



Chapter 3
Cabinet Process Review

Cabinet Process Review

The process analysis work consisted of the following activities:-

- Analysis of Current Processes
- Development of the E-Cabinet Model
- Redesign of Processes
- Key Stakeholder Interviews
- Analysis of the benefits of redesign

Analysis of Current Processes

The following summarises the issues identified as part of this work:-

Paper Based

The bulk of the processes are paper based resulting in large volumes circulating in and out of Departments. Large volumes of paper (in excess of 1.2 million A4 sheets) are processed each year. Memoranda are circulated manually for meetings with considerable time and effort involved, the meetings themselves are paper based – with Ministers bringing on average 4.75 kilos of paper to a typical meeting.

Room for increased process efficiencies

The content contained in memoranda forms the basis of many other documents – agendas, decisions, briefing notes, minutes and summary advice notes. Because of the absence of integrated systems, the content is rekeyed, or at best, partially cut and re-pasted, to construct the main content of the other documents (e.g. decisions) and this rekeying process causes root inefficiencies. The elimination of this duplication of effort would improve process efficiencies and free up valuable staff time to concentrate on value added activities of clearing memos for inclusion on the Agenda and preparation of briefings.

Search and Retrieval Issues

There are electronic records of memoranda topics, briefings, agendas and minutes however the main organisation of all Cabinet documents is on paper based files. This makes search and retrieval of related documents more difficult as well as hindering opportunities for cross referencing of memoranda topics, associated background documents and cabinet meeting decisions.

Maintenance of paper based registers

There is a current practice of maintaining registers of Minutes, Judicial and other appointments etc. Whilst these are currently maintained on paper, they could be kept electronically. In addition there are opportunities for developing information repositories. Such repositories would be maintained by the relevant Departments, to which other Departments could potentially contribute to and share information and the judicial appointments register is only one such example.

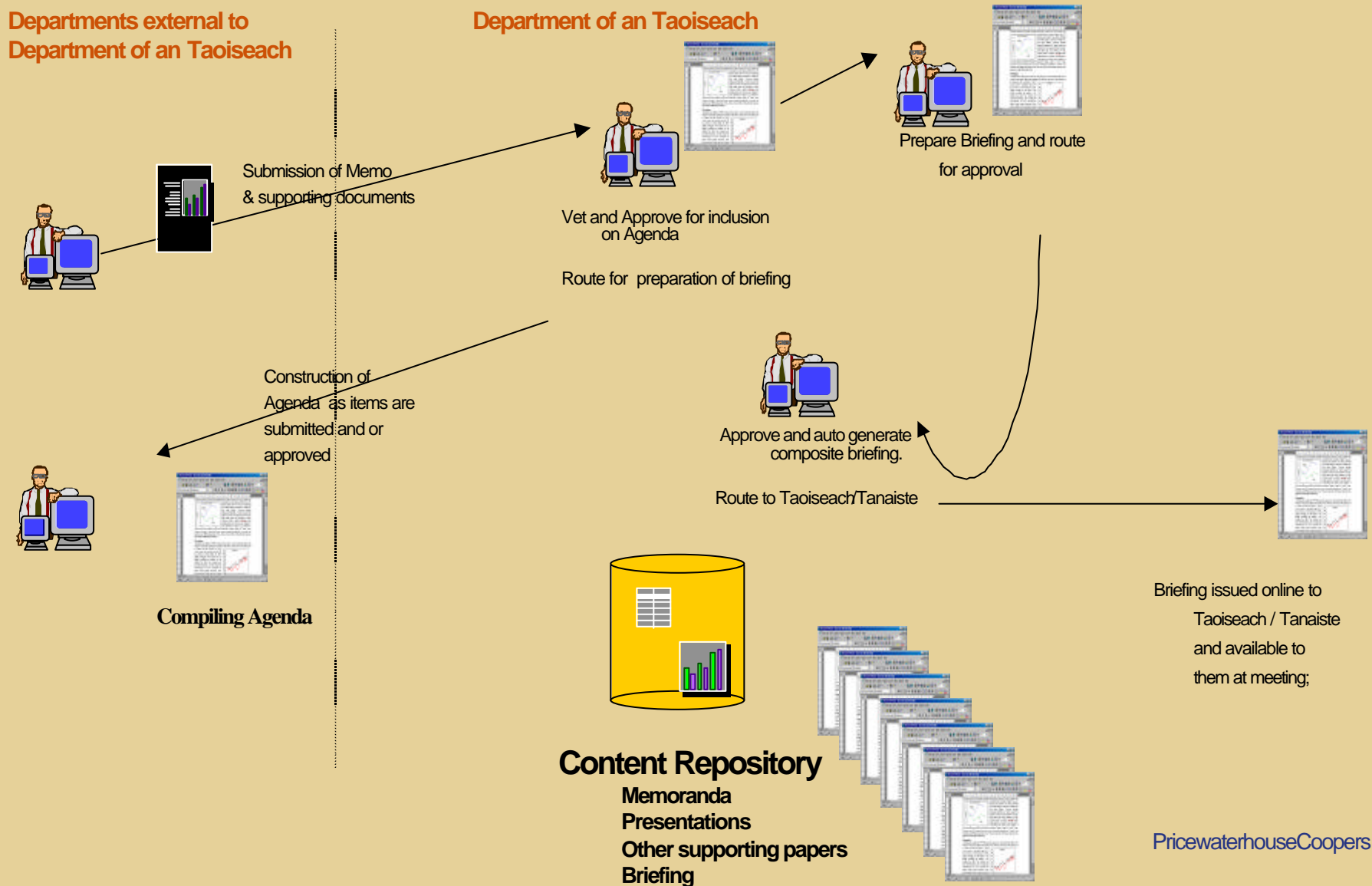
Cabinet Meeting

There is currently no electronic support for conducting the meeting, resulting in large volumes of papers, as well as limited use of presentation technologies at the Cabinet table. Use is made from time

Outline of e-Cabinet Vision –Pre Meeting

Departments external to
Department of an Taoiseach

Department of an Taoiseach



to time of electronic presentations. However the full potential in this area has yet to be realised, even taking into account the importance of ensuring that technology does not dominate the proceedings. Other issues include the absence of electronic support for meeting logistics such as communication and notification of attendance, confirmation of attendance or an integrated system for the recording of Cabinet decisions.

e-Cabinet Model

Following the analysis of the current e-Cabinet processes the vision for the new e-Cabinet model was developed and is described as follows:-

- Pre Meeting;
- Cabinet Meeting; and
- Post Meeting.

This vision represents the current maximum scope to which technologies could be deployed in this environment.

Pre-Meeting Vision

The Pre-Meeting vision is shown opposite and is described as follows

- Sponsoring Department will use a structured layout, designed using an XML based authoring tool to prepare Memoranda for Government.
- Consultation between Departments on draft Memoranda will take place electronically, with Departments being able to input their observations directly into the appropriate section of the document.
- The layout will provide guidance and help to Departmental staff in drafting memoranda for the Government, by integration of Cabinet Handbook (Cabinet Procedures) requirements with the memorandum drafting process, through prompts for mandatory/desired information and on-line help/guidance menus
- Where sponsoring Departments wish to provide a presentation or supporting slides or graphics to support a complex Memorandum or illustrate a point, this can also be prepared and integrated into the Memoranda.
- Once approved by the relevant Minister for submission to Government, a Memorandum will be transmitted electronically, and uploaded into the e-Cabinet system using a secure point of access within each Department.
- The structured input will incorporate draft decisions and these will feed automatically into other relevant documents, such as final decisions.
- Cabinet Secretariat clear Memoranda for the agenda and circulation, and if/where apt route them to divisions for preparation of briefings.
- Memoranda once approved for the agenda, will be available to Ministers in real time electronically with appropriate notification

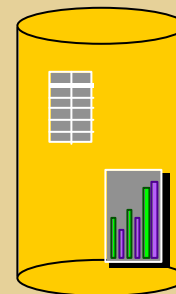
Outline of e-Cabinet Vision - Meeting



Print documents for Ministers
Run presentations for Ministers

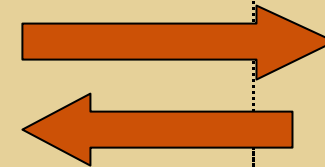
Cabinet Meeting Room

On Line Minutes
On Line Agenda
Personalised screens;
Customised Memorandum Views
On line Presentations
Personal Briefings for sponsoring Ministers
Messaging as required
Recording of Decisions



Outside Cabinet Room

Messaging to / from Ministers as required
Finalise Decisions



alerting the Minister's Office. The Agenda will automatically compile and be available on-line in the central repository from the secure terminals in Minister's offices.

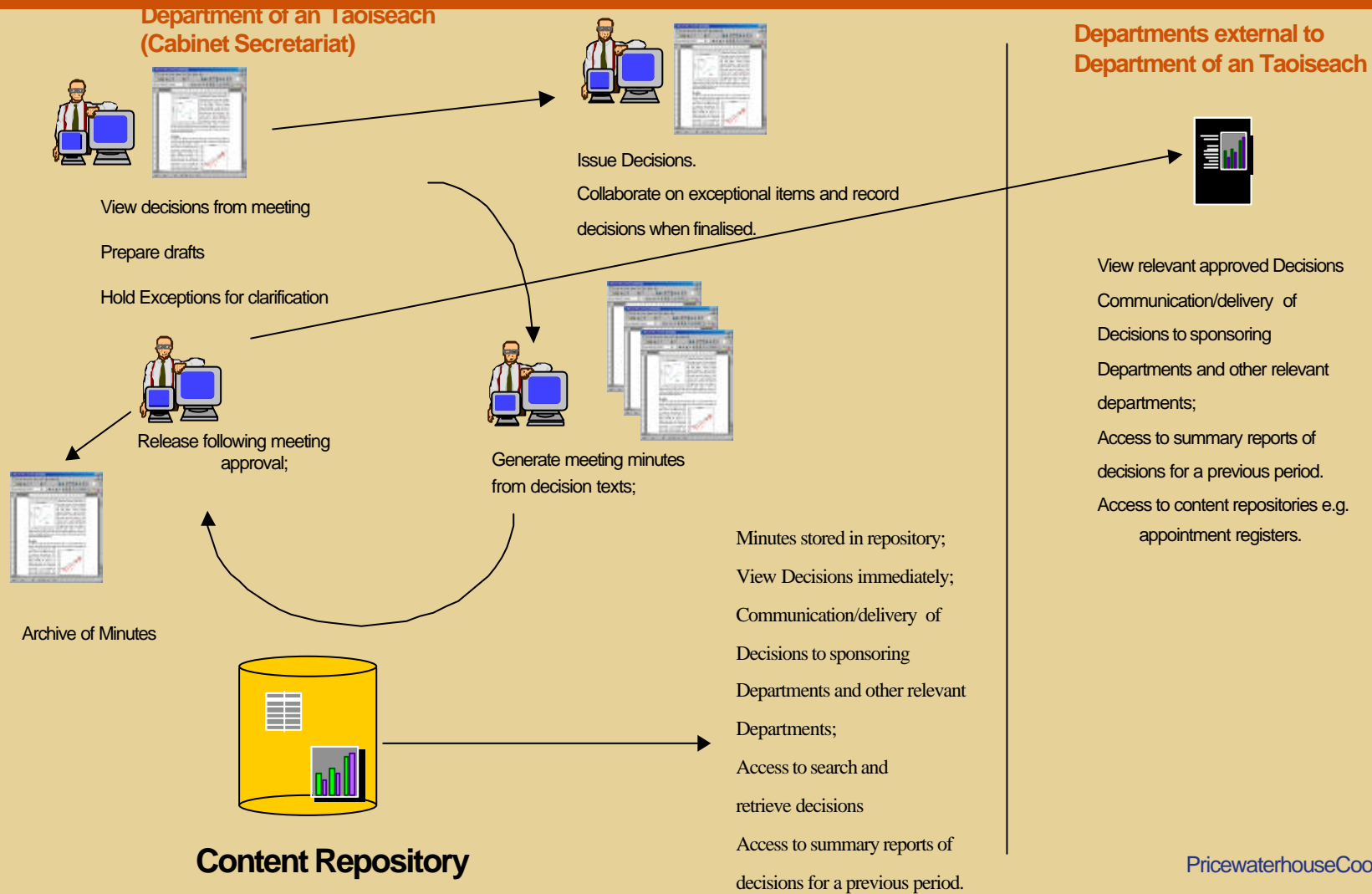
- All Cabinet related notifications, currently carried out by phone can be conducted electronically.

***Cabinet Meeting
Vision
At the Meeting***

The Cabinet meeting vision is shown opposite and is described as follows

- Each Minister will have his/her own touch screen terminal at the Cabinet table from which s/he will be able to access all relevant documentation. There will also be a central agenda monitor to track progress during the meeting, i.e. displaying the agenda items under discussion at any particular time.
- The agenda and supporting documents will be available on screen for each Minister. Ministers will have the choice to bring documents with them, to use only virtual documents accessible on screen or to have copies or extracts of documents printed for them en Marge of the Cabinet meeting - or combinations of all three approaches.
- Each Minister will have the option of having his/her screen layout customised to suit their own preferences – including how they wish to have the overviews of the Memoranda presented to them.
- There is a further benefit from the use of a special authoring tool for the drafting of memoranda i.e. the ability to create “virtual documents”. This means that memoranda can be structured or viewed in different ways according to individual preferences. This includes the layering of memoranda ‘Content’ so that summary information is presented initially and more detailed information accessed as required.
- Ministers will be able to bring substantially less paper to the meeting or dispense with paper entirely. It is recognised though that some Ministers may wish to bring some paper, and they will of course continue to have this option
- Any agenda items and their supporting documents or extracts a Minister may wish to have in hard copy can also be printed for him/her in the Cabinet environment.
- Personal briefing in relation to Agenda items can be made available electronically by a Minister's staff - this would be confidential to the Minister in question. An integrated e-mail facility will enable Ministers to receive (and reply to) urgent messages while a meeting is in progress.

Outline of e-Cabinet Vision – Post Meeting



- Where a sponsoring Department provides a presentation to support a complex issue, this can also be accessed on screen which will follow the progress of the meeting displaying the item currently under consideration.
- There will be a central agenda monitor to track progress during the meeting, i.e. displaying the agenda items under discussion at any particular time. Minister's terminals can break away as required e.g. to examine some particular aspect of detail relevant to a proposal.
- The emphasis will be on touch screen technology and keyboards, if used, will be silent to prevent noise.
- It will be possible for the Secretary General to the Government to record Decisions on the system at the Cabinet meeting. (electronic "pinks")

A Sample (for illustrative purposes only) of what the e-Meeting system layout could look like is included in Appendix IV.

Post Meeting Vision

The post meeting vision is shown opposite and is described as follows

- Decisions at Cabinet will be communicated electronically to sponsoring and other concerned Ministers.
- Each Department will have access to an electronic database with decisions sent to it by Cabinet Secretariat to facilitate subsequent monitoring and follow up
- The systems will provide proofs of receipt as well as printing and storage styles which will uniquely identify decisions and provide equivalent degrees of recognition as is provided by the existing system.
- Each Secretary General of a Department will have on line access to all Government decisions transmitted to that Department. This will replace the present monthly summary advice provided by the Cabinet Secretariat to Secretaries General.
- Minutes will be automatically constructed and stored electronically. Printed Minutes will continue to be provided for archival and related purposes.
- Certain follow up procedures can be automated. For example, the notices for publication in *Iris Oifigiúil* can be issued electronically and, once an on-line publication of *Iris Oifigiúil* is available, can be directly published to it. Similar type considerations can apply to presentation of documents to the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- Where decisions require further action e.g. by the President, workflow procedures can be developed to support this

electronically.

- New information resources can be created. For example the Cabinet Secretariat does not have a need any longer for some of the manual registers of appointments that have been inherited from earlier years. Where continuation of such a Register would be of benefit to any particular Department (e.g. Diplomatic for the Department of Foreign Affairs, Judiciary for the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform), the content to compile that resource can be made electronically available to the requesting Department.

Redesign of Processes

The processes have been redesigned to take account of the e-Cabinet model and the dataflow diagrams are included in Appendix II.

Benefits of Redesign**Benefits for Stakeholders****Benefits to Ministers**

- Ministers will have enhanced supports at the Cabinet Table such as the ability to view memoranda content in a format of their choice, integration of personal briefing with Agenda items, e-mail / messaging facilities.
- Ministers will not need to use papers as frequently at Cabinet Meetings. The improved structure of documents will facilitate “on-line” perusal, and there will be a back up capacity to print documents or extracts en marge of meetings. The capacity to view memoranda in a format of their own choice will also be a benefit.
- Use of ICTs will make communications between the Cabinet Secretariat and Ministers on a wide range of Cabinet matters, quicker and more efficient.
- There will be real time access to the Agenda as it is automatically compiled and items are approved to it.
- It will be easier to arrange presentations at Cabinet to explain complex issues. Presentations can be simplified and embedded in Memoranda and their use, where appropriate, can be proportionate to the complexity of issues under discussion and the time available to Cabinet to conduct its business.
- Decisions can be communicated more speedily after Government meetings.

Benefits For Departments

- The authoring tool will support integration of the Cabinet Handbook requirements into the drafting process. This means that, through the use of templates where appropriate, there will be extensive guidance available to even the most novice drafter from the beginning of the process.
- Departments will be able to send urgent messages to their Minister during Cabinet meetings and to provide briefing, on a confidential basis to Ministers, through the system.
- The provision of direct access to Cabinet agenda and supporting memoranda as they are approved by Cabinet Secretariat will provide better support to ensure that Ministers and their Departments can review items in advance of the Cabinet meeting. Departments will thus have sight of agenda items and Memos in

many cases earlier than they do at present, allowing more time to formulate views and/or prepare briefing.

- Departments will have electronic access to any relevant information repositories developed and these include Decisions (as they relate to them) to facilitate subsequent monitoring and follow up to replace the current paper based reports issued.

Many of the benefits under the headings of “Generic” and “for Ministers” will be benefits for Departments also, including the efficiencies which the system will bring to the process.

Benefits to Cabinet Secretariat

The benefits to the Department of the Taoiseach relate to significant improvements in process efficiencies through the automated submission of memoranda, elimination of the manual preparation and circulation of paper copies of agendas, memoranda, and decisions. Specifically the following benefits accrue:-

- Elimination of the need for sponsoring Government Department to send 30 copies of every Memorandum for Government. This will also benefit Cabinet Secretariat;
- Elimination of the need for the Cabinet Secretariat to send, by hand, to every Government member, copies of memoranda, agendas, decisions etc;
- The introduction of electronic workflows which will be quicker and more efficient such as the ability to record decisions at Cabinet meetings (e-Pinks);
- The capture, electronically, of all records relating to the cabinet process will result in a comprehensive electronic archive and in possibilities for the creation of new information resources.
- Automation (or semi-automation) of aspects of the process,
- Improved supports for the business process generally; and
- Improved communication with Ministers and Departments.

Generic

- There should be a qualitative improvement in Memoranda for Government. Memoranda can often be over discursive. The technology proposed should lead to enhanced Memoranda for Government, with greater clarity of the key issues.
- Electronic dissemination of memoranda, decisions and other notifications relating to the Cabinet process will speed up communications and provide much greater efficiencies than are possible in the existing manual system.
- The use of technologies has the potential to improve the consultation process at the drafting stage. Apart from the obvious benefits of speed of communication and direct input of observations into drafts, electronic communication is more conducive to dynamic dialogue and should be helpful to Departments when seeking to resolve differences of views about

issues.

***Key
Stakeholder
Meetings***

Having sketched out a “vision” of how an electronic model (e-Cabinet) might function, and the benefits and potentials it offered, we conducted the Key Stakeholder Meetings over a four-week period. This consultation process was carried out with Secretaries General, Ministers and in some cases additional experts such as Heads of IT for the Departments in question. These consultations proved invaluable and we took account of the suggestions made and issues raised in refining our vision for the new model. Presentations were subsequently made to Cabinet and to Secretaries General on the emerging model and any further points made were taken into account.

The consultation has been categorised and distilled into the main points as outlined overleaf:-

Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretaries General were positive overall about the proposals and the benefits which would accrue to their Departments, most expressed a strong desire that the secure points of presence of the system in each Department would include the offices of the Secretaries General; • They stressed the importance of the training, including for Ministerial users and the importance of not negatively impacting on the culture of the Cabinet meeting; • Some suggested that it may be worth considering introducing a time guideline for presentations made at the cabinet table so as to guard against meetings running too long; • A number suggested that benefits would accrue if this model was also introduced for use at sub-Committees and other meetings; • Provision of a facility to furnish a Ministers with personal briefing papers within the electronic system as well as the provision of templates for presentations were seen as key benefits; • It was stressed that in order to facilitate and encourage the adoption of the new system it is important that the Taoiseach lead by example and embrace it from the start; • One of the stakeholders expressed significant concerns about the proposals to introduce technologies at the Cabinet meeting and suggested that technology to allow the meeting to be led by one person would be sufficient (Overhead Screen, Terminal and Presentation/meeting package); • One Secretary General suggested that the new system might usefully incorporate tools which allowed resource factors to be considered in the decision making process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministers were generally engaged and positive about the proposals and benefits which would accrue from the Vision; • They clearly saw the benefits which would accrue to Departments; • They acknowledged the importance of leading the way in this area although some hold the view that benefits for Ministers would be less than for their Departments; • A number of Ministers expressed approval at the idea that the new model would streamline the reading of minutes; • They stressed the need for flexible training options prior to introducing these changes as the majority of them are not significant users of technology; • A number suggested changes to the Memo in order to be able to view the key summary details quickly and with ease (Decision sought, Background, For & Against etc); • They stressed the culture and style associated with the Cabinet meeting and the importance of not adversely affecting this; • A number suggested the benefits which would accrue if this model was also introduced for use at sub-Committees and other meetings; • A number suggested that benefits would accrue if there were facilities for Ministers to access the system when travelling, out of town or at home; • The majority felt that they would still require paper in order to be able to prepare for the meeting – especially those who brief themselves en-route from the constituency to Dublin; • The majority favoured 1-1 training following a group briefing; • There was no perceived requirement for video conferencing facilities; • They welcomed the proposed functionality which would enable them, if they chose to do so, to illustrate a point using a slide or short presentation; • The eCabinet initiative was also regarded as a positive development from the perspective of Ireland’s image as an Information Society
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Processes and Technology	Change Management Issues	Benefits	Concerns	Enhancement Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new system must be able to deal with current processes for Urgent Items and Items which are brought to Cabinet table on the day; The meetings identified requirement for access points in Ministers and Secretaries General's offices, and in some cases in Ministers offices in Dail Eireann, - depending on Ministers involved) Some expressed the view that they would like to see more pervasive use of presentation materials; IT support for the new technologies was identified as a key requirement both for Department of the Taoiseach and with the other Departments; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The approach to training is key to the success of this. The following has been identified as the most appropriate approach to introducing this:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group Briefing 1-1 training sessions with flexibility to suit Ministers schedule; An incremental approach to implementation of the Cabinet meeting model was suggested; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minutes on line would be of benefit at the Cabinet meeting rather than having to read them out; Access to agenda on line very useful; Access to private Departmental Ministerial briefings on line very useful; Creation of information repositories on line such as Decisions, Appointments, Lists and Contacts for Embassies will be very useful; Elimination of paper flows; Templates for preparation of presentation materials; Iris Oifigiúil on-line would yield great benefits both in generating new efficiencies and eliminating paper publishing; Adoption within Departments would be greatly helped if the new system is seen to be embraced and supported from the top. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technology, if not properly managed, might be off-putting at the Cabinet table Must ensure that it isn't the case that there is less time and less paper for the Minister to adequately brief him/her self prior to the meeting; Ministers very comfortable with paper – the new system will take time to get used to; Training for Ministers will be very important and must be very flexible to fit with Minister's schedule; Must make sure technology does not get in the way during presentations by Ministers. They were concerned that they would not be able to focus on making their argument; In general, they felt it was desirable to provide an IT Facilitator at the meeting. Constitutional and confidentiality issues may need to be addressed in this context; Concerned that items marked FYEO would be handled appropriately including a facility to allow a Minister delegate access to others if/when appropriate; Concerned that items on the agenda which are circulated only at the Cabinet meeting would also be accommodated in this model; Concerns about screen size – ease of use versus interference with Cabinet table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure access by Ministers from remote locations; Development of a better method of handling annual reports (to be electronically submitted) Development of a similar system for Programme managers meetings and other sub committee meetings; Facilitate items which are for the Ministers eyes only or private briefing aids for the Minister; Minister's private secretary to have access and training; Facility to courtesy email submitted items to a selection of Departments when submitting the final agenda item; Facility to send urgent messages to Minister could include 'breaking news' perhaps on agenda items; Departments should use the same template for the memo/aide memoire on their own office systems; Being able to view who has printed agenda items / memos Iris Oifigiúil - great benefits of eliminating paper publishing;