ABSTRACT

This research explores issues related to the design and development of South African e-Government applications. The South African government from the 1960s has invested substantially in computer technology for the purposes of automating government bureaucracy. Contemporary computer applications in the form of e-Government use the Internet as a platform to make services more accessible to citizens. It is estimated that South Africa is spending approximately $1.5 billion a year on government ICT initiatives.

The design and development of e-Government applications has not been extensively researched. There are gaps in the academic literature in that no current theory or model adequately explains or outlines how e-Governments applications can be optimally designed and developed to meet the expectations of the various stakeholders that have an interest in the e-Government application.

To understand how an e-Government application moves from conceptualisation through development to operationalisation, data was acquired inter alia through interviews with knowledgeable civil servants from different departments. The data was analysed using principles of content and interpretive analysis and this analysis was used to formulate a theoretical conjecture concerning the issues affecting e-Government application design and development.

One finding is that e-Government performance can be improved by proactive change which recognizes the limits of the current situation and the potential of the new system. Using appropriately trained civil servants and drawing on the skills of middle management is critical to the success of e-Government applications. Outsourcing can be helpful, but it has to be overseen by appropriately skilled civil servants. Meaningful evaluation of the applications and the people involved in these processes is a central issue.

The government space is complex with multiple agendas that have relatively little alignment. Government is traditionally not readily receptive to the use of Hi-tech solutions. There is an inherent 'conflict' between the tendency of technology to be most effectively used as an instrument of integration and the structure and philosophy of the organisation, which is profoundly based on attitudes of strict departmental boundaries.