

From E-Government to Digital Government

The fast-paced digital transformation of today's societies and economies is changing expectations of public sector performance and requires new capacities for governments to adapt to the new digital environment. This has driven a shift in public administrations' approaches to the use of technology and data.

After decades of efforts aimed at digitising existing paper-based processes and procedures, and to making public services available online, including on mobile phones, governments are progressively using digital technologies to innovate how they design, operate and deliver services. The goal is to meet the increasing public demand for engagement and services in ways that better respond to users' needs, while improving public sector performance and openness. This has taken the form of a move from using digital technologies in support of government efficiency toward using them to influence and shape public governance outcomes in order to increase societal wellbeing and public trust.

This shift, understood as the evolution from “e-government” to “digital government”, is framed by the 2014 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Digital Government Strategies (OECD, 2014). The Recommendation aims to help governments adopt more strategic approaches in the use of technologies with the aim of fostering more open, participatory and innovative government. The 12 key recommendations call for a cultural change within public administrations from the use of digital technologies to better support for public sector operations toward the integration “from the start” of digital technologies in government strategies and policies for public sector reform and modernisation.

The need for digital government indicators

The challenge today for most, if not all, governments is to continue the process of maturing to become “fully digital” – taking steps to promote the evolution from e-government to digital government. As a result, there is a need for tools to identify gaps and areas in need of improvement; these will be essential in helping governments understand their advancement towards a digitally transformed public sector. However, most of the current international measurement instruments are still chiefly focused on governments' use of technology to support the digitisation of existing processes, procedures and services (“e-government”), rather than focusing on elements characterising a digital government.

The OECD Digital Government Indicators project is a first attempt to measure such digitalisation of the public sector. It represents the culmination of several years of collaboration between the OECD Digital Government Unit within the Public Governance Directorate and the OECD Working Party of Senior Digital Government Officials (E-Leaders). It is founded upon a theoretical framework based on the 2014 Recommendation of the Council on Digital Government Strategies and a number of resulting peer reviews (OECD, 2018a, 2018b, 2017). The Digital Government Framework identifies six key dimensions of digital government and aims to assess governments' maturity in those domains (OECD, forthcoming):

1. User-driven (i.e. governments that listen to users' need);
2. Government as a platform (i.e. governments working together with the public to address common challenges);
3. Digital by design (i.e. rooting digital transformation within governments);
4. Data-driven (i.e. governments using data as a key strategic asset);
5. Pro-activeness (i.e. governments anticipating needs and delivery of services); and
6. Open by default (i.e. governments that are transparent and accountable).

Digital government indicators

Data related to each of these dimensions are gathered through surveys sent by the OECD to public administrations. These data will then be used to develop a suite of Digital Government Indicators, in the form of a “maturity index”, encompassing all six dimensions of a digital government and showing the maturity in each. This will enable governments to assess their current level of digital maturity (i.e. gradual progress towards becoming a fully digital government) and provide a basis to monitor their efforts towards implementation of the Recommendation.

Although the index will provide a benchmark across countries, the focus will not be restricted to the ranking; it will also enable assessment of the current stage of advancement in each dimension. To support this, the indicators will provide details allowing users to pinpoint specific areas within each dimensions (sub-dimensions) and, thereby, spot weaknesses and gaps and thereafter identify areas for action to increase overall digital maturity.

The Digital Government Indicators aim to provide an innovative, relevant and useful policy tool for governments to advance towards becoming “fully digital”, and a monitoring tool to help governments assess their progress in implementing the Recommendation.

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