

Integrating E-Government into the Business Curriculum

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INTRODUCTION

Citizens around the globe are demanding better services and more responsiveness from their local, state, and national governments. Governments are responding to this challenge by implementing a vast range of information technologies (IT) to reengineer government processes, deliver services, and manage resources more effectively. As such e-government (electronic government), which can be defined as the government's use of IT to exchange information and services with citizens, businesses, and other government agencies, is increasingly becoming a crucial concept for practitioners, researchers and educators.

Recognizing the importance of the topic, many universities have started offering undergraduate and graduate level courses in e-government. These courses are typically being offered as a part of the public administration curriculum. However, there is also a pressing need for incorporating e-government topics and concepts into business curriculum. Developing a sound understanding of the technological, organizational, political, social, economical, and legal aspects of e-government applications might prove extensively helpful to business graduates in their lives and chosen careers.

The incorporation of e-government into a business curriculum requires careful consideration of backgrounds and interests of business students as well as faculty. In this article, we will discuss the importance of integrating e-government into business curriculum as well as the most suitable mechanisms and procedures for teaching e-government to business students.

WHAT IS E-GOVERNMENT?

According to several researchers, the term "e-government" represents an evolutionary process, and is yet

to be defined by universal standards (Basu, 2004; Jaeger, 2003; Jaeger & Thompson, 2003; Seifert, 2003). Described broadly, e-government is the application of the IT tools and techniques (such as wide area networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) to the work of government. These tools and techniques are intended to serve both the government and its citizens (Howard, 2001). Backus (2001) defines e-government as a form of e-business in governance which includes the processes and structures related to delivering electronic services to the public (citizens and businesses), collaborating with business partners and conducting electronic transactions within organizational entity. According to the World Bank, e-government refers to the government's use of IT in a way to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other branches of government. Seifert (2003) defines e-government in terms of specific actions (e.g., obtaining documents, accessing information, creating a shared database), or simply as the automation of services.

A 2002 Improvement and Development Agency study categorized e-government into three high-level types: e-governance, e-services, and e-knowledge. On the other hand, the Center for Democracy and Technology categorized e-government programs by three objectives:

- 1 Publishing or expanding access to government information,
- 2 Interacting or broadening civic participation in government, and
- 3 Providing online transactions and government services (Center for Democracy and Technology, and Information Development, 2002).

Typically, e-government is viewed as an incremental progression. The five stages of e-government include:

- 1 **Emerging Web presence:** A country may have a single or a few official national government Web sites that offer static information to the user and serve as public affairs tools.
- 2 **Enhanced Web presence:** The number of government Web pages increases as information becomes more dynamic with users having more options for accessing information.
- 3 **Interactive Web presence:** A more formal exchange between users and a government service provider takes place, that is, forms can be downloaded; applications can be submitted online.
- 4 **Transactional Web presence:** Users easily access services prioritized by their needs, conduct formal transactions online, such as paying taxes, and registration fees.
- 5 **Fully integrated Web presence:** The complete integration of all online government services through a one-stop Web portal (United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance, 2006).

INCORPORATING E-GOVERNMENT INTO THE BUSINESS CURRICULUM

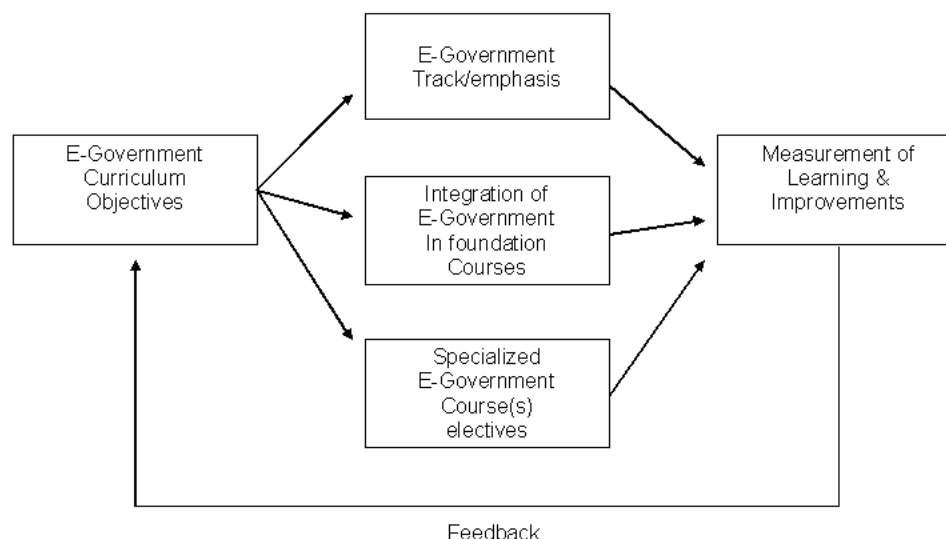
The business world is changing rapidly every year. Successful management in the digital age is demanding new IT-based skills and knowledge. Business schools

are doing a great job in preparing their students to meet the challenges of an electronic future. They must now begin to rethink how and what students are learning about government activities and services and how they can educate students who want to make a career in the e-government field.

There are several options that the business schools can pursue to incorporate e-government concepts and topics into the business curriculum (See Figure 1). One option is to have a dedicated track/emphasis on e-government. This would involve having five or six cross-disciplinary courses on e-government. This track would be beneficial for those students who would like to work for a governmental agency upon graduation or for those students whose companies work closely with government agencies. This option involves a long-term commitment in terms of additional resources. If a business school is considering this option, we recommend they joint do it with the School of Public Administration.

The second option would be to integrate e-government concepts and topics into several existing foundation courses. For example, business schools can integrate e-government into the following two business courses: business, government, and society/small business management, and business law. The business, government, and society/small business management course can be revised to focus on the most recent approaches for developing and implementing e-government applications.

Figure 1: Integration of E-government into the business curriculum



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