Chapter 4.15
Business Process Change in E–Government Projects:
The Case of the Irish Land Registry

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates one of the first e-Government services launched as part of Ireland's Information Society programme, the Irish Land Registry's implementation of their award winning Electronic Access (EAS) project. In-depth enquiries into how public sector organisations manage IT-enabled transformations have remained relatively limited and this case contributes to this emerging body of literature. The analysis highlights that the implementation of e-Government initiatives beyond basic service levels necessitates business process change in order to reap rewards. This study fulfils an identified need for research in Business Process Change (BPC) in the implementation of e-Government initiatives. In this way the research attempts to add to, and complement, the existing pool of studies exploring e-Government induced change. The conclusions from the research stress the importance of planning for process change and the support of top management in the achievement of the efficiency gains and improved customer experience that are outcomes of e-Government.

INTRODUCTION

In response to a growing range of demands, the governance process of the public sector is undergoing modernisation (Pärna & von Tunzelmann, 2007). Although organisations in this sector may not operate within competitive environments in the traditional sense, changes in management philosophies are causing these organisations to think and act more like private sector ones

(Gulledge & Sommer, 2002, Hughes *et al.,* 2006). One of the consequences of adopting a private sector mentality has been an increased level of Information Technology (IT) projects, with a concurrent need for organisational transformation (Tan & Pan, 2003). These new technologies have the potential to provide higher levels of efficiency and the ability to reduce costs for government while simultaneously increasing productivity and delivering better quality services for stakeholders in public management (Weerakkody & Dhillon, 2008). Given the pressure on government to deliver services in a more efficient and effective manner, the drive to reap the benefits of these changes is intensifying.

Although various perspectives are available for the analysis of e-Government initiatives (Tan & Pan, 2003), a process perspective of e-Government initiatives, examining the areas of government where IT can be effectively utilized to enhance the efficiency of service delivery as well as the redesign of governmental processes and its impact on customers, is adopted in this article. O'Donnell *et al.* (2003) deduce that technology radically affects public organisations not only by reengineering current processes and structures but by also inducing fundamental changes to the strategic role of government. Bellamy & Taylor (1994) agree that IT in public administrations presents opportunities for increased efficiencies but also opportunities to adapt bureaucracy and in this way they suggest that IT is in fact identified as key to the reinvention and the reinvigoration of public administrations.

This research investigates one of the first e-Government services launched as part of Ireland's Information Society programme. The Irish Land Registry office implemented the award winning e-Government Electronic Access (EAS) project, which provides a unified national system of title registration for land administration, between 1999 and April 2005, as part of a strategic initiative to improve the quality of service delivered to customers. The study generates insights into the implementation and management of strategic process change by describing, analysing and explaining how the agency changed their fundamental structures and processes through this project, and the consequent effects on their employees and their customers.

It also highlights the opportunities now available to the organisation having successfully redesigned its fundamental processes. The data used in the case is derived from a variety of sources, both primary and secondary, that combine to generate a comprehensive retrospective picture of e-Government induced change in the public sector in Ireland.

Comprehensive studies of how public sector organisations manage IT-enabled transformation are relatively scarce (Tan *et al.*, 2005). This research contributes to the understanding of Business Process Change (BPC) within the public sector and highlights the key factors observed in process change which may explain its success. The study also highlights the motives for process redesign and the strategic approach taken within the organisation. The case analysis is also useful for business process management researchers as it gives insights into the application of IT and its influence on government processes. This case fulfils an identified need for research in BPC in the implementation of e-Government initiatives (Hughes *et al.*, 2006). In this way the research attempts to add to, and complement, the existing pool of studies exploring e-Government induced change from a BPC perspective. The article proceeds with a review of the relevant literature. The qualitative research methodology is outlined and the case material presented. The case findings are highlighted and discussed. Conclusions are drawn for future e-Government projects of this nature.

E-Government and Public Sector Change

e-Government refers to the use of information and communication technologies to change the structure and processes of government organisations

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