Chapter 18

IT and Enterprise Architecture in US Public Sector Reform:
Issues and Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at public sector whole-of-government reform from an Information Technology (IT) focused Enterprise Architecture (EA) perspective. The chapter summarizes reforms undertaken under three US presidents—Clinton, Bush, and Obama—and discusses how they have too frequently failed to meet expectations of policy makers, public servants, the public, and other stakeholders. We find that IT reforms in support of larger public sector reform have been ineffective and unsustainable, although many IT reforms have been successful in a narrower context. EA has suffered as a once promising methodology: it has not become the "silver bullet" in managing the IT and information infrastructure to support reform, knowledge management, and decision making. It was also seen as an important tool for reducing information management silos that successive governments have unsuccessfully tried to reduce. This chapter raises the spectre of endemic barriers to reform that must be overcome if EA and IT reform are to realize their potential, and offers recommendations for overcoming these hurdles in the context of whole-of-government public sector reforms.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama have launched one major whole-of-government public sector reform after another in an effort to make government more effective, efficient, economic, and perhaps equitable (the four E's)[1], focusing on performance management and budgeting, and citizen services, engagement, and participation (for an overview, see, especially: Kettl, 2005; Redburn, Shea, & Buss, 2007; Bouchaert &

Halligan, 2007; Frederickson, Smith, Larimer, & Licari, 2011). Policy makers soon latched on to the potential of IT to serve as the platform upon which to build, develop and maintain the four E's, in the process making government more transparent and accountable. Over this period as new technologies evolved, many believed that: automation would improve overall government efficiency, improve quality of services, and reduce service delivery costs; E-government would improve government-citizen, government-business, government-government transactions, and public service delivery; and social media would facilitate and foster intra-governmental collaboration and communication and enhanced citizen engagement and participation. EA would provide the platform to better link IT to policy, planning, management, strategy, information, and process. Many even claimed that this reform agenda would enhance democracy, as well as good governance (Gerson, 2006; Buss, Redburn, & Guo, 2006; Kamarck & Nye, 2002).

In spite of successes here and there[2] in the context of whole-of-government reforms, many believe that public sector IT reforms have not lived up to the expectations upon which policy makers placed so much hope, and EA has yet to fully take hold across government and where EA has diffused widely, it has been problematic. IT and EA may have fallen victim to the failure of the public sector reform agenda's problems, rather than its own shortcomings. Perhaps, though, both are at fault. In any case, this is distressing to critics who point out that over the past decade alone, the federal government has spent more than $600 billion on IT, and EA has been around for more than 25 years but is still yet to deliver the benefits promised, again in the context of public sector reforms[3].

Using the US federal government as a case study, this chapter looks at public sector and IT reforms primarily in the context of EA and addresses the following questions: What have been the driving forces in public sector reform? Why are public sector IT reform initiatives so ineffective and how does this relate to public sector reform across the whole of government? Why have EA efforts not realised their potential? And, What can be done to make public sector reform through IT and EA implementation more effective?

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM INITIATIVES

Public sector reform undertaken in a whole-of-government framework has featured in the agendas of most presidents over the past 120 years, but it is only in the last 20 or so that reform initiatives have become a high priority and expected to engender massive changes in governance (see Buss & Buss, 2011, for a review). Policy makers understood that they could not accomplish missions, attain policy goals, and deliver quality public services unless government could achieve the four E's. The public, empowered by unprecedented access to information and greater transparency in government operations, also began to expect much more value in return for the taxes paid or fees charged, and demand more input into, and responsiveness from, political processes affecting their lives. Social media enabled a move towards "people power" as an unavoidable influence on government decision making and processes and provided a unique motivation for reform and a new era of government responsiveness. With perpetual burgeoning budget deficits, out of control long-term debt, and increased demand for public services, government would have to do much more for much less (Balutis, Buss, & Ink, 2011).

Two trends provide a context for reform, one attempted to make government operate more like a business (Osborn & Gaebler, 1992), the other broke down formal, hierarchical command and control structures of government into informal networks (Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004; Kettl, 2009).

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