

Chapter 9

Governing E–Government (E–Governance): An Operational Framework

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ABSTRACT

Public administrators face considerable challenges in their quest of reforming government. E-government initiatives are tiny steps taken in the above-mentioned direction. Various e-government initiatives have been categorically documented in the IS and NPM literature. However, a majority of these projects are either still underway or have failed due to the lack of a proper governance framework. The existing body of research on governance of e-government largely focuses on technological aspects. It has not put much emphasis on institutional structures such as control and monitoring, accountability, and responsibility that are antecedents to good governance. Moreover, a majority of existing models are conceptual in nature. They do not offer any mechanism whatsoever to operationalize the concept of governance for e-government. In this chapter, the authors propose a framework of operationalizing governance of e-government at the municipal level. The proposed framework is based on the RASCI model prevalent in the practitioner literature of the IS paradigm. Finally, the framework is linked with key performance indicators in order to validate it against set objectives of good governance.

1 INTRODUCTION

Reforming government is a very challenging task. It is a two-sided effort which affects both the internal and external environments of the

government. Internally, the government is affected by organizational problems such as inter-agency collaboration and responsibility; externally, it is affected by societal problems of service/information delivery and accountability. The implementation of new technological tools probably can solve these problems and set governments on the path

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to reform. E-government is perceived as the latest in a set of reforms (Navarra & Cornford, 2003) proposed by the new public management (NPM) movement that aims at augmenting the efficiency and accountability of government institutions (Gregory & Hicks, 1999). It is the use of the Internet and associated ICTs for the provision of government services, 'covering changes of governance in a two-fold manner: 1) transformation of business of governance, i.e., improving service quality and delivery, reducing costs and renewing administrative processes; 2) transformation of governance itself, i.e., re-examining the function of democratic practices and processes' (Aicholzer & Schmutzer, 2000 in Devadoss, Pan, & Huang, 2003, p. 255).

The process of initiating and implementing e-government has been studied through several disciplinary lenses such as information systems, public administration and organizational behaviour (Löfgren, 2007). However, most of these papers, barring a few exceptions (Ciborra & Navarra, 2005; Saxena, 2005), have delved into the technological aspects of policy-setting and governance. The institutional structures guiding the decision-making and policy-setting processes have often been overlooked in the academic literature. Hence, the success or failure of an e-government initiative is often measured using benchmarking exercises based on simple technological strategy (Janssen, 2004). Moreover, there is a need to align the government strategy with performance measurement for evaluation purposes. Again, the existing literature evaluates e-government on the basis of either technological maturity or financial measures (Gupta & Jana, 2003; Irani, Love, Elliman, Jones, & Themistocleous, 2005). We, however, feel that the success or failure of an e-government initiative depends on a carefully developed governance strategy that includes technological, financial and institutional measures.

This paper proposes an e-government governance framework that includes technological,

financial as well as institutional measures. However, our focus is to highlight the importance of institutional structures of governance in public administration. The institutional structures have been invoked through control mechanism proposed in the governance framework. It focuses on two connected levels – agency and performance measurement - that are crucial for e-government success. The agency level includes political representation to which the IT governance council is accountable to. This level describes the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the individual actors in the IT governance council for each activity in the e-government strategy. The roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the actors decide the output at each activity level. The output is then carried over to the performance measurement level. Here, each program output is detailed with its activities and then linked to its initial, intermediate and long-term outcome. The proposed framework has been superimposed on an existing IT governance model proposed by Grant, Brown, Uruthirapathy, & McKnight (2007) in order to emphasize its operationalization mechanism.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The next section provides the theoretical background of this paper by discussing the literature on IT governance, accountability, and performance measurement. This is followed by an extensive explanation of the research design and the proposed governance framework. Finally, discussion, conclusion and avenues for future research round up the paper.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The proposed operationalization framework of governing e-government is based on existing theories of governance, IT governance and performance measurement.

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