

The discussion also returned the issue of the shared mental map: on the one hand we are talking about new alliances and at the other we are talking about fragmentation and breakdown of systems. The participants discussed how to reconcile these contradictory trends.

The participants noted that in the information society the issue of secrecy intersects with IT in that IT has acts as the great equalizer.

The participants were very concerned about the question of sharing information. The benefits of sharing is that it will lead to better quality decisions. As one participant stressed, sharing information does not necessarily mean giving up power; indeed, the diffusion of information can actually legitimize the power of government. Then there is the more practical question of cost. What information should be charged for at commercial rates and what information is in the public interest? Some participants, however, felt that the sharing of information is an objective in of itself; the availability of information does not necessarily mean that it is going to be used. Another issue related to this sharing that was recognized was that confidentiality, secrecy, copyright, and enforcement are all issues that are tightly interwoven in sharing information.

In looking at how to share information participants were uncertain about whether such a process required consensus. In the old days one looked to the political parties to do this consensus. Today we have broader stakeholders that are reinforced by IT. The problem is that nobody knows what the rules of the game are any more. In the absence of a consensus from stakeholders it is then thrown back to the government to find consensus. Participants noted that the whole federal bureaucracy is now in an extensive process of consultations, but the problem is that the stakeholders such as the NGOs feel free to walk in and then opt out, after which they pursue their agendas in the international arena. This trend merely highlights the impotence of political parties as instruments for achieving consensus; meanwhile, the bureaucracies too have lost respect in society and thus have lost this traditional role. Public opinion is instead being won over by the media and interest groups.

There appeared to be some disagreement on whether the sharing of power would be in tandem with information technology. This is because IT often can serve very narrow interests rather than being inherently democratic.

The discussion returned to the question of creating shared mental images. Participants felt that there is a crisis of authority and element of non-governmentability: either we are in the process of restructuring ourselves which is made possible by IT; or, IT will merely accentuate our disintegration.

There are some interesting parallel between financial sectors and what is going inside government. Whereas the shelf life in financial sector is six weeks, so the shelf life in government is also shorter. What is the meaning for managing inter-state relations? The key message is the management of contradictions: IT means speed and volume. The problem is