Chapter XI

Information Technology as a Facilitator of Results-Based Management

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Abstract

The most widely accepted normative model of good public and nonprofit management is often called results-based management. It encourages planning and target setting to make the organization more proactive, an emphasis on outcomes to make the organization better focused on its mission, quick performance feedback to make the organization more responsive, and continuous process improvements to make the organization better able to serve its clients. These changes are possible only with supporting information technology. This chapter discusses ways that IT, including GIS, dashboards, and data mining, can support the new management model. However, IT can increase management effectiveness only if its role has been carefully designed. Before implementing major IT changes, top public and nonprofit managers must begin by determining what information would best guide upcoming major decisions. They must also decide how they wish to balance system integration vs. costs, disintermediation efficiencies vs. client guidance, internal information accessibility vs. security, and frontline worker empowerment vs. organizational uniformity.

Introduction

The role of information technology in government and nonprofit management has constantly evolved over the years. This evolution has generally been driven by continuing improvements in IT. However, IT's management role has recently been changing more rapidly, and this time it is because public management, at least as much as IT, has substantially changed. This chapter will discuss some of the ramifications of this new role for IT within public and nonprofit management. In the first of three sections, it will briefly describe the new normative model of best management practices. The second section will look at ways that IT can advance this new management model. The final section will examine some policy choices that must be confronted when incorporating IT into public and nonprofit management systems.

The New Model of Public and Nonprofit Management

The Changing Definition of Good Management

During the past decade, consultants, texts, academics, and professional societies have all combined to change the accepted definition of good management. Twenty years ago, public or nonprofit managers who listened to their workers, kept their operations moving smoothly, and calmly handled occasional crises would usually be considered outstanding managers by peers and by outsiders. Today such managers would likely be viewed as competent, but disappointingly passive. To be seen as outstanding, today's managers must proactively move their agencies to higher levels of performance each year. The current normative model of management calls upon managers to continuously improve their agencies' performance by scanning their environments purposively and then using the resulting information to set agency targets for improved results, including improved customer satisfaction. The new model then suggests ways of flattening the organizational structure, streamlining its processes, and speeding up its feedback systems in order to help produce these continuously improving results.[1]

Confusingly, this single new model has been given at least three different names: results-based management, strategic management, and performance management. We will use the term results-based management in this chapter. (Adding to the confusion, a fourth term—new public management, or NPM—is also sometimes treated as a synonym. However, NPM is a broader concept that includes results-based management, but then also adds a strong market emphasis, calling for more public entrepreneurship and increased privatization of government programs. NPM's market-oriented policy prescriptions lie outside this chapter's focus on internal management improvements, and we will not consider NPM further.)

Results-based management combines several streams of management changes that developed separately, primarily in the business world. Total quality management (TQM) was first. Total

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