## Chapter XVI

# E-Government and Private-Public Partnerships:
## Relational Challenges and Strategic Directions

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## ABSTRACT

*E-government creates both new pressures and new opportunities for partnering —
within governments, between governments and across sectors and the citizenry. In
particular, new relational mechanisms are required to shape effective ties between
governments and the vendors of IT systems and solutions that are more pervasive, fluid
and demanding in terms of the level of collaboration and trust required between private
sector vendors and public sector clients. The complexity and sophistication of such
solutions produce many strategic choices for governments about how to deploy IT and
the degree to which in-house capacities should be balanced and complemented with
externalized skills and solutions. Thus, partnerships are now central to public
management: In a digital world, effectively dealing with more relational organizational
architectures becomes the core competency of a continually renewed and enabled
public service. This chapter first explores the main challenges facing governments in
such an environment, followed by a sketching of the main strategic directions required
to address them.*

# INTRODUCTION

E-government is an umbrella term for a wide range of initiatives — driven by both emerging technology and social ingenuity — that carry the potential to fundamentally alter relationships within government, between governments, and across all sectors and the broader public. In fact, there is now growing recognition that e-government is less about electronic government in a purely technical sense and more about renewing public sector institutions for a new, more knowledge and network-driven era.

As governments formulate their own integrative strategies for moving online, coordination challenges both within and across governments are likely to grow — as will the potential for healthy competition. The new challenges of an effective and online public sector reside in defining the requisite mix of competitive and collaborative forces needed to realize the full potential of an online world - *one that is both digital and democratic*.

As a starting point, *governance* may be defined as effective coordination in an environment where both knowledge and power are distributed. Every organization is built on governance, whether formal or informal, ineffective or successful. The rise of *e-governance* refers to new processes of coordination made possible or even necessary by the advent of technology — and the spreading of online activities in particular.

As a result, e-*government* in the broadest sense refers to an IT-led reconfiguration of public sector governance — and how knowledge, power and purpose are redistributed in light of new technological realities. In summarizing what has been written about the information age and/or digital world to date, our perspective is that there are three main sets of inter-related forces driving the emergence of e-governance and the search for new organizational models across all sectors:

- *Spatial:* geography and place
- *Digital:* communications and time
- *Cognitive:* knowledge and education

Globalization drives new spatial considerations that are changing our notion of place as economic and, to some degree, social and political forces for integration create new interdependencies beyond national borders. As a result, identity and community are less bound by geography, with new and far more complex networking patterns emerging.

More instantaneous communication and changing perceptions of time are related considerations — as the expression "*Internet time*" redefines many organizational activities in the private sector, and in government as well. A digital world implies instantaneous decisions and accessibility, and speed and responsiveness become the hallmarks of performance (Guillaume, 1999; Tapscott & Agnew, 1999).

Changing cognitive capacities are the third set of contextual forces driving change — as the rapid expansion of both information and education empowers populations to become less passive and better educated. Organizations struggle to define and retain the right mix of competencies in a knowledge-based workforce increasingly characterized by mobility, diversity and assertiveness (Rifkin, 2000; Rosenau, 2000).

These simultaneous forces are at the heart of the struggle to adapt to a new governance environment. *For governments, however, there are inherent contradictions in each that must be recognized.*

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