Chapter 3
Collaboration and E-Government

INTRODUCTION

Collaboration is an important element in the advancement of e-government (Hu et al., 2006). This chapter examines the level of collaboration among state governments to see how advanced they are in e-government. Collaboration is critical in homeland security because it is one of the often cited challenges in the time of a crisis (Reddick, 2008). In order to understand Homeland Security Information Systems (HSIS), one must delve into the impact of collaboration and e-government.

There is a growing body of research on e-government and its impact on managerial effectiveness; with collaboration being an important area of management effectiveness (Yang and Paul, 2005; Reddick 2007). This chapter examines how state governments measure up against some noted principles of effective collaboration. The role of citizens in the collaborative process is examined, with citizens arguably being the key to more effective collaborative efforts through e-government (Vigoda-Gadot, 2002). Indeed, research shows that citizen involvement in the decision-making process through collaborative efforts will enhance democracy and accountability of governments (Vigoda-Gadot, 2003).

In order to examine collaboration and e-government this chapter first outlines several key principles of effective collaboration and relates them to e-government. Second, this chapter provides a conceptual framework of collaboration and e-government. Third, there is a data analysis of a survey of Chief Information Officers (CIO) opinions on collaboration and e-government. The conclusion of this chapter summarizes and examines the impact of collaboration on HSIS.

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BACKGROUND

There are many definitions of e-government discussed in Chapter 2. Some look at e-government exclusively as it relates to the Internet adoption in governments (Moon, 2002). Other definitions of e-government examine it in relation to information technology’s (IT) impact on the governance of organizations (Gronlund, 2005). The definition, provided by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), used in this chapter takes into account collaboration. The term e-government refers to the use of IT, particularly Web-based Internet applications, to enhance the access to and delivery of government information and services to citizens, to business partners, to employees, and among agencies at all levels of government (GAO, 2003b). This definition takes into account the Internet as one of the main vehicles for e-government, but also leaves room for other types of IT. More importantly, it also considers the interrelationship between different stakeholders and the e-government process, something that is supposed to influence collaboration (Sharma, 2004).

There are also many definitions of collaboration. One common definition offered by Bardach (1998) defines collaboration as any joint activity by two or more agencies that can be used to increase the public value by working together rather than working separately. Agranoff and McGuire (2003) further believe that collaboration can occur both vertically across different levels of government such as federal, state, and local and horizontally with players representing different interests in the community. Therefore, collaborative efforts can involve intra-agency and/or inter-agency dimensions.

The definition of collaboration that is used in this chapter is also taken from the GAO. In the context of e-government, collaboration can be defined as a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals (GAO, 2003b). This definition takes into account the important dimensions of Bardach’s (1998) work, but sets collaboration in the context of e-government. The following question should be asked, why would governments want to engage in collaboration? Huxham and Vangen (2005) provide some reasons for collaboration that should be briefly mentioned:

1. Organizations often collaborate if they are unable to achieve their objectives with their own resources;
2. Sharing of risk is a reason often cited for collaboration;
3. Governments sometimes believe that commercial organizations are more efficient providers of services than public entities, arguing for collaboration on efficiency grounds;
4. There is a belief by some that the provision of public services will become seamless and coordinated as a result of successful collaboration;
5. There is the argument of learning more about a process because of some joint activity; and
6. There is the argument of the moral dimension of collaboration. For instance, the really important issues of society cannot be tackled by an organization acting alone.

What does collaboration mean in the context of e-government? There are three public administration arguments for the study of collaboration and e-government. According to Allen, Juillet, Paquet, and Roy (2005), e-government requires an important shift in the nature of collaborative governance according to three dimensions. First, technology applications create new opportunities to link together organizations. Second, policy changes require a growing level of collaboration across levels of government and sectors.
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