

Chapter 6

The Latitude of Information Management in Local Government: Views of Local Government Managers

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the changing role and latitude of information management in local e-government. Municipalities have implemented information management and e-government for decades, but due to the cultural, political and behavioral reasons these efforts often face problems. This paper seeks to address these limitations by exploring the issues from the perspective of latitude. An empirical study where 137 managers answered questionnaires with open questions and 16 were interviewed was conducted in Finnish municipalities. The overall profile and latitude of information management is yet unstructured and narrow, indicating only supportive operations, as managers have difficulties with the complex domain of information management. The interaction between various stakeholders is also undeveloped. The authors conclude that both strategic integration and a hybrid type of management are required in local e-government. This article provides a framework of information management that can help enhance understanding of the determinants of information management in local governments.

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INTRODUCTION

Due to electronic changes in public administration, many conventional approaches have changed, and information and communication technology (ICT) has transformed e-government practices providing opportunities to improve government effectiveness (Caragliu, Del Bo & Nijkamp, 2011; Li & Feeney 2014), and to enhance the efficiency and quality of service delivery (Tolbert, Mossberger & McNeal, 2008). The role of information management has also been on the agenda and studies have demonstrated the added value that information management can have to achieving organizational outcomes (e.g., Steventon, Jackson, Hepworth, Curtis & Everett, 2012). Information is one of the most critical resources for organizations and especially the rapid growth of “Big Data” set needs and expectations to the well-organized information management.

The expectations of the capability of information management to enhance the productivity and innovativeness are high. However, existing literature clearly shows that the role of information management is often unclear (Karyda, Mitrou & Quirchmayr, 2006) and its maturity level reflects awareness rather than maturity (Ursacescu, 2014; Waring, 2015). A typical challenge is that information management initiatives have not yet been “mainstreamed” within authorities. Changes in information technology and management have been incremental rather than revolutionary, and information management has been developed as technical and additional function or channel of service production and transactions with public service users and citizens. According to Beynon-Davies & Martin (2004), the typical barriers in adopting information management practices are political, legal, and cultural. Bureaucratic organizational cultures, for example, don’t promote developed information management (Svård, 2014).

To analyze the barriers of information management in local governments, the latitude of the information management is the core of this research. In this study, the latitude of information management is defined as the realized and potential scope within the local government organization’s structure, management system and decision-making arena. The objective of this study is, based on empirical material, to illustrate the factors affecting on the latitude of the information management and to clarify and understand the relationships and interplay of information management with the local government organization, administration, and decision making. The research question is:

- How is the latitude of information management viewed by the local government managers?

Previous research linked to the information management in the context of local governments is limited. Studies have mainly focused on the adoption and use of information technology and e-services (e.g., Li & Feeney, 2014; Batlle-Montserrat, Blat & Abadal, 2014). However, the future of local government is highly dependent on information management: how well information is organized, managed, shared, and utilized. Information management should hold a solid, strategic position in the local government management system, being an essential part of political and administrative actions. In order to strengthen the role of the information management in local governments, a deeper understanding about the specific complex features of local governments in developing information management should be developed. This requires further information management analysis and raises questions about the latitude of information management. That is, a more nuanced understanding about the unique characteristics, barriers and potential of information management should be developed.

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