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Chapter I

The Argentine IT Professionals Forum: Building the Basis for the Back Office Through Communities of Practice¹

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the experience of the Argentine IT Professionals Forum (ITPF) that enriches the definition of processes involving the tasks of e-government. The ITPF has become a cross-agency network that involves all the IT professionals of the public administration. It was created in 2002 as a response to the institutional crisis in Argentina in order to solve problems associated with the IT areas. The most important contribution of the ITPF is the basis for the back office as an interesting management model, theoretically known as “communities of practice” (CoPs) and networks, which have become core organizational tools as far as carrying out difficult innovation processes, such as the development of free software, cross-agency applications, and interoperability. However, traditional government structures have found it hard to deal with this kind of processes. Among the specific tasks

involved, it is worthwhile mentioning the development of suitable software, the creation of cross-agency consensus, the generation of institutional networks, and so forth.

Introduction

The experience of the Argentine IT Professionals Forum (ITPF²) enriches the definition of processes involving the tasks of e-government. The ITPF has become a cross-agency network that involves all the IT professionals of the public administration (in Argentina it is called Foro de Responsables Informáticos³). It was created in 2002 as a response to the institutional crisis in Argentina in order to solve problems associated with the IT areas. The most important contribution of the ITPF is the basis for the back office as an interesting management model. The components of this model are theoretically known as “communities of practice” (CoPs) and “networks,” which have become core organizational tools as far as carrying out difficult innovation processes, such as the development of free software, cross-agency applications, and interoperability. However, traditional government structures have found it hard to deal with this kind of processes, such as the setup of the back office. Among the specific tasks involved, it is worthwhile mentioning the development of suitable software, the creation of cross-agency consensus, the generation of institutional networks, and so forth. The new institutional forms are based on knowledge management (KM) related to ongoing learning and innovation within organizational environments. These new models were incorporated into e-government plans in order to solve the problems of the integration of technological, institutional, and cultural systems. Nowadays, such models are at the core of knowledge theories and are being used in real e-government experiences.

To consider the ITPF experience and the usefulness of the CoPs in the development of e-government (including back-office plans), I will deal with the following items: the background, including definitions and theoretical approaches; the context in which the ITPF took place; and the technological models at the time and the current problems they have been generating. Then I will describe the different periods of the ITDF and other experiences (future and emerging trends), and finally I will lay out the conclusion of those experiences.

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