The following thoughts along the lines of the workshop questions are mainly informed by my work on two projects: 1. Co-founding and coordinating a research center for e-government, and 2. My dissertation project on the relationship between knowledge flows and the use of internet-related information technologies (IT) in public sector organizations.

Center of Excellence for Electronic Government

In March 2000, Prof. Kuno Schedler and I founded the Center of Excellence for E-Government (CE eGov) at the University of St. Gallen to develop a framework for studying e-government. The Center was conceived as a virtual network, bringing together researchers and practitioners (public and private sector), with the goal to produce objective, application-oriented research in the field of e-government relevant to public administration, business, and the research community. A primary role for the CE eGov is to serve as a hub for information on e-government, and to develop and transfer know-how. Since the formation of the CE eGov we have been collecting project descriptions, strategy papers, reports, and relevant news articles worldwide, making these available to the public on a website (www.electronic-government.org). On the basis of these documents, we developed a set of criteria for benchmarking e-government projects and identifying best practices.

Having monitored the evolution of e-government projects, activities, and applications in Switzerland and worldwide for more than a year, we developed a concept for an “e-government barometer” that should allow public sector organizations to (self-) evaluate their e-government activities. The indicators of the barometer were validated and adjusted in an iterative procedure through the inputs of a sounding board
of researchers and practitioners. Measures include (Schedler, Scharf, Schmidt, & Summermatter, 2001):

1. Performance of existing solutions, e.g., procurement applications, public service delivery, Intranet, shared databases;
2. Management efforts, e.g., process reengineering, quality management, training, communication;
3. Internal influence factors; e.g., staff capacity/qualifications, budgetary restrictions;
4. External influence factors, e.g., political environment, regulations, public Internet use.

The aim of the three-year panel analysis (conducted on Swiss public sector organizations) is to identify facilitating and undermining factors for e-government projects and to produce policy recommendations.

Knowledge Flows and the Use of Internet-Related Information Technologies

The motivation for my dissertation project emerged from comparing e-government strategy papers with the actual implementation process of Internet-related technologies. Generally, the introduction of these new information technologies (IT) takes place in the form of a project, often referred to as e-government projects. The objectives of these projects can be roughly summarized in the effort to serve the client better through more efficient operations, resulting in an improved delivery of public services. A few years into this development, many agencies now have a website, offering a range from mere information (e.g., address, opening hours) to sophisticated tools (e.g., online tax payment) integrated into a portal. Governments have invested large sums in IT projects; however, the expectations in terms of more efficient operations are far from being fulfilled (Fountain, 2001).

In my study, I attempt to find potential theoretical and practical explanations for this phenomenon from an organizational perspective. The purpose of this study is to explore how intra- and interorganizational knowledge transfer processes facilitate (or undermine) the success of e-government projects. Taking on a knowledge-based perspective of the organization (Grant, 1996; Horem, von Krogh, & Roos, 1996; Spender, 1996), I argue that knowledge transfer processes play a major role in the
conception, development, and implementation of IT projects. I have observed that computed networks are often designed by externals (e.g., IT consultants), replicating the formal organizational structure. Social, in particular informal, networks are not supported by computed networks. This “mismatch” between formal and informal structure could be one of the causes that lead to an inefficient exploitation of IT resources.

Empirical evidence is provided by exploratory case studies. I compare four different IT projects in Switzerland and the US with regard to the project team and their decision making processes: How do public managers decide what to include and what to exclude in a project? How do they attribute priorities to various actions? What sources inform these decisions? What does their communication network look like? How is knowledge transferred? In the following paragraph I present a few preliminary findings from the Swiss case studies.

Preliminary Findings

Motivation of the project

The motivation to start an e-government project stems from a mix of external and internal factors. External factors include image, prestige, and “making a tribute to the information society”; internal factors are mainly rationalization efforts in search for higher efficiency and lower costs. From what I have observed so far, external factors prevail as motivation to start an e-government project: The information society connects prestige with the use of the Internet. However, it seems that few of the people involved recall the exact reason for which their e-government project was launched. This stands in a some discrepancy to the objectives set by most e-government projects – generally formulated as high targets to meet (e.g., “easy government for citizens”), especially if the project then is limited to designing a simple website with little or no interactive content.
**Forming of the team**

Questions relating to how the project team was formed appeared to be rather difficult to answer, and the responses were somewhat contradictory. I observed that at least in the early stages of the introduction of IT there was no structured process behind the team formation; people came together on a voluntary basis, being driven by personal interests. This is not very surprising, as extra motivation is required, because overtime for meetings and discussions is not remunerated. I found two types of team members; “typical” innovators in e-government teams, i.e. those members of an organization who often come up with new ideas, who are restless, even within a rather rigid structure. The second type of e-government team members seems to have a particular interest in IT, be it professional or private. However, after a varying period of time the project teams all got “institutionalized”: Organization charts were rearranged to accommodate the growing teams, and (often following the recommendations of external consultants) new employees were hired to work exclusively on the e-government project.

**Choice of the team leader**

This topic turned out to be highly political. In some cases they hired newcomers to that particular government agency (in one case a newcomer to the public sector), and created those positions not too far up in the hierarchy, giving little or no political support, i.e. no politician wrote e-government on their flag in the last campaign. Other agencies appointed “innovators”, who are described by their staff as politically well-connected, charismatic leaders. I will have to investigate further into the relationship between the choice of the team leader and the success of the corresponding e-government project.

**Use of external knowledge**

Although the level of involvement of external consultants varies significantly from agency to agency, all agencies hired consultants for at least one part of the project. Some conducted focus groups with representatives from the public and private sectors, politics, and academia. Citizens, if included at all, seemed to be underrepresented (two e-government project leaders stated during interviews that they
are citizens themselves and therefore know what to expect and how to judge public services).

From what I have observed in the US cases so far, this seems to be a field where Swiss agencies are particularly lagging behind US agencies.

**A Note on Collaboration in Research Projects**

*Q: What forms and processes of collaboration between social, policy, and information scientists might further a research agenda for digital government? How might an organization like the National Science Foundation Digital Government Program provide direction, guidance, and incentives for the advancement of high-quality multidisciplinary research?*

As a European member of this group, I would like to draw the attention to some efforts undertaken by the European Union in the field of digital government.

- In its 5th Framework Programme, the European Commission launched a call for “Information Society Technologies”. They set up a project proposal database to enable the search for matching project partners ([http://www.cordis.lu/fp5/partner.htm](http://www.cordis.lu/fp5/partner.htm)), which could be interesting for the planned partner search on [http://www.gdiggov.org](http://www.gdiggov.org).

- Interchange of data between Administrations (IDA): IDA is a European Commission driven strategic initiative using advances in information and communications technology to support rapid electronic exchange of information between Member State administrations. The objective is to improve Community decision-making, facilitate operation of the internal market and accelerate policy implementation ([http://www.europa.eu.int/ISPO/ida/jsp/index.jsp?fuseAction=home](http://www.europa.eu.int/ISPO/ida/jsp/index.jsp?fuseAction=home)).

References