

Susman – Evaluation of Website of The Office of the State Chief Information Officer

As we learned from earlier lectures in this class, approximately 50% of technology projects fail (Porumbescu, 2017). The state of Oregon, like many other government agencies, has experienced significant technology project failures. In the mid-1990's, an overhaul of the Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles project costing \$123,000,000 failed (GoLocalPDX News Team, 2014). One of the outcomes of this failure was a new statutory scheme that required mandatory attorney review of certain large contracts including technology contracts (ORS 291.045 - 291.047). In spite of this additional mandate, in 2014, Oregon again experienced a significant, state-wide failure of its \$240,000,000 healthcare exchange website, Cover Oregon (Manning, 2016). Unlike the eventual success of the federal healthcare exchange website, Oregon's site failed to allow even one person to enroll and required Oregon to hire 400 additional staff to process hard copy applications (Associated Press, 2016). The failure of the Cover Oregon site resulted in six lawsuits between the state and its main technology vendor, Oracle (Manning, 2016). All suits were settled in 2016 when Oracle agreed to a \$100,000,000 settlement (Manning, 2016).

The issues behind the failures of the projects, in particular Cover Oregon project, included poor project management, unclear goals, bureaucratic disputes, and lack of technical competence (Manning, 2016). These issues are the same as many of the primary technology project challenges outlined in this class (Porumbescu, 2017). In an effort to avoid the same pitfalls on future technology projects, in 2017 the state instituted new statutory mandates requiring larger information technology projects to be overseen by The Office of the State Chief Information Officer (ORS 276A.200 - 276A.236). In 2018, based on its new statutory authority, the Office adopted a new statewide policy for managing and approving technology projects, now commonly known as the "Stage Gate" process (OSCIO Statewide Policy 107-004-130).

Oregon's Office of the State Chief Information Officer (OSCIO) is now tasked with overseeing large information technology projects for almost all executive branch state agencies, which includes overseeing the stage gate process (ORS 276A.206). Since I found the class information on technology project challenges, project management, and measuring technology performance

extremely interesting, I chose the OSCIO's website to assess how transparent its site is especially with regard to outlining and responding to these common technology project issues.

Transparency in the context of government may be broadly defined as allowing access to or providing sufficient information to individuals and parties outside of government (i.e., external actors) so that those individuals and parties are able to understand and monitor the actions of government (Porumbescu, 2017). Further, as outlined in the week 6 lecture, there are two dimensions to assessing transparency: one regarding the quality of the information; and the other regarding the form of information (Porumbescu, 2017). Each of the dimensions has three parts (Porumbescu, 2017). With respect to the quality of information the factors for review are: (i) the color (e.g., is the information balanced or biased); (ii) the completeness (e.g., is the information complete or skewed); and (iii) usability (e.g., is the information understandable and easily used) (Porumbescu, 2017). With regard to the form of information, the factors for review are: (i) decision making (i.e., information on the underlying decisions made); (ii) policy (i.e., information on policies); and (iii) information on policy outcomes (i.e., measurements of policy performance) (Porumbescu, 2017). In assessing the transparency of the OSCIO site, I reviewed the site against each of the three factors in the two dimensions of transparency (The State of Oregon, n.d.).

Quality of Information

The information on the OSCIO site was predominately factual, without bias. The information was provided was similar to a reference guide providing an overview of the services offered, a listing of resources available, and listing of policy and procedural requirements. Given the type of information provided, there was little opportunity or need to include biased information.

Next, I assessed the completeness of the information. The sheer volume of the information, as well as the need to constantly click on links to pages with even more links, made me initially believe the information on the site was complete. After reading several pages and following many links, I reassessed my initial belief. While I did not find the information skewed any more than I found the information was biased, I did find it incomplete. The information presented on the OSCIO site was almost exclusively that of policy information. In the area of policy

information, I found the information very comprehensive. Overall, however, the types of information available were not comprehensive. For example, while the site provided information on the stage gate process, its steps, and its basis in PMBOK project management, it provided no information on the context of why the process exists or the process' purpose or goals. Given the background that led to the implementation of the process and the expansion of the role of the OSCIO, I would have expected more detail on the purposes and goals of all the policies.

Lastly, in assessing the quality of information, I assessed its usability. Overall, the site was arranged into four main sections: technology services; information security; strategic planning; and shared services. Those four sections, however, are mid-way down the home page. The top of the page contains three different links. While those links are related to the OSCIO, by clicking on them you inadvertently leave the OSCIO site. Once I navigated back to the site, I reviewed each of the four sections. I found navigating to each of these sections somewhat confusing. The title of the link of the home page did not match the title of the page you were taken to by the link. Further, most pages contained only a couple of paragraphs and more links. I found to navigate to usable information took several clicks down the rabbit hole of links. This made navigating back to the main pages and maintaining a sense of where you were on the site difficult. Another difficulty is the information was separated by various departments within the OSCIO rather than subject matter. For example, I was interested in the stage gate process. To obtain complete information on all aspects of that process, you need to navigate to two different portions of the site. First, the link for stage gate is under the links for "strategic planning" which takes you to the Enterprise IT Governance Office. Once on the actual "stage gate" page, there are additional links to additional pages with additional links or documents. However, for the quality assurance part of the process, the quality assurance information is under another section of the site, Shared Services. The shared services link takes you to the Office of Enterprise Shared Services which then has a link to the quality assurance information. While I did understand and find usable information on the site, I was already very familiar with the OSCIO's portfolio and services. Overall, the information seems geared to agency staff with an already existing understanding of the OSCIO, not the general public.

Form of Information

As briefly mentioned above, the information on the OSCIO site essentially falls into one of the three types of information, that of policy information. While there is a plethora of policy information on the site, some of the policies are out of date. For example, under the Technology Services/Enterprise Technology Services (ETS) section of the website the ETS strategic plan link takes you to the 2015 update to the 2012-2016 ETS Strategic Plan. Similarly, the ETS Business Plan is from 2016. Given the significant updates that occurred after 2016, these documents are out of date. Further, I am not sure how ETS, a department of the OSCIO, and its strategic and business plans fit into the overall OSCIO office. I did not find a strategic or business plan for the OSCIO.

Noticeably lacking from the site is information about the history and decision making about the policies and procedures. Again, given the history and politics that prompted the changes after 2016, inclusion of some of this information would have been helpful in understanding the purpose of and goals of the policies and procedures.

Lastly, the site completely lacks any information on policy outcomes. While some of the main policies and procedures have only been in place for a couple of years or less, there is not even reference to future tracking of performance or reporting on outcomes. As Gupta and Jana (2003) note, measuring the performance in e-government is critical to ensuring success (p. 365). Unless performance is measured, it will not be possible to determine if the new policies and procedures actually help Oregon avoid more technology project failures.

Overall, I found the OSCIO website was transparent in providing policy type information. The policy information was accessible, but more easily found if the user of the site already has some knowledge of the office and its functions. In terms of overall transparency, while an external person could determine the services offered by the OSCIO, the lack of more than policy information would make it difficult for that external person to monitor the performance of the OSCIO. Transparency in government should lead to greater accountability and responsiveness (Porumbescu, 2017). I do not believe, however, there is sufficient information and information types on the site to allow better external accountability and, therefore, responsiveness.

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