Chapter 17
Successfully Applying "e" to Governance

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ABSTRACT

The challenge of better public service offering and the expectations of modern citizens and businesses, as well as the poor past practices of public organizations, bring forward the need to design and implement new systems. These systems are based on current information and communication technologies and are points of reference on the path towards e-government "enlightenment." However, the transition from the traditional processes to the modern ones can be long and strenuous, if relevant projects are not carefully implemented. Therefore, in order to successfully apply electronic practices and methods to public systems of governance, a step-wise approach needs to be formulated starting from traditional standards, leading to transitional procedures, and finally achieving simplification and increased quality of public service by exploiting previous experiences, overcoming past limitations, and applying the lessons learned.

INTRODUCTION

The effort of incorporating electronic methods and introducing modern technological applications to the offering of governmental services can prove to be extremely difficult either due to administrative issues, due to practical limitations, or due to "the fear of the unknown." Usually, the effort to convert the traditional process to an electronic one derives from the necessity to face long-term problems and the aspiration to provide higher quality of service to citizens and to all the involved parties. However, the plan of "electronizing" a governance model can plunge to failure if certain areas are not fully covered and mistakes from the past—which practice and theory both recognize as common—are not taken under careful consideration. Therefore, this chapter focuses on identifying some of the issues that stem from the limitations of the traditional system and may re-

strain the transition towards the new e-government systems. In addition, it describes the most critical subjects for consideration and management, while being in the transitional process, and concludes by providing insights on generic rules that lead to successfully applying "e" to Governance.

BACKGROUND

The gradual involvement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to everyday activities and business practices has transformed the managerial and administrative methods and raised the public's expectations concerning the levels and the quality of service provision. Accordingly, the trend in public administration has evolved in order to respond to modern market requirements and citizens' demands with the development of electronic government systems. The *e-government* revolution offers the potential to reshape the public sector and remake the relationship between citizens and government (Saxena, 2005).

Similarly, *e-governance* can be identified as a second revolution, following the movement of new public management, which may transform not only the way in which most public services are delivered, but also the fundamental relationship between government and citizen (The Economist, 2000) and become a pre-requisite for development (Sen, 1999). Governance is the outcome of politics, policies, and programs that concerns long-term processes and not immediate decision-making (Kettl, 2002). Thus, before attempting to pass over to the "electronic era," public organizations have to re-consider, adapt, and modernize all of their traditional old-fashioned processes.

FROM TRADITION…

The path that leads to the application of e-government methods and systems is marked by long-term routines, mistakes, and unresolved issues. In order to gain the ability to transform them, all involved parties should recognize, realize, and respect the conditions of today before envisioning the reality of tomorrow.

Some of the most critical issues of *traditional governmental practices* are:

- *Bureaucracy (piles of paperwork) and procedural plurality (complex and stiff procedures).*

"The type of an organization designed to accomplish large-scale administrative tasks by systematically coordinating the work of many individuals is called bureaucracy." The basic characteristics of bureaucratic organizations include specialization, hierarchy of authority, a system of rules, and impersonality.

However, "if we want to utilize efficient bureaucracies, we must find democratic methods of controlling them lest they enslave us" (Blau, 1956) and the Internet provides a powerful tool for reinventing governments and establishing democratic methods. It encourages transformation from the traditional bureaucratic paradigm, which emphasizes standardization, departmentalization, and operational cost-efficiency, to the "e-government" paradigm, which emphasizes coordinated network building, external collaboration, and customer services and supports the adoption of "one stop shopping" and customer-oriented principles in design, emphasizing on external collaboration and networking in the development process rather than technocracy (Tat-Kei Ho, 2002).

- *Decentralized agencies all over the country, lacking communication and exchange of information.*

The great number of similar services, dispersed all over the country, deprives of the possibility to communicate and exchange information at the crucial time when they should be ensured. In Greece, for example, before 1998, 300 tax offices

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