

Chapter XII

E-Government Challenges: Barriers and Facilitators in Spanish City Councils

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ABSTRACT

Government agencies are being pressed to become more efficient. For this reason, e-government strategies result from the expectations from society to be able to use Internet technologies as a strategic means of communications and relationship with its public sector, virtualising the delivery of public services. The aim of this chapter is to identify the main barriers and facilitators affecting the deployment of e-government, and to classify them into dimensions that may help researchers and practitioners to identify and better understand these factors. A literature analysis and empirical research based on the perceptions of the technology managers of Spanish councils with more than 5000 inhabitants and institutional Websites were carried out. The findings disclose some lessons for public managers to take into account when implementing an e-government strategy. However, the ultimate challenge seems to be in the hands of the politicians of the council, who are responsible for developing these e-government strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Organisations from around the globe are actively exploring opportunities and challenges brought about by the Internet and e-business. This is not limited to private sector companies. Public institutions are also facilitating and shaping the development of infrastructure and services and experimenting with new ways of information and services delivery via electronic channels (Govindarajan and Gupta, 2001; Phan, 2003; Li, 2006). In this respect, Knowledge Management tools like Websites or intranet databases usually allow for the provision and canalisation of information and documents for internal activities along the public sector value chain and delivery of public services (Prokopiadou *et al.*, 2004). The better the knowledge base upon which public policies are built, the more likely they are to succeed (Brigdman and Davis, 2004).

The question is, how does Internet really affect local administrations? By enabling local e-government strategies. This is the logical answer to such a trivial question, but there is more than meets the eye. The key word is “enabling”: not every council actually succeeds, even if the expenditure is the same. An e-government strategy is a fundamental element in modernising the public sector, because it does not only provide a wide variety of information and a form of interaction between public sector organisations, business and citizens, but also improves the performance of government organisations and the welfare of citizens (Ebrahim and Irani, 2005).

Therefore, e-government practices must be regarded as tools for creating added value to public products and services, thus increasing governmental efficacy, efficiency, transparency and security. The latter two are even more important considering the virtual side of these practices. For that reason, it seems crucial to analyse the importance of the design of successful e-government practices according to the principles of strategic

management and organisational change, as do private firms regarding e-business initiatives.

According to the existing literature, there are many factors that affect the success of e-government (Bueno García, 2002; Hackney and Jones, 2002; ICMA, 2002; Holden, 2003; Li, 2003; Barca and Cordella, 2004; Eyob, 2004; Vishanth and Jyoti, 2004). These are known as e-government facilitators and barriers, for they might help achieving success in the design and implementation of the council's e-government strategy, but they can also create difficulties. City councils face the challenge of learning to recognize such factors and implementing whatever measures are needed to overcome or deploy them, depending on their influence.

These factors may be of different natures: social (e.g. employees' attitudes toward technology, society's perception of e-government practices, legal issues); political/institutional (e.g. political will, hierarchy and division of labour, workflow management); or infrastructural (e.g. availability or lack of finance, skilled personnel and technology) (Joia, 2004). The role that each factor plays in the definition of e-government success will depend on how public governments approach them, which is why barriers and facilitators are essentially the same elements from opposite perspectives.

This chapter explores the facilitating and barrier factors that, ultimately, shape the formulation and implementation processes of strategic e-government, focusing on the point of view of local government. The objectives of this chapter are to identify the main barriers and facilitators affecting the deployment of e-government, and to classify them into dimensions that may help researchers and practitioners to identify and better understand these factors.

To do so, both theoretical and empirical analysis are carried out, in order to overcome the lack of specific studies about this topic, as Al-Sebie and Irani (2003) have mentioned. Indeed, most current research on e-government, particularly regarding

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