Chapter IX

Linking E-Government with Organizational Memory through Individual Competencies

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Abstract

Organizational memory (OM) is a concept that has been used to refer to stocks of data, information, and knowledge to which every member of the organization has access. In the following chapter we distinguish between what we refer to as "hard OM" and "soft OM." The term "hard OM" is used to refer to a variety of technologies that support the storage of, access to, and modification of OM. Soft OM refers to policies, rules, reporting structures, and practices that encourage the active use and updating of OM in addressing current organizational concerns. This chapter considers the role of OM (hard and soft) in relation to the adoption and use of e-government systems. We argue that for e-government to be successfully adopted by companies, some "competences" to manage and exploit knowledge at the organizational level need to be developed and assessed. In doing so, the research supports the view that the identification of problems, the changing of cognitive patterns and the integration of new measures in the organization mediate the relationship between the OM and e-government.

Introduction

The *organizational memory* (hereafter OM) literature provides many varying and, occasionally, competing definitions, but the meaning of OM at the organizational level is the same. OMs are usually based on what has worked in the past, that is, what has proven to be successful (Bent, Van der Paauwe, & Williams, 1999). OM is comprised of a stock of data, information, and knowledge (memories)—every member of the organization has access to it, has the possibility of interpreting it, and has the possibility of acting upon it. OM includes not only "hard information," for example, numbers, facts, words, and figures, but also "soft-information," that is, individual or social information with meaning, for example, expertise, experiences, anecdotes, critical incidents, stories, and details about strategic and operative decisions.

E-government can be defined as a set of activities supported by information systems with the aim to improve the relationships between government institutions and citizens (Heichlinger, 2004). The aim of *e-government* is to enhance public participation in decision-making. Varieties of e-government Web sites have been set up worldwide, providing services and information at different levels (local, regional, or national). Important "users" of e-government are not only citizens but also businesses. E-services include social contribution for employees, corporate tax, registration of a new company, submission of data to the statistical office, custom declaration, public procurement, and so forth. OM is especially important in e-services. Many existing sources of knowledge, laws, comments to laws, specific regulations, old similar cases, available cases, documents and information, and so forth, are prevalent at different places and in different forms and representations at several degrees of formality, and are related by manifold links.

The growth of this new electronic world requires innovation and the generation of new knowledge, with not only staff but also public servants listening to information in new and unexpected ways. This often means letting go of our existing knowledge and recognizing that they may prevent us from learning new things. For example, before new routines can be implemented (e.g., pay corporate tax through e-government Web sites), the old routines must be challenged, and this requires a willingness to unlearn (i.e., accept that knowledge and experience can and should be challenged; Sherwood, 2000). This is a challenging and painful endeavor. Therefore, although e-government has to be redesigned around OM to attain any benefit from the information provided by governments, managers must be aware that just as OM provides stability, it can also serve to block e-government implementation. Part of this difficult alignment involves critical self-reflection about one's own work and changing roles (Spender, 1998).

Competencies represent the knowledge and skills required for performing and supporting the business processes (Woodruffe, 1993) and the basis for creating value in an organization (Hoffmann, 1999), and they involve competence factors that are observable and measurable (Sicilia & Lytras, 2005). Considering this, we suggest that in order to implement e-government and transform such procedures and processes, those companies using and accessing government services need to acquire the necessary '"competencies" about them.

The focus of this chapter is how can OM enable e-government implementation in companies? In order to answer this question, we use competence factors to distinguish among the various levels of work within the OM. The chapter is organized as follows: the conceptual

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