

Chapter 3

Risk Governance and the Role of Digital Communication in Policy Life–Cycle Management

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ABSTRACT

Public policies have to operate in complex, shifting environments structured by several intervening factors related to forces of change at global, national, and regional levels. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can support policymakers in modeling their policy design and implementation by capturing, analyzing, and acting upon a better assessment of their constituents' needs and expectations. This chapter suggests a way of dealing with the main challenges of applying ICT in policy modeling, emphasizing policy impact exploration, monitoring, and risk governance. The authors propose a conceptual framework for a policy modeling cycle that will support risk governance via continuous risk monitoring and enable proactive reactions in decision-making that go beyond currently available approaches. The chapter discusses the challenges of ICT utilization for policy modeling and the theoretical background of policy modeling. The authors propose a solution that systematically supports the policy modeling cycle and facilitates the stakeholders' activities.

INTRODUCTION

The popularity of social media and a variety of participatory tools such as web/text/opinion mining systems, online social networking, blogs, wikis, and forums, present to public

administration decision-makers, governance bodies and civil society actors the possibility of bringing about significant changes in the way future societies will function. The emerging technological environment is transforming communication, information processing and

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knowledge-sharing among public administration participants and also within civil society (Osimo et.al. 2012). Development of a clear voicing of opinions, expression of citizens' needs and a strengthening of participation can occur so that participatory democracy may be enhanced. In this new setting, decision makers are able to gain access to a large amount of data and information concerning what people think and believe.

Policy-makers will have access to a huge amount of data (Big Data), which they should be able to use in order to elaborate policies, make decisions, or to define rules of behavior (TechAmerica Foundation, 2012). Advanced technology allows policy-makers to become well informed. The resulting policies are more fair and transparent, and therefore more legitimate. However, utilizing data appears problematic when we consider its complex, fragmented nature and its immense quantity. Policy-makers need feedback on their initiatives in order to align public policies with emerging societal needs, requirements and expectations. Furthermore, civil society requires transparency in the policy-making process. Many authors (Bertot et. al. 2010; Jaeger and Bertot 2010a, 2010b) discussed the importance of ICT and especially social media as tools enabling transparent, open and accessible information services. Gelders and Rijnja (2007) examined external, public communication-related issues of policy-preparation stages (policy intention), emphasizing the importance of proactive and interactive communication with the citizen while realizing that successful interactions between communication professionals and policy professionals are critical for any successes, too. Policy-making and operations happen in complex, shifting environments, which are structured by several intervening factors, (growing risks) related to forces of change at

global, national, and regional levels -where the effects of policies are difficult to predict. Risk is an inherent part of the policy life-cycle, and frameworks have been developed to take on board the risk aspects of e-government initiatives (Bannister and Connolly, 2007). The technical and social dimensions of government information sharing, focusing on interoperability issues has been analyzed extensively in the literature (e.g. Estevez et.al. 2012). Here, policy-related social aspects are addressed. ICT tools support policy-makers in modeling policies and implementation by capturing and analyzing contextual information and acting upon a better assessment of their constituents' needs and expectations. They have a fundamental role to play in risk management and in capturing and highlighting the impact of policies for policy-makers.

This article will seek answers to the following questions: What are the main challenges and problems in the policy-making life-cycle from communication aspects between decision makers and citizens? Are there any ICT-based ways of operating that fit in with decision-making requirements? We propose a policy-modeling framework and description that will provide a possible solution for policy makers to interact with citizens during policy construction and maintenance. A number of questions emerge in the literature about the optimal utilization of ICT for policy modeling (Lampathaki, et al, 2010). One of the main challenges here is how to cope with a large volume of data and the time constraints against data processing. Questions related to this are:

- How can we guarantee that some of the information will not be ignored, such as that originating from the lowest social strata of the population or from groups that are most marginal to society?

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