Introduction to Policy, Governance, Ethics and Law Minitrack

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This minitrack examines the public policies and laws that support, facilitate and promote e-government, as well as how these technologies impact and influence governance systems and public institutions. It also explores emerging models of governance in relation to ICTs and ethical issues arising from the use of ICTs in the public sector. It encompasses as well the challenges that arise in the deployment of ICTs and adoption of e-government in developing countries.

The first paper, by Rowena Cullen and Graham Hassall, focuses on this last theme. The paper discusses regional and global strategies intended to bring the benefits of e-government to small island states in the Pacific, and some of the problems these initiatives have faced. The paper argues that in addition to the barriers of geography, isolation, climate, education, language and economic resources that face all small island developing states when implementing ICTs, cultural factors and cultural attitudes to information must also be taken into account when developing e-government applications in the region. The paper proposes a new framework based on the concept of an ‘information ecology’ that will assist in developing locally grounded, culturally relevant, sustainable and effective e-government policies in the small island states of the Pacific.

The second paper, by Elin Wihlborg, explores challenges related to the impact of ICTs on governance, focusing on how the concept of legitimacy changes through the introduction of ICTs into the operations of government and in the interactions between government and citizens. The paper argues that whereas the input side of government (such as elections and public consultation) has traditionally been regarded as paramount in defining the legitimacy of government, the output side of government, in the form of public services, has now become recognized as contributing to legitimacy. Hence, the increased use of digital interactions between government and citizens through e-services, which may impact on that interaction, can challenge the grounds of legitimacy. From a series of case studies on trust and safety in public services, the paper presents new models of legitimacy in the age of e-government.

The third paper, by Bryce Newell and David Randall, explores an ethical issue arising from the use of ICTs in the public sector. It investigates the approaches, policies and experiences of two US-based public libraries which introduced video security systems. The paper explores the very different approaches of the two libraries including attitudes towards staff and patron privacy, and how each library addressed the conflict between personal privacy and civil liberties and the need to maintain public safety and protect library property.