

Chapter 16

A Historical Perspective of the Development of E-Gov in Brazil

Alexandre F. Barbosa

Brazilian Internet Steering Committee, Brazil

Álvaro Junqueira

Secretariat of Finance of State of São Paulo, Brazil

Eduardo H. Diniz

FGV-EAESP, Brazil

Otávio Prado

FGV-EAESP, Brazil

ABSTRACT

Initiatives of reform and modernisation of the public sector in Brazil have intensified, not only as a consequence of the fiscal crisis that occurred during the 1980s, but also as a result of the exhaustion and collapse of bureaucratic management and government interventionist models. The development of the Brazilian e-gov program officially started in 2000 and today is in its third phase after two different government administrations. It plays an important role in the modernisation of the public sector in the country and faces the challenge of giving proper support to public policies to universalise opportunities that promote economic and social development. The currently available literature analysing the history of the Brazilian e-gov program focuses too narrowly on the identification of relevant technological aspects affecting its designing and development, failing to use a theoretical framework that takes into consideration social actors and other intervening factors. This chapter presents and employs an approach that takes into consideration the relevant social groups involved in each phase of the construction process of e-gov programs, the intervening factors impacting this construction, and the strength of the relationships among them. Based on qualitative empirical research, this chapter discusses the validity of the proposed framework for studying the history of e-gov in Brazil. As a result of an in-depth documental analysis and interviews with key actors throughout the different administration tenures, this chapter identifies important intervening factors that guided successful and unsuccessful government initiatives in the e-gov program.

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of electronic government (e-gov) is associated with the intensive and strategic adoption of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in the public sector. E-gov is often associated with modernisation of public administration, with improvement of the efficiency of governments' internal processes (Osbourne 1997; Agune and Carlos 2005) and with the use of the internet as a channel for delivering electronic public services (Ronaghan 2002; Grant and Chau, 2005).

The reason for the intensive and strategic adoption of ICT by governments lies in the fact that citizens and companies have been resorting more and more to technology, giving preference to online transactional services, as well as the universalising of the internet itself (Holmes, 2002; O'Looney, 2002). In addition, Fountain (2001) and Heeks (2003) also indicate forces deriving from the state's reform and modernising movement as reasons for adopting ICT in the public sector. The use of technology in transforming the government's internal processes, in modernising management and control tools, and in delivering public services has made imperative a change of paradigm in assessing public sector efficiency (Fountain 2001; Pavlichev and Garson 2004). This has driven a substantial increase of governments' use of ICT (Heeks 2003), causing technologies to play a vital role in the modernisation process of public management. These technologies have been acknowledged as agents of change and as tools that make it possible to implement reforms in the public sector (Fountain 2001; Heeks 2003; Holmes 2002).

It is possible to affirm that the development of the public sector has become dependent on the use of ICT and, particularly, of e-gov programs (Fountain 2001; Klitgaard and Light 2005). E-gov programs are imperative in order for the public sector to attain new levels of efficiency so as to transform itself into a high-performance organisation. The analysis of factors of success and failure

in e-gov initiatives makes it possible to identify different aspects associated with the political, social and technological dimensions that affect the performance of these programs.

The existing literature analysing the history of Brazilian e-gov focuses mostly on identifying the relevant technological aspects influencing its creation and development. There is a gap in the literature concerning the adoption of structured models or frameworks in a historical analysis considering the social actors and their relations, as well as other intervening factors, such as those of a political and social nature. This paper proposes a structured framework of analysis considering the social actors involved in each construction phase of the e-gov, the intervening factors influencing this construction and the strength of the relationships among them. Thus, the proposed model seeks to identify social, political, institutional and technological factors that significantly influence conception, implementation and evaluation phases of the e-gov programs. We start from the assumption that the nature and strength of the social relations among social actors influence each phase of this construction process.

E-GOV IN THE BRAZILIAN FEDERAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The initiatives of reform and modernisation of Brazil's public administration have intensified, not only as a consequence of the fiscal crisis of the 1980s, but also as a result of the exhaustion of the bureaucratic management model and of the interventionist state model in economic activities. The movement known as New Public Management (NPM) had as its crux principle to seek to guide and optimise the public services in terms of citizens' needs. This movement was based on management principles concerning results, efficiency and governance, guiding the public management towards market management practices. Behn (1998) defines this movement, which was

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