Chapter 6.1

Administrative Leadership and the Electronic City:
Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written about the benefits of e-government, but far less has been written about how the e-government revolution will be staffed. Many questions remain about whether we have the capacity to develop and provide new e-government services. This chapter seeks to add to our knowledge in this area by examining three perspectives on the readiness of administrative leaders for effective development of e-government systems and strategies. The authors examine the lingering division of policy and administration, present an assessment of the technology knowledge of city managers, and finish with an examination of the leadership strategies available to administrative leaders in city government for achieving the kind of comprehensive changes that many e-government initiatives require. The authors find challenges in each of these important areas and also opportunities. The chapter concludes with recommendations for administrative leaders to break free from these different barriers to success.

INTRODUCTION

Technology has changed the world over the past few decades in far more ways that we probably realize and cities are no exception, but this is not to say that the pressures, costs, and benefits are the same across all parts of modern society or that the capacities for change and the degree of flexibility are the same. Cities arise across generations, and

our governmental systems developed more as bulwarks against rapid change than conduits for progress. The challenge may be especially great in United States where we have struggled with the relationship between politics and administration. Genuine disagreements exist about when and how this distinction developed (Lynn, 2001), but the affects are quite real. E-government implementation requires both policy leadership and administrative skill, and this is certain to hinder the development of electronic cities. Among other things, such efforts require insight, initiative, substantial administrative changes, and reasonable efforts to assess progress, and dividing these needs between political and administrative spheres is not really plausible. Making e-government work challenges governmental systems in ways that are exceptional. Our perspectives on local governance in the United States have been changing (Nalbandian, 2005), but at nothing like the pace of technological change.

E-government is not something that we can push aside and ignore, however, and this is especially true for local governments, which offer a mix of service and communication intensive activities that can and do mesh well with Internet technology. A first step is to acknowledge that Internet technologies are changing the parameters of local government in important ways. Then we must find ways to work around the existing barriers to progress.

The goal of this chapter is to begin sorting out the different kinds of administrative leadership responsibilities that effective e-government requires. Our focus is on city managers in the United States in large part due to data availability, but our analysis is certainly relevant to cities using other governmental forms wherever they are located. Collaborative relationships between elected officials and appointed administrators are not uncommon in local governments, and the struggle to develop e-government infrastructure is a global challenge (UN, 2005). The issues we examine include the difficult nature of the relationship between political leaders and appointed professionals in local government, the technical skills and knowledge possessed by local public managers, and the leadership strategies that could help to produce successful outcomes. We are breaking some new ground here, but also building on a rapidly growing body of research. The role of technology in local government has not been totally overlooked at this point, but we are far from thinking about e-government progress as an essential local government responsibility. We will start with a brief look at the e-government landscape from a local government management perspective.

E-GOVERNMENT IN A LOCAL CONTEXT

E-Government Defined

E-government can be described as encompassing all things electronic (UN and ASPA, 2001), but this is not going to serve us well. Nor can we allow e-government to become synonymous with IT (information technology). As Moon (2002) noted, e-government may *use* IT; the IT should be viewed as a means to an end. Local governments already do use a wide range of specialized knowledge and tools to assess their financial status, to hire and fire employees, provide clean water, etc. E-government does present some unique challenges, but the local government management perspective needs to be that e-government is just one of many services. The IT and geek connection has helped to make e-government a responsibility that is easy to marginalize and leave for someone else to do. If e-government is rocket science, then only rocket scientists will have e-government. Using technology to better serve citizens is a management responsibility, and we need to approach e-government from a public management perspective (Zouridis and Thaens, 2003).

The nature of e-government was aptly described by Alfred Ho (2002) when he linked it to the

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