, this high failure rate strongly indicates a need for more effective support. It raises questions about the breadth and depth of available informational web services (Ponnekanti & Fox, 2002; Hart, Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2000; Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997), and about the varying needs of different kinds of small business. It challenges our fundamental understanding of the nature of the relationship between small businesses and those agencies that are established to assist them, and it has been interesting to find that service providers did not seriously monitor or assess awareness of their existence, their usefulness or the outcome of their support efforts (Mitrovic & Bytheway, 2009).

This picture of difficulty justified an investigation of the empirical evidence and an attempt to understand more clearly the problems and opportunities involved in making support services more effective through the use of electronic government.

APPROACH TO THE STUDY: GROUNDED THEORY

It might be expected that there would be existing theories that would assist in designing the study; however, no directly applicable theories were found that were able to accommodate the key features of the study: government-provided services, for small businesses, using the Internet to promote business development.

Some loosely related work was found. For example, there are early exploratory studies of small business Internet commerce issues (Poon & Swatman, 1998), there is a theory of the small firm

(Di Tommaso & Dubbini, 2000) and a theory of application service provision (Smith & Kumar, 2004); studies of service delivery and the new economy (Beyers, 2002), the business value of e-government for small firms (Thompson & Rust, 2005), and electronic services infrastructure for community development (Jutla, Feindel & Bodorik, 2003).

However, these loosely related theories presented a dilemma: should the research proceed by means of a detailed examination and adaptation of these extant theories, or should it set out independently to develop a new theory? An extended review of options was undertaken, for example: action research, network action research, interpretive hermeneutics, and case studies. Most interestingly, email discussions were initiated with international experts and an open research seminar was held, at which the specific option to use grounded theory methods was proposed, defended, discussed, and ultimately agreed upon. Essentially, this approach offered the advantage that it accommodates and controls complexity and uncertainty in the phenomenon under study (by working at different levels of abstraction), and also accommodates the different interactions between humans and between humans and technology. It also lays the foundations for further work that can set out to test and validate the theory or theories that emerge.

It follows that there is no detailed examination of the existing literature presented here. In accordance with grounded theory methodology, an empirical study always precedes an extensive literature review in order to avoid seeing empirical data "through the lens of earlier ideas" (Charmaz, 2006: 165). Other components of grounded theory practice are also applied in this study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987; summarised in Charmaz, 2006: 6-7):

- *Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis;*
- *Construction of analytical codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deducted hypotheses. In contrast to the type of hypotheses that are used to test already existing theories, the grounded theorist produces hypotheses from empirical data that can be tested by others;*
- *Use of the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis;*
- *Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis;*
- *Memo writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationship between categories and identified gaps;*
- *Sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness. However, in the manner of grounded theory research, there is a commentary on related literature at the end of this article.*

The study from which this paper is drawn (referred to here as the "main study") began in November 2005 and was completed in March 2008. Data collection was undertaken initially by analysing three websites belonging to government agencies. This was followed by 58 interviews: seven with the service providers' representatives and 51 with small business owners and managers. Two hundred and twenty-eight individual first-order constructs (quotations) were identified within the interview content that led to the development of 109 concepts in five main

domains, classified at six conceptual levels. A number of subsidiary studies have emerged since then, of which the work reported here was one. The list of the examined service providers and small businesses is given in Table 1.

TABLE 1: LIST OF RESEARCHED SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SMALL BUSINESSES CITED IN THE MAIN STUDY

Small businesses	
Accounting services	Hairdressing salon
Advertising agency	Health shop
Architect contractor	Internet development company
Business consultancy 1	IT company
Business consultancy 2	Management consultant
Car wash services	Marketing company
Cell phone workshop	Plastic products company
Crêche	Retail company
Electrical workshop	Shoe repair workshop
Engineering company	Software company
Financial services	Tourist agency
Funeral services	Trading company
Furniture trading company	Gardening services
Service providers	
Real Enterprise Development Initiative (RED Door)	Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA)
Smart Cape – the project of the City of Cape Town aimed at provision of ICT-based services	

This paper now summarises the results of the main study, and then identifies the single domain that we are concerned with here: the role of advocacy in addressing the inadequate awareness of electronic-government support services in Cape Town. The data collected for the study is presented here in a synthesis view, and used to elaborate new concepts that can be applied to the problem.

MAIN FINDINGS: ADEQUACY, AWARENESS, ADVOCACY

Based on available anecdotal evidence concerning the lack of effective, Internet-based, small business development support, the main study set out to identify the cause of and possible solutions to this phenomenon. The main findings revolve around the identification of gaps in the perceptions held on either side of the service (the provider side and the beneficiary side), and presentation of a detailed understanding of the origins and nature of those gaps.

SERVICE GAPS

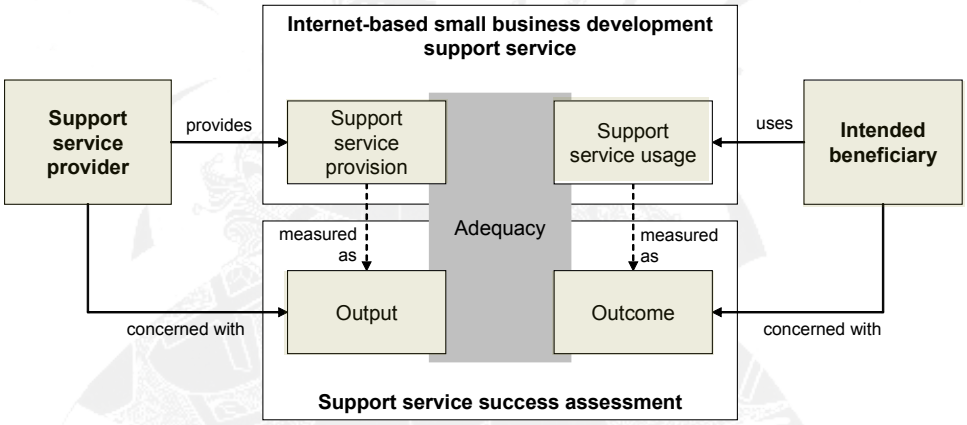
Interviews with intended service beneficiaries confirmed that they were not benefiting from available support services, despite the service providers' public declarations of success. It became clear that this significant difference of opinion arose from the different perspectives of the two role players: service providers were primarily concerned with measuring success

according to outputs (for example, the number of businesses that had enquired and the number of questions that had been answered), whereas the intended beneficiaries were only concerned with outcomes (the net benefit, in terms of business turnover, for example profitability or market share).

ORIGINS OF THE GAPS – THE ISSUE OF ADEQUACY

As it became clear from a review of the data that the services supplied were inadequate (as measured in terms of outcome or benefits to the intended beneficiaries), it was possible to postulate a high level concept – adequacy – in order to characterise the problem and provide a basis for more detailed analysis. The arrangement of ideas at this stage is shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: THE SERVICING ADEQUACY GAP



Starting with the high-level concept of adequacy, the next task was to examine its nature and to find a more detailed understanding that might lead to possible service improvements. Adequacy is, of course, a very broad term that needs to be examined for more specific components that make it more meaningful in the context at hand.

[Note: At this stage, it is necessary to formalise the terms used here to refer to the emerging concepts. Italicised text with initial capitals will be used here to identify the concepts without ambiguity, and so (for example) we will refer to "Service Advocacy", not to "service advocacy". This style will be used in the discussion that follows].

UNPACKING ADEQUACY: FROM AWARENESS TO ADVOCACY

Further analysis of the data showed a range of sub-concepts, of which the most important attribute of electronic government small business support services appeared to be Awareness of these services. These findings show that the concept of awareness has at least four principal facets, indicating existence of its sub-concepts. These sub-concepts are accordingly named as (Mitrovic & Bytheway, 2009):

- Awareness of Service Existence
- Awareness of Service Usefulness
- Awareness of Servicing Outcome
- Awareness of Servicing Limitations

It was clear from the main study that small business people were generally not aware of some or all the above aspects of available services – prompting a question: How can awareness be increased? In business, there is usually strong attention to "marketing" in order to ensure awareness within a marketplace, but that is hardly an appropriate term for the promotion of government services. What is needed is the involvement of some kind of intermediary, and this prompted the emergence of the concept of Servicing Advocacy – an advocate being a more general and more acceptable term for someone (or something) that would work in the gap between providers and beneficiaries to increase awareness and promote engagement.

Some early evidence of such advocacy could be seen on the service providers' websites: all service provider websites provide links to other websites that are potentially useful for small business development. Hence, to some extent the providers see themselves in the role of "advocate", for example: "…selection of important business support links for your small business; which include places which provide training, mentorship and networking" (RED Door, 2006)

However, further research disclosed that there was no organised cooperation between different service providers, and there was no clarity that would assist small businesses, only an increased level of confusion – unbridled advocacy leading to bewilderment? "No, we have no official participation in designing or supplying services to small businesses. We just think it would be convenient to give our users links to other organisations that can help them … our resources are limited and we can help only that much …" (Project manager, local government service provider).

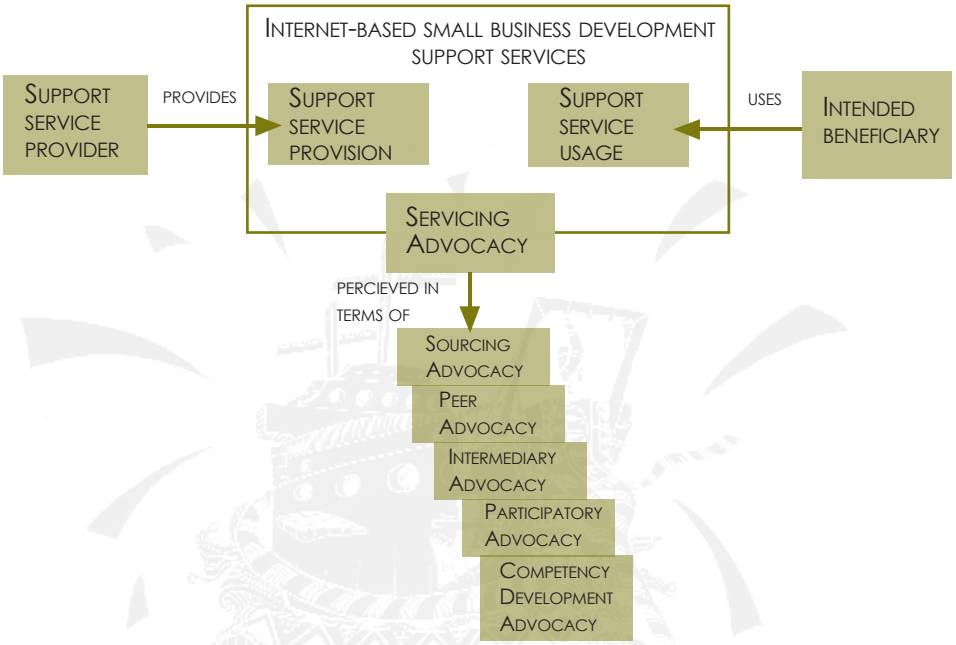
This need for a more universal, negotiated advocacy was found while looking from the service standpoint (rather than the beneficiary standpoint), therefore it was provisionally classified as Service Provision Advocacy.

From the beneficiaries' standpoint, there was evidence that despite the potential for bewilderment they had received advice, but it came mostly from other small businesses, their "peer group" . For example, the owner of the hairdressing salon said: "… they have their business running for ages… it is good to know how they are doing their job …"

This "received advocacy" was provisionally named as Service Usage Advocacy. The existence of these servicing-related advocacies indicated that they can form part of a higher concept, which can help in understanding how to increase awareness of electronic small business development services. This concept was named here as Servicing Advocacy and it subsumes the ideas of Service Provision Advocacy and Service Usage Advocacy. With this new concept at hand, the interview data and other material was re-examined and analysed in order to more fully understand the composition of this higher-level concept of Servicing Advocacy.

The concepts and sub-concepts established by this means are summarised in Figure 2 below. The paragraphs that follow present a commentary on the five subsidiary concepts that emerged from this re-examination: Sourcing Advocacy, Peer Advocacy, Intermediary Advocacy, Participatory Advocacy and Competency Development Advocacy.

FIGURE 2: SERVICING ADVOCACY AND ITS SUB-CONCEPTS



DISCUSSION

These five sub-concepts are now discussed in three stages, in terms of their:

- Origins (forming the origin of the higher level concept of Servicing Adequacy);
- Conceptual characteristics (becoming characteristics of the higher level concept of Servicing Adequacy);
- Possible ways of achieving them (thus achieving an adequate level of Service Advocacy).

ORIGINS

The origins of the components of Service Advocacy – the sub-concepts – are to be found in the content of the interviews. The paragraphs that follow provide an overview of what was found, for each of the five sub-concepts.

SOURCING ADVOCACY

Although some service providers claimed that their services were provided as a "one-stop shop", this research showed otherwise. The identified service providers' limited capabilities to provide a complete "one-stop shop" to small businesses, arising from their inability to supply all possible useful services on their own, was the origin of the concept of Servicing Advocacy.

The incapacity of service providers to do so was related to their limited resources. For example, one of the project managers of the local government service provider stressed that they always have a staff shortage, explaining that "…we do not have enough skilled people …

we are forced to outsource many activities… our resources are limited…". As a consequence, the service providers have to offer links to other resources that are potentially helpful for small business development. These links are named as sourcing links, and the action associated with them is named Sourcing Advocacy.

PEER ADVOCACY

Peer Advocacy has its origin in the need of service beneficiaries to understand and emulate the success achieved by their peers. Some even look to medium and large enterprises for ideas. For example, the owner of a hairdressing salon, explaining her wish to emulate her peers' success, said: "…they have their business running for ages… it is good to know how they are doing their job and who helps them…". Three other interviewees, gathered in the workshop at the Cape Chamber of Commerce, had a similar idea, stating that they were there, among other things, "… to learn from each other by giving and receiving advice of where to get [developmental] help …". Further evidence for the concept of peer advocacy was the service beneficiaries' insufficient trust in the government-based service providers. This distrust led to a need for alternative sources of help – one of them being their peers. Thus, this type of advocacy is named Peer Advocacy.

INTERMEDIARY ADVOCACY

Having sufficient expertise was a matter of concern for all: service providers and small businesses. The lack of sufficient expertise forces them to reach out to external sources of expertise and appropriate advice, a case of Intermediary Advocacy. External sources include academics, research institutions and consultancies, all of which are naturally interested in research and in publishing reports that advocate effective evidence-based approaches to particular servicing practices. Intermediary Advocacy occurs when the advocate advises one or both of the two parties: service providers and service users.

PARTICIPATORY ADVOCACY

The evidence makes clear that the service providers are not fully aware of the service needs of beneficiaries, nor are the beneficiaries fully aware of the existence or usefulness of the services provided and their own capability to use them. When presented with this finding, both the providers and the beneficiaries agreed that they should participate in each other's activities in order to develop services more appropriate to needs and opportunities. For example, service providers can invite service beneficiaries to participate in the service design process (eg discussing a particular type of electronic service or suggesting certain delivery methods). On the other hand, service beneficiaries can invite service providers to help them in acquiring knowledge and skills essential for adequate use of the services provided. Where there were attempts, from the service providers' side, to engage small businesses in service design, it appears that these attempts never moved beyond the embryonic phase, admitted one service provider manager "Not too many people participated in those sessions". These ideas about mutual participation are embraced here in the concept Participatory Advocacy.

COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT ADVOCACY

The evidence shows that there are more fundamental problems with Internet-based services: many service beneficiaries in Cape Town were not able to use the technologies, the services provided, or both. The view of one owner of a financial services business was heard, with

different variations from other interviewees: "…many small entrepreneurs that I meet here [at the Chamber of Commerce] are not able to use computers…never mind provided services…". Service beneficiaries need appropriate competences if they are to benefit from these support services, as do service providers. This shows a need for the development of appropriate competencies in the provision and usage of these support services. It also shows a need for advocating the development of these competencies, which is named here as Competence Development Advocacy.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICING ADVOCACY

The identification of a single high-level domain (Adequacy), the realisation that it depends upon a single prerequisite (Awareness) and that the prerequisite can be positively influenced by another concept (Advocacy) – is interesting but very abstract. The identification of five sub-concepts that elucidate Servicing Advocacy is helpful, but hardly sufficient to be useful in practical terms. It is necessary to press on still further, to identify properties or characteristics that can form the basis of a method with which to evaluate services, and render them more effective.

This has been done by means of further analysis of the interview data. Servicing Advocacy can be characterised by a number of lower-level "conceptual properties" – by which we mean properties that can be measured, and that will form the basis of an achievable evaluation method. Properties were sought that could be reviewed in order to make an overall assessment of Servicing Advocacy. They come from an analysis of the data relating to the five sub-concepts. Finally, in order to give a context for measurement and assessment, some comments are also provided here on Manageability – the overall capability of all concerned to understand what is needed and deliver it.

TABLE 2: BASIC CONCEPTUAL PROPERTIES OF SERVICING ADVOCACY AND ITS SUB-CONCEPTS

Conceptual property	Potential for measurement and evaluation
Sourcing Advocacy: Common Incidence Permanent Accessibility Scope Modifiability Limited Reliability Technology-based Participatory Initiating	**The first sub-concept is Sourcing Advocacy.** Appearance of sourcing links (Common Incidence) on the website of all service providers and 24/7 accessibility (Permanent Accessibility) of these links was possible by using on-line (Technology-based) advocacy of services of other providers. Advocating other than own services represents a kind of (not pre-arranged) participatory approach to the servicing (Participatory Initiating). However, possibilities to modify (unannounced) the scope and content (Scope Modifiability) can cause limited reliability of the provided services (Limited Reliability). Analysis of these factors would provide useful indicators of the actual state of play and the advocacy subject-matter.
Peer Advocacy: Ad hoc Incidence Multiple Sources Spontaneity Networkability Serendipitous Incidence Success Emulation	**The second sub-concept is Peer Advocacy.** Not trusting the service providers sufficiently, small businessmen in Cape Town spontaneously preferred to obtain advice or to advocate useful developmental sources (in their experience) and thus try to emulate the success of their peers (Success Emulation). These interactions often occur serendipitously, spontaneously and in an ad hoc manner. Access to many of their colleagues (Multiple Sources) is enabled by all kinds of social networks (physical or technology-based). Examining, for example, quality, intensity or subject matter of these factors can help service providers in achieving adequately designed and provided electronic small business development services.
Intermediary Advocacy: Flexibility Multiple Sources Multi-facilitating Participatory Need Fluctuation Awareness Dependency	**The third sub-concept is Intermediary Advocacy.** As it was found that the lack of expertise is equally affecting service providers and beneficiaries, involvement of external experts is inevitable if an adequate level of electronic small business services in Cape Town is to be achieved. The various intermediaries (Multiple Sources), bringing multidisciplinary expertise (Multi-facilitating), can be flexibly deployed (Flexibility) and also can facilitate participation of various stakeholders (Participatory). Assessing the extent of needs for this kind of advocacy (Awareness Dependency) would be useful to determine changing needs (Need Fluctuation) for assistance. It can also help in determining the profile of intermediate consultants ("advocates") to be engaged.
Participatory Advocacy: Inclusiveness Application Flexibility Multiple Sources Initiating Influencing	**The fourth sub-concept is Participatory Advocacy.** In order to increase awareness of beneficiaries' needs and the providers' servicing capabilities, Participatory Advocacy is concerned with suggesting cooperation between at least these two main stakeholders – but also inclusion of other stakeholders such as consultants, academia, or government officials (Inclusiveness, Multiple Sources). For example, small business can "advocate" their servicing needs by physically meeting service providers or using ICT (eg email, Internet), which adds to flexibility of applying this advocacy (Application Flexibility). Assessing beneficiaries' needs and the providers' servicing capabilities, the "advocate" can help in initiating new useful services (Initiating) or influencing changes in existing services (Influencing) that will meet changing developmental needs.

Conceptual property	Potential for measurement and evaluation
Competence Development Advocacy: Multi-stakeholder Involvement Service Stakeholder Competency Inclusiveness Multiple Sources Need Fluctuation	**The fifth sub-concept is Competence Development Advocacy.** As the competence of service providers to supply adequate services and the capabilities of small businesses to effectively utilise these services was found to be questionable (Service Stakeholder Competency), it is proposed that involvement of various stakeholders (Multi-stakeholder Involvement) can bring much needed (diverse) "advocating" expertise (Multiple Sources). If appropriately assessed, this inclusive multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary involvement (Inclusiveness) can help in determining (awareness of) changing competence/capabilities needs (Need Fluctuation). Consequently, this can help in supplying more adequate service and more effective use of these services for small business development (Servicing Adequacy).
Manageability: Thinking Planning Acting Checking	**There is a general need for manageability.** It is necessary to introduce some level of manageability into the provision of services. Providers do not recognise that Service Adequacy gaps derive from a failure to undertake basic management steps to: find out what is needed, operationalise appropriate capability and measure the outcomes. The traditional management cycle of "thinking", "planning", "acting" and "checking" would be applicable here. Much of what has been found in the data indicates "acting", with little prior "thinking" or "planning", and virtually no "checking". This conceptual property of Manageability applies across the whole domain of Servicing Advocacy.

ACHIEVING SERVICING ADVOCACY

It has been shown that Servicing Advocacy is grounded in an ability to source what is needed to create the service, to design appropriate services through proper participation, to work with peers and with intermediaries in understanding how to access and use the services and to develop the requisite competencies to do so. We therefore find that assisting providers and small businesses to achieve the required outcomes is not straightforward, and is not just a matter of advocacy. However, advocacy is at the centre of what must be done and may be found in different forms, as has been shown through chambers of commerce, government support services or other communities of interest and practice.

Much of this sort of action focuses on the participants' awareness, willingness and ability to communicate. By communicating well, using the principles of Servicing Advocacy, service providers will develop awareness among service beneficiaries and both parties can then understand expectations and capabilities more clearly. This simple expression of what is required is not new, but the detail that underpins it is based upon an extensive survey of current practice that justifies further examination of the affordability and effectiveness of the steps that emerge from this kind of analysis.

We are commonly reminded that "you can not manage what you cannot measure". What this study provides is a structured view of Servicing Adequacy and its constituent parts;

in each case quantifiable characteristics are now available, derived from the extensive measurable evidence gathered in the main study. In attempting to improve Servicing Advocacy, the present levels of Sourcing Advocacy, Peer Advocacy, Intermediary Advocacy, Participatory Advocacy, and Competence Development Advocacy should be evaluated from the perspective of service providers and beneficiaries, using the conceptual properties developed here as indicators.

The conceptual property of Manageability is particularly important, since project managers must attend to all tasks in an organised manner. Particular managerial attention should be paid to technology-related and organisation-related limitations. In essence, much of this depends on the availability of pertinent information, and it can be concluded that an adequate information management system is essential for achieving adequate Servicing Advocacy, Servicing Awareness and, ultimately, an adequate electronic small business support service (Servicing Adequacy).

CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION: SERVICING ADVOCACY IN E-GOVERNMENT SUPPORT SERVICES FOR SMALL BUSINESS

SOLVING THE PROBLEM

At the start of this paper a solution to the problem of making electronic government support services work well was promised, and this has been achieved through the development of a hierarchy of concepts, starting with Adequacy, progressing through Awareness and culminating in an examination of what Advocacy means and how it can be realised as a key to achieving support services for small business development. This study has led to an understanding of what it is we should measure, in order to manage small business support services.

Achieving an adequate Servicing Advocacy requires that the sub-concepts of Sourcing Advocacy, Peer Advocacy, Intermediary Advocacy, Participatory Advocacy, and Competence Development Advocacy are all adequately achieved. By attending to the 28 conceptual properties of these sub-concepts, and by introducing the basic principles of good management, it will be possible to assess Servicing Advocacy, identify areas requiring remedial action, and take appropriate steps to bridge the gaps that became clear at the start of this work.

While the introduction to this article indicated that there are a variety of sources of small business support, it selected Internet-based government support services as its focus. In order to achieve more effective support services for small business development, the attributes and relevant sub-concepts elaborated here can be incorporated into the design of electronic government systems for small business support services. In addition, the conclusions that are drawn here may or may not be applicable in a wider context. However, in the course of the study the reliance of the government on external providers of specialist services has become apparent. For this reason, it is considered possible that the results will be applicable in any commercial context where electronic media are used.

USE OF GROUNDED THEORY

For many concerned with research, the use of grounded theory remains contentious, especially in the sense that the detail of prior work, as might be seen in the academic literature, is effectively ignored until the end of the theory development. It is in the nature of grounded theory to pay minimal attention to existing research literature at the start, but it is necessary to come back to the question of existing theories and models before drawing conclusions. For the purposes of this study, the literature was therefore reviewed in two phases:

- The first phase occurred before the start of the empirical study, and was concerned with understanding the issues faced by small businesses in Cape Town, searching for possible sources of small business development support, and deciding on a suitable research method. This helped in determining the research problem and deciding how to approach to the work.
- The second phase of the literature study, as prescribed by grounded theory methodology, occurred after the empirical research was completed. The purpose of this phase was to compare the empirical findings of this study with other contemporaneous work and to position the results in relation to existing theories where this might be possible, and useful.

COMPARISON WITH THE CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

Although the term "advocacy" is not new, the literature reviewed did not return any instance of this term used in servicing (in general) or electronic servicing (in particular). Discussions with selected academics familiar with servicing issues have acknowledged that the term "advocacy" is used in gerontological research regarding services for older people. In some countries, so many services are made available to the elderly that they become confused. The advocacy role is recognised as one that can ensure they receive the particular services that they need. Some such research has been reported (Dunning, 2005; Robinson, 2006; Miles, 2007), but only loose association with this research was evident. An exploration of how the term "advocacy" was used by other disciplines failed to return a relevant result. Thus, comparison of the concept of Servicing Advocacy with similar concepts from the pertinent literature was not possible.

The review of the pertinent literature corroborated the uniqueness of this concept, since no use was found of the term "advocacy" or "Servicing Advocacy" in work addressing general servicing topics and themes, or in more specific work concerned with Internet-based servicing. However, this study has elicited that:

- The concept of Servicing Advocacy is brought into existence;
- It is relevant to electronic small business development services;
- It can be deconstructed to the level of specific conceptual properties that can be measured, understood, and evaluated, in order that support services can be managed and improved, whether through electronic government or other electronic media.

SUMMARY

Given the very high importance of small businesses within the South African economy, the evident failure rate of these businesses and the South African government's commitment to develop a so-called "Information Society", it is of great concern that support services intended to assist small businesses are not effective and do not encourage their participation in the Information Society. This paper has addressed the problem and identified a means to evaluate

and improve the management of support services by introducing the concept of Servicing Advocacy. It has elaborated a number of attributes and sub-concepts which can be incorporated in the design of next-generation electronic government.

The significant gap between the perceptions of success held by the service providers and the perceptions of poor outcomes held by the intended beneficiaries requires effective provision and use of support services that are adequate for their purpose. This in turn depends on awareness of their existence, their usefulness and their limitations, which can be addressed by means of the concept developed here and named Servicing Advocacy. Since similar concepts were not found in the pertinent literature, these ideas can now be reviewed, critiqued and amended, and refined for the benefit of managerial practice and further academic research.

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