Chapter 9

E-Democratic Administration and Bureaucratic Responsiveness:
A Primary Study of Bureaucrats' Perceptions of the Civil Service E-Mail Box in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

The Civil Service E-mail Box (CSEB) is one of the windows that facilitate communication between Taiwan's government and its citizens. According to research, when a government has a user-friendly digital platform maintained by technologically literate public administrators, those public employees would support using such an electronic system to increase governmental responsiveness. This chapter investigates how the perception of e-democratic administration and information and communications technology's (ICT) level of readiness influence public administrators' perception of CSEB effectiveness in facilitating communication with citizens. It does this by examining bureaucratic survey data gathered from Taiwan's Research, Development, and Evaluation Commission (RDEC). Findings show that an unfriendly digital platform, unskilled staff, low appreciation of e-democracy, and lack of readiness on the part of CSEB negatively affect public employees' enthusiasm in regarding ICT as an effective tool in raising governmental responsiveness in Taiwan.

INTRODUCTION

With the popularity of information and communication technology (ICT), the interaction in intra-organizational, inter-organizational, inter-governmental, and boundary-crossing relationships has gradually evolved from the use of traditional written documents to e-communication via ICT. Advances in ICT have impacted the public sector, resulting in original administrative procedures that are both faster and more convenient. With the emphasis on facilitating public relations, and with the increased degree of readiness inherent in e-governance, citizen participation in today's decision-making process has become more convenient and frequent (Shiang, 2002; Snellen, 2002). Facing increased dissemination of citizens' opinions, the public sector has found that the convenience brought about by ICT has opened a window of opportunity to increasing bureaucratic responsiveness.

The Civil Service E-mail Box (CSEB) is one of the public sector's most accessible venues for receiving public opinion. As an application of Web 2.0 techniques in a government setting, its significance is not only manifested in the rapid response to the populace's complaints, opinions and queries, but it can also enhance the populace's participation in public affairs. The public sector emphasizes processing and resolving complaints as a public relations management mechanism. In the future, CSEB can aid in the timely resolution of problems, constituting a modern, emphatic, responsive, and democratic administrative foundation. If the public's problems cannot be solved immediately, the administrative organ can at least promptly explain the reason for its inability to resolve the problem, thus achieving the mission of comforting and informing through ICT. The very existence of CSEB strengthens the effective use of ICT and emphasizes bureaucratic responsiveness as a key link in e-governance.

Past related research, however, mostly concentrated on discussing the developmental trend of new governance style in the era of e-governments (Milward & Snyder, 1996; Scavo & Shi, 2000; Peled, 2001; Welch & Wong, 2001; Danziger & Andersen, 2002; Roy, 2003; Grant & Chau, 2004; Pavlichev & Garson, 2004; Carrizales, 2008; Dawes, 2008); identifying the correlation between ICT application and service quality (Cohen & Eimicke, 2001; Bovens & Zouridis, 2002; Buckley, 2003; Gant & Gant, 2003; West, 2004; Norris & Moon, 2005; Pirog & Johnson, 2008), the populace's perception of e-democracy (Barber, 1998, 2001; Bryan, Tsagarousianou & Tambini, 1998; Hacker & van Dijk, 2000; Chadwick, 2003; Stanley & Weare, 2004; Morgenson, Van Amburg, & Mithas, 2010) and public trust (Moon, 2003, 2005; Parent, Vandebeek & Gemino, 2004; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2004), or relevant research on digital division (Compaine, 2001; Norris, 2001; Becker, 2004; Groper, 2004; Moon & Welch, 2004). There has been very little in-depth analysis focusing on the process of public administrators' resolving the issues relating to the use of ICT, especially in regard to bureaucrats' attitudes towards the utilization of CSEB to make their office routine more effective and efficient. Examination of whether it leads to an "effective increase in bureaucratic responsiveness, and specifically, if it does help to solve the public's complaints and problems" as a research subject, has been lacking. In Chen, Huang and Hsiao's (2006) and Ong and Wang's (2009) research regarding the operation of the Taipei City Mayor's Mailbox, it is discovered that coping with the populace's "snowflake-like" complaint mails frequently resulted in the internal customer[1] processing expiration and engendered accusations from the public for the public sector's low response efficiency. Chen, Huang and Hsiao's (2006) and Ong and Wang's (2009) research is thus considered to be of vital importance in facilitating the creation of an environment wherein the administrative worker is able to satisfy the public by providing a service via ICT. Three elements are necessary to create a friendly environment for transforming communication between the

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