

Chapter 7

Designing and Implementing E-Government Projects: Actors, Influences, and Fields of Play

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ABSTRACT

In modern times, people and their governments have struggled to find easy, cheap, and effective ways to run countries. The use of Information and Communication Technologies is gaining ground as a means of streamlining public service provision by shifting tasks from the government to its citizens, resulting in reduced government costs, increased public revenues, and greater government transparency and accountability. The new buzzword is e-Government: the use of ICTs by government, civil society, and political institutions to engage citizens through dialogue to promote greater participation of citizens in the process of institutional governance. However, the implementation of such projects is complicated by the reality that while developmental problems in these countries are many, the resources available to tackle them are scarce. In attempting to investigate the interaction between new technologies, information flows, and the complexities of public administration reform in the developing world, this chapter examines not only the interplay of local contingencies and external influences acting upon the project's implementation but also aims to offer an insight into disjunctions in these relationships that inhibit the effective exploitation of ICTs in the given context.

INTRODUCTION

A popular discourse in international development policy, and one that has been fast gaining ground in India in recent years, is the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) platforms

and applications by the public sector as means of reforming government administration and providing citizens with a range of improved services. The new buzzword is e-Governance: “the use of ICTs by government, civil society, and political institutions to engage citizens through dialogue to promote greater participation of citizens in the

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process of institutional governance” (Bhatnagar, 2003: p.1). This may be achieved through the use of ICTs to improve information and service delivery, and to encourage citizen participation in the decision-making process; thereby making government more transparent, accountable, and efficient, and involving the governing or management of a system using electronic tools and techniques wherever the government offers services or information (Misra, 2005). The essential aims of e-governance are:

- To initiate a process of reform in the way governments work, share information, and deliver services to external and internal clients;
- To produce greater transparency in the functioning of government machinery;
- To help achieve greater efficiency in the public sector;
- To deliver services to citizens and businesses online, targeting tangible benefits such as convenient and universal access (time and place) to such services, and lowering transaction times and costs (Bhatnagar, 2005).

Conceptually, e-Governance may be divided into *e-Democracy*, defined by an express intent to increase the participation of citizens in decision-making through the use of digital media, and *e-Government*, the use of Information and Communication Technologies by government departments and agencies to improve internal functioning and public service provision (Virkar, 2011). e-Government is hence not just about the Internet and the use of Internet- and web-based systems with government and citizen interfaces (Heeks, 2006). Instead it includes office automation, internal management, together with the management of information systems and expert systems (Margetts, 2006); and is, in short, a process of reform in the way governments work, share information and deliver services to internal and

external clients through the harnessing of digital Information and Communication Technologies – primarily computers and networks – in the public sector to deliver information and services to citizens and businesses (Bhatnagar, 2003a). Broadly speaking, e-government may be divided into 2 distinct areas: (1) *e-Administration*, which refers to the improvement of government processes and to the streamlining of the internal working the public sector using ICT-based information systems; and (2) *e-Services*, which refers to the improved delivery of public services to citizens through ICT-based platforms.

THE ECOLOGY OF GAMES METAPHOR

From the turn of the century to the present, there has been a progressive movement away from the view that governance is the outcome of rational calculation to achieve specific goals by a unitary governmental actor (Firestone, 1989), and in that context metaphors based on political games have been extremely useful in developing new ways to think about the policy process. The concept of games has been also used as analogy to explain certain features of political behaviour. The best-known and most popular use of the games metaphor is that of Game Theory, the mathematical treatment of how rational individuals will act in conflict situations to achieve their preferred objectives – from the irrationality of life in schools to how coalitions formulate and pass bills in legislatures. The game metaphor, as developed in the social sciences, assumes that during their interactions actors develop strategies for negotiating with others and for maximizing their needs (Fine, 2000). Being in control is central, with actors acquiring the power to direct action and define situations to the extent that they can persuade others that their image of reality should be taken as the primary framework or the model by which the world should be interpreted.

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