

New Governance Strategies for a Government IT Policy

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INTRODUCTION

How can a country's government be sure that e-government will, in turn, generate value for its citizens? Presently, nearly all governments understand the potential impact information technology has in reducing the costs of governmental operations as well as in delivering information and public services with greater opportunity, flexibility, and reach. Nevertheless, in fundamental aspects, such as confidence in public institutions, citizen participation, or quality-of-life standards, there is little evidence showing that IT has been able to create visible improvements.

The aforementioned observations force us to revisit the previous promises of e-government (OECD, 2003) and to rethink the current system of governance in order to turn these promises into reality. Indeed, this necessary reconsideration raises two important questions: First, how can we take advantage of the nature of governmental work and its consequent relationship with a country's citizens, and second, how should local and national governments, the private sector, a country's overall society, as well as its individual citizens cooperate and interact in an effort to ensure that e-government delivers the most important information and services to a country's citizens? Table 1 summarizes the main issues, questions, and ideas that will be addressed.

The answers to these questions may perhaps appear in new governance strategies that facilitate the development of IT public policies that comply with the promises

Table 1. E-government under scrutiny

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The glitter of e-government is fading. • The mere truth is that everybody needs e-government, but nobody demands it. • There are unfulfilled promises of cuts in costs. • We have e-government in spite of government. • Everybody does e-government, so now what do we do as government? • Taking the <i>e</i> out of e-government

Table 2. What do we want?

Yesterday
Informatization of government information and services
E-service anywhere and anytime
Money
Self-leadership
Today
Things people need, Web based or not
Simpler and integrated services
No cuts to IT budgets
Leaders

of e-government. Table 2 summarizes the previous and current concerns of e-government.

FRAMEWORK OF GOVERNANCE FOR E-GOVERNMENT AND IT POLICY

To achieve the desired design, implementation, and evaluation of IT public policies required by e-government, certain criteria that enable the analysis and selection of such policies or initiatives need to be considered. First, policy strategies and objectives should be specified; initiative should be analyzed and aligned with the e-government program strategies and objectives. Second, regarding policy and public administration objectives, the initiative needs to be analyzed and aligned with the country's development, science, and technology strategies and objectives. Third, the initiative should be analyzed in the context of the instruments and tools of public policy (political, institutional, economic, and legal instruments). Finally, the initiative should be analyzed under the components of a governance framework (Norris, 2001). (The model follows this order: Generate and transfer knowledge for use in the decision-making process; put knowledge and decisions into action; facilitate change for the incorporation, acceptance, and application of concepts, models, initiatives, and projects; align the initiative to the higher order objectives and achieve political sup-

Table 3. A summary of the components of an e-governance framework

1. Knowledge: The generation and transfer of knowledge for use in the decision-making process
• Definition of issues
• Needs and solutions identification
• Knowledge management and information management (projects, good practices, technology; Canada Site, 2005)
• Continuous learning
2. Authority: Put knowledge and decisions into action
• Mandate
• Organizational structures
• Regulations and legal framework
• Policy and guidelines
3. Ownership: Facilitate change for the incorporation, acceptance, and application of concepts, models, initiatives, and projects
• Decision-making processes
• Cost and benefit allocation
• Management of synergies, and win-win and zero-sum situations
• Identification of needs and interests
• Active engagement of participants
4. Internal Accountability
• Strategic alignment and clear contribution to higher order objectives
• Performance evaluation
• Garnering of financial, institutional, and political support
5. External Accountability
• External performance evaluation
• Inclusion of users' feedback
• Evaluation of take-up (Accenture, 2004)
• Transparency
• Citizen participation and engagement
6. Operations
• Project-management techniques and tools
• Interinstitutional management of resources
• Cooperation mechanisms
• Technical and operational evaluation
7. Policy Instruments
• Budget
• Nonfinancial incentives
• Legislation (laws, regulations, and norms)
• Mandates, decrees, orders
• Organizational structure

port; open spaces for citizen participation and transparency; and facilitate the operation and implementation of the initiative.)

The new IT governance and regulatory framework strategy will help institutionalize e-government in part by formalizing existing structures. For example, in Mexico, the head of the E-Government and IT Policy Unit will

become the more formal ICT coordinator general for the federal government, the E-Government Network will become the Executive Council, and informal groups of people interested in specific themes on e-government will be formalized as specialized technical committees (OECD, 2005).

Additionally, the IT governance and regulatory framework strategy will create new structures that will help broaden responsibility and ownership of e-government. Table 3 summarizes the governance framework components.

TRENDS AND SOME GOOD PRACTICES TO FOLLOW

The current trend for e-government in the most advanced countries is to adapt strategies and models of governance, as illustrated by some comparative studies (INFOTEC, 2003, 2004; Nath, 2003).

The objective of these new governance strategies is to render the natural mechanics that exist between the work of the government and citizens more efficient, always trying to fulfill the potential of e-government. Additionally, these governance strategies are looking for help to clearly outline the coordination, collaboration, and cooperation mechanisms between the three levels of government—the private sector, civil society, and citizens—in order to ensure that e-government delivers information and services that are the most popular with citizens. In other words, these strategies will always include the necessary space for the gathering and understanding of citizens' worries, opinions, and needs, as well as the channels that will deliver answers most rapidly.

The experiences of these countries also serve to demonstrate which practices are best in terms of an organizational structure that successfully encourages the functional development of IT policies in government (E-Government Office of Brazil, 2005; E-Government Office of Canada, 2005; E-Government Office of Chile, 2005; E-Government Office of Colombia, 2005; E-Government Office of France, 2005; E-Government Office of Portugal, 2005; E-Government Office of Singapore, 2005; E-Government Office of the United Kingdom, 2005; E-Government Office of the United States, 2005). Table 4 shows some good practices to follow in order to have a better organizational structure for e-government.

There is strong demand from citizens and businesses for the government to improve transparency and anticorruption efforts, and many leaders believe that e-government provides a means of doing so. The Federal Law on Transparency and Access to Information, in combination with the use of ICT, in the case of Mexico has greatly



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