

LEADERSHIP

IN DRIVING THE ICT AGENDA

GOVERNMENT E-SERVICES
MORE THAN ICT - **PART 5**

ATIBA PHILLIPS



Government e-Services More than Just ICT - Part 5¹

Launched in 2007, **ttconnect** is the multi-channel government service delivery structure of the Trinidad and Tobago government which was conceptualized to be: “The single face of Government to the citizen”. The initiative was developed with several objectives, including:

- To deliver services to the citizens in an efficient, transparent and accountable manner;
- To facilitate electronic transactions within the Government of Trinidad and Tobago;
- To avoid fragmentation or duplication of government services as they become available electronically; and
- To build the co-operative “back office” arrangements that are necessary to provide “Connected Government”, and present a “One Government” service to citizens.

Not only are the principles of this initiative laudable, but from an operational standpoint, they are also practical, noting the economies of scale and skill which can be had from a single, reusable, set of infrastructures for Government ICT-based service delivery. Particularly in the context of the realities of fiscal tightening and budget constraints brought on by the current Pandemic, the need to eradicate wasteful duplication of resources has never been more paramount.

We have seen however, that over the last 13+ years **ttconnect** has suffered a dissipation of consensus regarding veracity and desirability of the original intentions of the initiative – both within Governments and across administrations. One of the contributing factors is that Government Ministers tend to find reward in seeming to deliver in the public’s eye. However, with **ttconnect** as the single face of Government

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This article can be found online at:

<http://ict.co.tt/articles/government-e-services-more-than-ict-part-5/#more-3046>

to the citizen, the identity of individual Ministries and Ministers is de-emphasized by design. Thus, the **ttconnect** concept can be perceived as threatening the ability of a Minister or Ministry to be identified by the public as a performing Minister / Ministry. This set-up may therefore not line up with the political aspirations of key Ministers and decision-makers in public office. Thus, left to itself, the “dissipation of consensus” which has been observed is not completely surprising, as consensus is always difficult to maintain in the context of politically driven governance contexts.

The Requirement for Power and Strategic Leadership

For initiatives such as **ttconnect** to work there must be a notable and powerful champion-sponsor, like-onto the Prime Minister or someone else who is sufficiently knowledgeable but also duly empowered. Such a one must have critical influence over other Cabinet Ministers so as to promote their compliance (beyond consensus or buy-in) such that they act in accordance with the larger picture, and not only with respect to their parochial Ministerial priorities.

One way to facilitate this compliance among Ministries [particularly the larger and more influential ones] would be institute mechanisms which track and measure Ministries’ incorporation of **ttconnect** channels into their core business. At the end of the day, what gets measured gets done. Indeed, there should be real incentives for supporting this cross-functional initiative, and likewise, consequences for not supporting it. One key Government actor interviewed puts it this way, “Ministries will not take it on as their responsibility to keep the ttconnect website up-to-date.” ...even though, by Cabinet Minute, it is the official website of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Strategic leadership should also extend to the redesign of the processes and requirements for project approval. Stakeholders must be aware of the clear guidelines, procedures and standards of government which they are required to follow when conceptualizing e-services initiatives. This will allow stakeholders to take these factors into consideration at the ideation and design stages of new projects, rather than attempting to retro-fit deployed solutions to interface with other-Ministry frameworks, after the fact.

Operational-Level Coordination and Technical Understanding

ICT in Government is a specialised area that requires subject matter experts to craft the necessary policies, operational strategies, laws, regulations and digital architectures which are best suited to peculiar

About this Series

*This is **the final article** of a 5-part series which has been investigating the national e-services infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago, specifically **ttconnect**, to draw out the pros and cons, successes, and areas for greater attention.*

Links to the earlier articles in the Series can be found as follows:

[Part 1- The Need for True e-Services](#)

[Part 2 – Fragmented ICT Oversight](#)

[Part 3 – Improving the Citizen](#)

[Experience](#)

[Part 4 – Vacillation & Change Fatigue](#)

This article can be found online at:

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national aspirations, while at the same time being informed by international experience and good practices. It is therefore important when considering government-wide enterprise solutions which will have political consequences, that government facilitates and maintains a dynamic and expert technical capacity in-house. Such capacity can advise as to the most appropriate solutions, in order to translate the vision of the government into felt reality for citizens and stakeholders.

For initiatives such as **ttconnect** to work, there must be an agreement (and subsequent enforcement) for a Government

capacity to have the lead-coordinator role. The focal Agency or Unit charged with service delivery (in this case, iGovTT) must also be supported to gain the autonomy, scale, budget and the expert capacity required to deliver on behalf of all-of-Government. The Government must also investigate the enabling (legislative and institutional) environment required, ensuring that transactions done on-line are backed by and have the force of law.

Putting Learning into Practice

It is clear that **visible** and **consistent** leadership on the initiative and its principles (effective, integrated, digital government) is required. These principles must be **seen** to be Government's overarching philosophy and DNA, and evidenced via the integrity and cohesiveness of the Government's **actions** over time. This visible leadership would result in greater compliance than could be achieved via pulpit statements or even Cabinet documents.

Over this Series, one of the key items that stands out in the review of **ttconnect**, was the significant timeframe in which the initiative has taken to develop, and the fundamental changes in leadership personnel which it has faced over its lifetime. We have also seen that it is important that initiatives such as these, from the outset, focus on the holistic aspects of service delivery, including intra-government institutional arrangements, change management, training and education of Public Service personnel. To ignore these non-technology aspects of Government Digital transformation initiatives, may lead to significant and continuous government expenditure being incurred without ever achieving the intended results.

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About the Author

Atiba Phillips is a seasoned ICT for Development practitioner with over 20 years' experience. He has led national ICT efforts and advised several Governments, IDAs and Regional bodies on issues relating to technology and development. More of his work can be found at <http://ict.co.tt/perspectives/>.

He can be contacted at atibaphillips@ict.co.tt ; <http://ict.co.tt>