

Chapter 75

E–Government in Public Administration in Africa: Systemic Impediments and Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is motivated by the need to escape the illusory perception of an incongruous implementation of information and communication technology policies in public administration processes in Africa. The problem is brought to light through an analytical distinction between e-government and e-governance. The analysis deals primarily with the impact of the new techno-economic regime, fostered by the development of information and communication technologies, on business and administrative structures, and shows that the conditions of implementation have varied from one political and policy environment to another. An inquiry into African ICT policies reveals a problem translated into the scantiness of African public administration structures in incorporating the conditions of technological change. The approach to solving the problem derives from the underlying distinction between e-government and e-governance. It shows that the efforts that produced thriving outcomes have tended to instill principled behaviors and actions in the restructuring of public administration structures.

INTRODUCTION

The role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in public administration has been the subject of numerous reflections and the research literature linking ICTs with public administration presents a debate on the capacity of ICTs to spark and sustain administrative effectiveness and efficiency that enhance the quality of life and stimulates economic development (Mistry & Jalal,

2012). The use by government agencies of such technological tools as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing, has been heralded in some definitions, in particular one offered by the World Bank, as a means for better service delivery, citizen empowerment through access to information (World Bank, 2011). This perspective also promotes e-government by highlighting its benefits, which include less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, among others.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8358-7.ch075

In this paper I observe that, in Africa, and perhaps elsewhere, such benefits, though related to the use of ICTs in public administration, cannot be attributed to e-government alone. They are quickly linked to e-government only when the distinction between e-government and e-governance is systemically blurred and purposefully ignored. Efficiency is not a machine induced quality; it is determined by the way a mindset incorporates the value and meaning of technological tools. The human mind operates within a system that is guided and conditioned by certain work ethics translated into effectiveness and efficiency. In addition, I seek to avoid reductionist views that analyze e-government without placing it in the context of its emergence, that is, technological change. Therefore, I find it crucial to analyze the systemic context of e-government, and its impact on the global economy and Africa. In light of this observation, the central argument of this paper is that technological change provides the systemic global context of the emergence of e-government, and the convoluted implementation of ICT policies in public administration in Africa reflects the intricate process of the region's integration in the new global economy, resulting in the fact that e-government capability and full potential remain hampered by systemic processes significant of political conditions and ethics, or its lack thereof. The thesis implies a distinction between e-government and e-governance, which is usefully introduced in order to emphasize the prerequisite of ICT policy implementation.

Following the ideas outlined in the central argument, I first place e-government in the context of technological change. I call this context the new techno-economic regime and use it as the theoretical framework. E-government is essentially rooted in the evolution of the global economy shaped to a large extent by technology. Furthermore, the restructuring process of the sub-Saharan African socioeconomic and political setting, which includes the adjustment of public administration to global trends, is seen in light of technological

change. The third section presents the distinction and the relationship between e-government and e-governance. It also provides a framework for the analysis of the political conditions that hinder the full potential of e-government and e-governance in sub-Saharan Africa.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE: THE SYSTEMIC CONTEXT OF E-GOVERNMENT

E-government is readily analyzed from the perspective that posits the determinant role played by information technology in the process of global change. However accurate this view is, it is structurally and analytically incomplete, for it is important not to overlook the transformation of the technological regime globally. Structural and analytical considerations, taken to their full explanatory extent, elucidate the reasons for limited impact associated with e-government progress in Africa. They assume a comprehensive approach that places information technology, without lessening its significance, within a whole context of technological change. Hence, it is not erroneous to state that progress, or the lack thereof, in e-government in Africa is significant of the degree to which the region has embraced the transformation of the technological regime and has incorporated technological change in the whole development process.

The transformation of the technological regime indicates that technological change and productive systems, organizational structures, institutions, market forces and procedures affect each other. This interaction substantiates the circumstances associated with the emergence of a new techno-economic regime. The concept of "techno-economic" regime suggests change in technology and its relation to institutional forms, the structures of the economy, as well as administrative, social and political systems. According to Christopher Freeman and Carlotta Perez, the

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