

These changes, in turn, will alter the face of politics. Representative democracy is moving from broadcast, mass politics to electronically enabled one-to-one relationships between citizens and politicians.

Even the form of the state will change. We are used to national and—in many countries—monocultural models. The digital era is accelerating the challenges of globalization, virtualization, and, interestingly, a revitalization of local communities.

Governments will need to find new ways of working, new ways of interacting with the public, new ways of organizing their responsibilities, and new forms of value that they can provide to the public.

Emerging e-governance models

In the coming years, early in the new millennium, we think there will be widespread adoption of a more community-based model of governance that, while appropriate to the culture of each government and society, will have several characteristics:

- The new networking technologies will eliminate the boundaries between branches of government, and among governments, as service delivery gets organized around the needs of end users (citizens), not of the historical, political, or public service structures.
- New networks of government, civil society, and the marketplace will redefine the nature of public services as boundaries collapse and the focus becomes who can best add and build value.
- Service delivery reforms will be followed by fundamental shifts in government—even in constitutional arrangements—as citizens look for more rational structures in government for service delivery.
- Citizen-centered government will create new roles for citizens and new prominence for citizen engagement as governance systems reengage the citizenry, moving beyond “broadcast” democracy to a more intimate and immediate model.
- In policy development and service delivery, citizens will be engaged directly and broadly in decision making and value creation, replacing the top-down process that characterizes too many governments.

For governments, partnership must become a customary mode of operation. That’s tougher than it sounds: privatization, outsourcing, and downloading are straightforward by comparison. Genuinely sharing power, decision making, and responsibility are much scarier propositions because they are so innately countercultural to many government organizations. There is also clearly a need for a real shift in traditional notions of accountability and governance. If part of what the digital era offers are new ways of innovating and creating value, can we tolerate more risk taking and less certainty, and even celebrate failures, in the search for better governance? Governments today are given little room for maneuvering; they will require more in the future.

Alliance for Converging Technologies’ “Governance in the Digital Economy” program

The Alliance for Converging Technologies, a consulting and research firm focused on business and organizational strategy in the digital era, has launched “Governance in the Digital Economy,” a global, multiclient program investigating the impact of the Internet and new technologies on the transformation of government.

The interactive program is mapping the practical implications for digital-age governance, including delivery of government services, administrative processes, the nature of democratic institutions, the role of the private sector, the relationship between the citizen and the state, the future of the nation-state, and new requirements for governance in a global, networked economy.

The program provides a forum for dialogue between the public and private sectors as the interests of these sectors increasingly overlap and intertwine. Program deliverables include an analytic framework complemented by illustrative case studies from around the world. The results will be communicated through a series of online reports and white papers, workshops, and a World Congress on Governance to be held in the spring of 2000.

Promise and peril in the digital age

There is much to be optimistic about as we count down the days to the new millennium. New technologies and the changes that are resulting from their widespread application will provide twenty-first-century governments the opportunity not just to do better but also, and most important, to reengage the citizenry in the important work of governing. That would be a welcome development in a world where in many countries participation in the democratic process is in decline and people increasingly question the relevance of public institutions.

But we should not ignore the perils as well. Serious issues remain unresolved. Around the globe, people are rightfully wary of the power of the new technologies to erode their privacy.

Even in countries with the highest levels of technology penetration, unacceptable gaps between digital haves and have-nots are growing, challenging both governments and businesses to address the international and domestic digital divide with substantive and meaningful solutions.

These issues are not beyond our creativity to resolve, but they need to be addressed urgently.

A reinvigorated, digital-era government is at hand. When governments, citizens, and private sector partners redefine and reengage their roles, better government—better governance—will be the result. **F&D**