

Chapter 4

Patterns for E-Government Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents three different patterns to understand and manage e-government initiatives. The word pattern means a set of values, beliefs and actions that can be distinguished as informing e-government development. The patterns are derived from the literature on the information society and information systems practice. They aim to help people involved in e-government to make sense of their work and impacts and to facilitate communication. In the chapter we use the patterns to critically review an e-government initiative in Colombia called Gobierno en Línea (Online Government).

INTRODUCTION

The information society is unfolding worldwide. Its development started since the definition of the concept in the US (Gore, 1991) and Europe (CEC, 1997) and has been followed by global declarations to encourage the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to address social and economic problems (DOT Force, 2000). Several countries have embarked in formulating and implementing different initiatives and integrating them with other ideas related to knowledge-based societies (Japanese Government, 2000). These

initiatives are now geared to facilitate the inclusion of citizens in government affairs. The term e-government has been defined to account for a variety of technological applications of service delivery which to some could bear the fruits of transformations towards having more participative, democratic and transparent societies (Banister, 2004; Marchionini, Samet, & Brandt, 2004; ODPM, 2003; Saxena, 2005).

From the conception of the information society at the policy level in some regions of the globe, it was envisioned that such type of society would yield benefits like (Information Society Commission, 1999):

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- Economic opportunities in the production, exchange and dissemination of electronic content, products and services
- Participation and access to education through electronic means
- Competitiveness due to intra and inter-organisational collaboration across geographical locations
- Citizen empowerment

The last of these benefits seems to be the current focus of policies under the banner of eGovernment. We now have several examples of policies and plans for eGovernment in Europe, the US, Scandinavian countries and the Far East. Their similarity makes us think that in parallel to this phenomenon of e-government globalisation, we are witnessing also the homogenisation of ways of thinking about it.

In developing a global information society, it is assumed that countries will find the best ways to accommodate to develop the above policies. Governments are called to assume either a neo-liberal or 'dirigiste' approach to the information society (Moore 1997; Mansell and Steinmuel-ler 2000). The first one means establishing fair conditions for the emergence of products and services related to information. The second one is about prioritising certain areas of investment and regulating the implementation of plans and policies. In both governments are called to ensure that potentially disadvantaged groups are to be considered as beneficiaries of plans.

In both approaches, it is interesting to see that the information society (and thus e-government) have been seen as 'inevitable', and therefore the role of governments is to ensure their implementation. Somehow this type of visionary thinking has been adopted, and we're left wandering if there are other alternatives or challenges to consider (see introductory chapter of this book). For instance, how local differences to this 'inevitable vision' are to be considered or accommodated; how can people make the best of it; and how e-government

could be used more strategically for our own purposes as individuals and societies.

It is necessary then to think about the ways in which governments conceive of and adopt e-government initiatives. This chapter enquires about the potential definition of *conceptual* elements to account for our thinking. We propose three (3) different patterns to consider the assumptions that enter into the formulation and implementation of e-government initiatives. For the purposes of the chapter, *pattern* means a series of assumptions, values and beliefs held by individuals which influence their action. The patterns are influenced by personal experience¹, conceptual and empirical research in the uptake of approaches for information and communications technologies (ICTs) planning (J. R. Córdoba, 2002; J. R. Córdoba & Midgley, 2006), and the use of systemic thinking to evaluate the implementation of ICT-related plans in the Colombian context (J. Córdoba & Robson, 2008; J. R. Córdoba & Robson, 2003).

The patterns are 1) idealist; 2) strategic; and 3) power-based. We use them to analyse the Colombian e-government initiative of "Gobierno en Línea" (Mincomunicaciones, 2007). Following our analysis, we conclude the chapter by drawing possibilities for systems methodology use under each pattern that could help those people involved or affected by them to improve e-government initiatives. Through the chapter we highlight the importance of having conceptual elements to help us assess and improve our thinking behind such initiatives. We do so by considering that, as being influenced by information systems and public policy practice, e-government knowledge imposes a sort of determined type of vision which is to be adopted. Out of this 'imposition' though, there is the opportunity to re-think about or shape our ways of conceiving e-government.

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