This chapter appears in the book, *Practicing E-Government: A Global Perspective* edited by Mehdi Khosrow-Pour © 2005, Idea Group Inc.

Chapter III

E-Government and E-Governance:
Organizational Implications, Options, and Dilemmas

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ABSTRACT

This chapter suggests that e-government and e-governance initiatives can potentially have major organizational impacts through three mechanisms: improved decision-making, more intensive and productive use of databases, and better communications. These mechanisms impact on both the internal organization of public agencies and their configuration of networks and partnerships. E-enablement therefore makes obsolete many existing organizational structures and processes and offers the prospect of transformation in both service delivery and public governance arrangements. However, the organizational changes which can be effected through the e-revolution are only just beginning to become evident. While it seems likely that existing organizational configurations in the public sector will not be sustainable, the most appropriate ways forward will only be uncovered through much experimentation within e-government and e-governance programmes. In the nature of experimentation, many of these initiatives will turn out to be unproductive or cost-ineffective, but that is perhaps the necessary price to pay for the level of public sector transformation which now appears to be in prospect.

E-GOVERNMENT AND E-GOVERNANCE: TRANSFORMATION OR DISPLACEMENT ACTIVITY?

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines a paradox: in a period when politicians, senior public officials and management consultants appear to be competing in exaggeration about the rate of change which they will soon effect, the claims made on behalf of e-government and e-governance have been particularly grandiose. At the same time, governments such as the Blair administration in the UK continue to declare themselves dissatisfied with the rates of change actually achieved in recent times. Yet the Internet and Web-enabled operations have already been around for nearly ten years. Could it be that e-government and e-governance are not actually delivering on their promises?

This chapter sets out to examine the extent to which e-government and e-governance has already impacted upon organizational structures and processes in the public sector, to explore the potential for further change in the next few years and to examine the extent to which the promise has so far been unfulfilled. Its focus is largely, but not exclusively, on local government, with particular reference to the UK.

The aims of this chapter are:

- To identify what kind of organizational change is being proposed in the public sector.
- To develop a conceptual framework for understanding how e-government and e-governance are impacting on organizational structures and processes in the public sector.
- To identify new organizational structures and processes which are emerging to make use of the potential of e-enabled processes.

In this chapter, the following shorthand will be used for convenience:

- *e-government* will be used to denote electronic enablement of all the services provided or commissioned by the public sector.
- *e-governance* will be used to denote electronic enablement of all the other activities of government (e.g., management of democratic activity, ensuring fairness and transparency of decision-making in public bodies, etc.).

While this is a little crude, it effectively allows us to distinguish two very different ends towards which the e-revolution has been directed — the "services improvement" agenda and the "relationships improvement" agenda.

The Need for Organizational Change in Response to E-Government and E-Governance

The need for organizational change in the public sector is not widely questioned. The main arguments tend to divide along two dimensions — firstly, whether the pace of

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