Chapter I

eTransformation in Government, Politics and Society: Conceptual Framework and Introduction

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, authors present a common conceptual framework to understand the nature, causes and effects of electronic transformation (e-transformation) in government, politics and society. This is done first by identifying and discussing four major factors affecting the transformation in governance: (1) the changing role of knowledge, (2) the changing forms of social organization and co-operation, (3) globalization, and (4) the utilization of new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Based on this analytical framework, some key dilemmas, problems and failures of transformation and how they might be solved are identified and discussed. Finally, in the end of the chapter, a detailed introduction to the specific themes and chapters of this book is given.

INTRODUCTION

One of the clichés of information-society-related rhetorics is that "we are living within changes" or that "we are living in a changing society." In this book, we will go beyond platitudes such as these by focusing on the changing relationships between government, politics, and citizens. In particular, we ask in which ways the utilization of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) is affecting these relationships. In that sense, we may talk about "e-transformation" in government, politics, and society.

However, before entering the specific topics of the book, we need to take a general overview of some of the ongoing key changes within our society, their background ideas, ways in which they have been conceptualized, and to their consequences, especially as regards to government and politics. This is not just to understand and justify this book and its chapters but also to develop a better common conceptual framework with which to understand the key changes we are living with, to understand how these changes are linked together, to understand what kind of problems and dilemmas are caused by and linked to these changes, and to understand how the different individual topics and issues discussed in more detail in individual chapters of this book are related to each other. In this chapter, we attempt to develop a common conceptual framework with which to understand electronic transformation (e-transformation).

We attempt to do this, not so much by giving final answers based on detailed data or a systematic analysis of evidence and literature, but rather by sketching the changing landscape of e-transformation of society and its consequences to government and politics. This is done, first, by discussing the causes and effects of e-transformation in governance (what is e-transformation and how can it be conceptualized); second, by identifying some key dilemmas, problems, and failures of governance caused by ongoing social transformation; third, by discussing some alternative ways to solve these dilemmas; and fourth, by giving a detailed introduction to the specific themes and chapters selected for this book. Along with this chapter, the introductory section of this book includes Chapter 2, where Ari-Veikko Anttiroiko contributes a detailed account of the concept and practice of democratic electronic governance (e-governance).

eTRANSFORMATION IN GOVERNANCE: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

One of the main points of this book is that recognition that the ongoing e-transformation in governance should not be conceptualized merely in regard to the application of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to government and politics — for example, in regard to the application of computers, different types and forms of computer programs (i.e., application of developed database management or decision support systems), mobile phones, mobile and wireless communicators, and the Internet (see e.g., Bellamy & Taylor, 1998; Snellen & Donk, 1998; Heeks, 1999; Snellen, 2002; Bellamy, 2002). Such an approach would easily lead to a limited and, perhaps, twisted understanding of the complexities of the transformation and the basic nature of the interwoven problems we face today.

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