Chapter 21
Assessing the Influence of Actors on E-Government Policies:
Evidences from Chile and Costa Rica Experiences

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ABSTRACT

E-government development, assumed as a public policy problem, has to consider political issues, where actors play a key role for success or failure on such policies. Several political theories admit the importance of actors in their approaches. Although there are efforts to formalize them, the model presented in this chapter looks to integrate a variety of proposals in the context of public policies. The application of the model to e-government cases on Chile and Costa Rica has shown that the characteristics of the process executed in a timeline (with their successes and failures) can be explained from actors' perspective. Issues like promoting new laws, the coordination of multiple agencies or the priority for projects on political context have to be solved with specific actors using their power resources. The explanations found could be considered for characterize future developments on e-government taking on account how critical is the actors' intervention.

INTRODUCTION

It is accepted that e-government development goes beyond of issues related on Information Technologies (IT). Such statement it is not new. Many studies have proposed that political and cultural questions have to be considered (Barros, Ruiz, Cerda & Martínez, 2012; Korteland & Bekkers, 2007; Bolgherini, 2007).

It can be supposed, for example, that using IT in order to improve efficiency and transparency on government services might provoke reactions on actors affected (such as bureaucracy reduction or a more open and easy access for a wider group of government providers).

Given that e-government solutions are not neutral, they shall to be assumed from public policies' perspectives. On one hand such solutions try to reach political goals like transparency, efficiency or enhanced public participation among others (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). On the other hand, as we pointed, actors could be affected or beneficiated from them.

Consequently, actors' importance has to be considered in order to assess success or failure of e-government policies. This approach it's not proposing to an individualistic approach. Multiples perspectives are needed to take on account regarding political, economic, social, administrative and technological variables (Cortés-Morales & Marín-Raventós, 2012a).

It is important to consider that incidences on poor e-government development are no limited just on areas like Public Administration inefficiencies or citizen dissatisfaction, but also on how enterprises could perform better their goals on productivity and/or transactions related with government. A broad analysis on institutions and how they affect economic performance is developed by North (1990).

This research has aimed to demonstrate that beside formal structures (like laws or decrees), or economic and technological capacity; how actors play is critical for e-government success. Lack of actors' adequate characterization in particular political contexts could derive on problematic experiences. Although this study is retrospective it is expected that its findings can give some notions for using the model in prospective mode.

The first section will introduce fundamentals of the model and its formal description as well the dimensions considered for e-government analysis. The second part of this chapter will describe some general characteristics of Chile and Costa Rica, countries that were selected as source of study cases. The third section presents the cases, including methodological considerations. The last part discusses the results obtained with the model application.

BACKGROUND

The importance of actors has been recognized in several fields related with political sciences like institutions (North, 1990; Tsebelis, 2001), policy networks (Klijn, 1998), governance and governability (Prats, 2001) or public policies (Subirats, Knoepfel, Larrue, & Varonne, 2008). However such importance is admitted, one can affirm that not enough efforts to characterize properties on actors have been made. Yet, some notions of concepts related to them like power, have been elaborated. For example, the capacity to avoid changes on institutions (known as veto power) is described by Tsebelis (2001). The source of such power is given by institutional results, like the number of seats that a politic party has on Deputies Chamber. Furthermore, institutional rules could construct complex models based on game theories by which actors could construct scenarios on how to play "political games" (Shepsle & Bonchek, 2005).

However, the political complexities are no limited to institutions. Since 80's decade, the reduction of the size and capacity of State and government has implied that other actors, not related directly to institutional contexts, have become more and more important for policy construction and implementation. This has been the case, for example, of policy networks (Klijn, 1998; Fleury, 2002). In this broad perspective, authors like Prats (2001) state that "strategic actors" are important for governability. Such "strategic actors" are capable to block changes on rules that govern any given society. A good governability is more that just government. Indeed it is a characteristic of a society.

In Subirats et al. (2008) it is argued the importance of actors on public policies. In their proposal it can be found a typology for actors' identification. Two main categories are defined: the public and

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