



Chair in e-Government

Research project '*Public Attitudes to the Sharing of Personal Information in the Course of Electronic Public Service Provision*'

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Project Summary

Introduction

Governments are exploring ways to develop new online forms of integrated public service provision to citizens. This new public service model would require an increased sharing of citizens' personal information between agencies in the back-office of online public service provision. Expected benefits of this new e-service model are many and varied. They include improved public service provision; increased effectiveness of public service provision (e.g. tailor-made service provision to individuals); increased efficiency and reduced costs; improved ease of contact between citizens and government; and improved monitoring to ensure compliance, equitable enforcement, exclusion of unwanted individuals and activities, or enhanced personal and public protection.

However, the collection, processing and sharing of personal information required to achieve this new e-service model touch upon a fundamental right of citizens: the right of privacy. Privacy is a multifaceted, ambiguous notion which means many things to many people. For instance, people from different cultures attach a different meaning to this concept (Barrington Moore 1984). Moreover, what is considered 'sensitive' personal information varies with context and in relationships. Furthermore, the meaning of privacy is changing under the possibilities opened up by new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), with younger generations, as digital 'natives', developing different perceptions of privacy compared to older generations (Pew Research Centre 2009).

So far, there is not much empirical, in-depth knowledge available about what people's attitudes are towards the collection, management, and sharing of personal information in these new electronic public service relationships, and the implications for their informational privacy. What we know is based on quantitative research (e.g. surveys) and through anecdotes presented in the media for instance. This research activity uses a qualitative research approach to more deeply explore attitudes of New Zealanders towards the collection, management, and sharing of personal information in the course of electronic public service provision.

Research Design

The research focuses on the following question:

What are attitudes of different members of the New Zealand general public towards the collection, management, and sharing of personal information in the course of online public service provision?

The research methods used are the following:

- literature review
- semi-structured interviews
- ten focus groups across New Zealand, with each focus group involving 6 to 8 participants in an in-depth, collective discussion of about 2.5 hours.

Research Project Management

This research project is led by Dr Miriam Lips, Professor of e-Government at VUW, and conducted in partnership with IRD and Colmar Brunton. The research is financially sponsored by IRD. A Project Advisory Group has been established with representatives from IRD, Ministry of Social Development, State Services Commission, and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. The timeline for this research is March 2010 – August 2010. The final research report will be publicly available on the website of the VUW e-Government Chair.

For further information about this research project please contact Professor Miriam Lips on (04) 4636588 or miriam.lips@vuw.ac.nz