Chapter IV

E-Government in the Context of State Reform in Brazil:
Perspectives and Challenges

Marco Aurélio Ruediger, Brazilian School of Public &
Business Administration of the Getulio Vargas Foundation, Brazil

Abstract

In this chapter, we examine key elements of state reform and the importance of e-government as a tool for increased civic participation and effectiveness. Brazil is taken as an example. We outline the political process behind state reform in Brazil and the importance of e-government in this construction. The successful case of the income-tax system and the problem of the digital divide are briefly discussed. Finally, we conclude considering the possibility of a civic participation strategy in the promotion of a sustainable process of state restructuring.

Introduction

During the 1990s, embedded in a political process of deep state restructuring and following a global governmental reformist tendency, Brazil went through a broad-spectrum public-administration managerial reform (Bresser-Pereira & Spinks, 1998) similar to what occurred in various other countries engaging in modernizing public administration. One of the pillars of state reform in Brazil was the intensive use of information technology to enhance government managerial capacity, decrease general costs, and bring more transparency to public administration as a whole. The implementation of these administrative reforms in Brazil started in the 1990s with the creation of the State Administration and Reform Ministry (MARE). As a key component of this reform, the Brazilian program for the development of Web-based governmental information systems was a central part of a larger political process that brought this reformist agenda and achieved substantial results that had an impact on the restructuring of the state. It also contributed to democratizing a series of key governmental services. The initial e-government experience, therefore, was deeply immersed in a political context related to the effectiveness of the state apparatus and the degree of interpenetration with civil society that this apparatus encourages. It is therefore, as we shall see, an essentially political matter, embedded in a complex political and social process.

In this regard, the e-government implemented by MARE did not result from a standard institutional development process accompanied by the usual bureaucracy. To the contrary, the ministerial program was actually implemented as a result of a political design. For this to occur, macroeconomic stability, the control of inflation, the restructuring of the administrative machine, and privatization, in addition to the redrawing of boundaries for governmental, private, and public operations, were fundamental pillars of the program of the political party in office at that time, namely the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB, Partido Social Democrata Brasileiro). Not by chance, this occurred in a period when Brazilian society strongly supported general reforms in government, and the new administration team had coupled successfully with the inflationary challenge in the country, achieving a higher level of approval during the 1994 presidential election.

Consequently, the new administration had strong support for reforming the state, including the privatization of state-owned companies and reforming the administration. Although the final results of this political experiment were not fully successful, some important achievements were obtained in relation

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