

Chapter XVII

Digital Government Development Strategies: Lessons for Policy Makers from a Comparative Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Digital government has a better chance of success if it follows a well-articulated and sound strategy. Failures of digital government projects in terms of cost overrun, delay in delivery, and problems in implementation are the rule rather than the exception (Heeks, 1999). Having a sound strategy is considered as the first and most important step in securing the success of information technology projects (Fletcher, 1999). More importantly, a strategic master plan helps align information and communication technology investment and resource allocation with the objectives of organiza-

tions. If done properly, a strategic plan can help public organizations realize the full potential of an information technology investment.

The key question that guides this study is: How can a national digital government strategy be better designed and developed? As reflected in the research question, this chapter takes a normative perspective of policy and institutional design with emphasis on policy makers. A large number of countries around the world have recognized the importance of information and communication technology for staying competitive in the information age. Moreover, it is recognized that a national strategy is the critical first step

in building an information and communication infrastructure and allocating the necessary critical resources to build digital government. Some European countries, Asian economies, and North and South American nations, have some form of a national digital government plan, such as UK Online, e-Japan, and e-Korea.

However, there is a shortage of research-based frameworks for guiding the development of a national strategy. This chapter fills this gap by offering policy makers a comprehensive framework for developing national digital government strategies. Moreover, the authors further examine the experiences of Poland and Taiwan to illuminate the proposed framework and to provide insights into specific considerations for designing and improving digital government through strategic planning.

BACKGROUND

Digital government refers to the use of information and communication technology to better the relations between government and its employees, citizens, businesses, nonprofit partners, and other agencies by enhancing the access to and delivery of government information and services.¹ The terms of digital government and e-government are used interchangeably in this chapter because, in the authors' view, they cover the same set of activities as outlined in the definition of digital government. Digital government strategic plans are national plans to guide the development of a country's efforts to deliver information and service via digital means.

An overarching national digital government plan is less studied than individual digital government projects. Most of the critical success factors come out of studies of individual IT projects at state and local levels (Heeks, 1999; Dawes et al., 1997). Since national strategic plans provide the framework in which most digital government projects are prioritized, designed, and implemented,

it is important to study those. There is lack of a research-based guidance on strategic planning for digital government at the national level and this study aims to fill the gap by drawing from three streams of literature to develop a framework for developing a national digital government strategic plan: digital government, institutionalism, and strategic information system planning. Each body of literature, as reviewed below, points out some key factors for the development of a conceptual framework. By choosing Taiwan and Poland, which are at markedly different points in their implementation of digital government plans, the authors believe that they can more rigorously test the validity and salience of the framework.

Digital Government

The broad literature on digital government points out the importance of political forces, institutions, and the all-encompassing notion of digital government to include citizen participation and electronic production of public services. In addition to these broad environmental factors, this body of literature offers a set of critical success factors that should be an integral part of national digital government strategies, including building management/rational decision-making capacity, establishing national information and technology infrastructure, developing IT-related human resources, protecting privacy and security, and managing government information resource management.

In addition, political forces and institutional settings play a significant role in national digital government efforts. Digital government plans and projects, unlike other private sector information technology projects, need to be attentive to political considerations and governmental processes at all levels of government (Bozeman and Bretschneider, 1986; Rocheleau, 2003). In the international arena, countries need to harmonize their digital government plans with regional associations that they aspire to be associated with.

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