Chapter 8
Urban Community Grids Management in Metropolitan China:
A Case Study on Factors Contributing to Mobile Governance Success

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ABSTRACT

Promoted by demands for a more responsive government, local governments across China are exploring the utility and feasibility of Urban Community Grids Management (UCGM) featuring mobile interaction and working. It is believed to provide not only innovative means for local public operations, but new channels for government-citizen communication and public service delivery (Chen, 2006). Though UCGM is generally perceived as one of the most recent innovation success and has great potential in public management on the level of municipal government in China (Jiang, 2009), current research offers little support in understanding factors that contribute to the wide success of UCGM (Liu et al., 2011).

Based on empirical data collected from Beijing, Shanghai and Wuhan, the authors will analyze the use of UCGM in public services delivery in three different cities. Aiming to evaluate and compare the impact of UCGM on local government operations, this paper is to develop a theoretical model that help to explain the success of mobile government in cities of different scales in China. Extracting commonalities of best practices, the authors attempt to dig deeper on social, organizational, and technological challenges each local government is facing when using m-technology to facilitate public service delivery.

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INTRODUCTION

Due to demands for a more responsive government, local governments across China have recognized the potential of using mobile and wireless technology (m-technology) for urban community management (Xu, 2007). They are exploring the utility and feasibility of Urban Community Grids Management (UCGM). UCGM refers to the management of government assets and public service delivery based on grids constructed artificially on electronic maps.

Featuring mobile interaction, UCGM not only provides innovative means for local public operations such as government asset management and internal operation efficiency and effectiveness improvement, but also serves as a new channel for government-citizen communication and public service delivery (Chen, 2006). According to official data, by the year of 2008, 52 Chinese cities headed by Beijing municipal government have adopted UCGM in urban public affair management (Wang et al., 2007). It is generally perceived as one of the most recent innovation success cases in public management on the municipal level in China (Jiang, 2009).

However, despite of the great potential and positive expectations about this trend in urban affairs management, current research offers little support in understanding the factors that contributed to the success of UCGM in China. Most academic papers published so far are of descriptive nature, and rarely provide any solid explanations for the UCGM's wide success (Liu et al., 2011). Thus, both academics and practitioners are facing problems when they try to theorize UCGM as the most recent innovation success in China's public operation management. Bearing this in mind, this research aims to provide a better understanding of the following questions:

- How do Chinese public agencies define the role of UCGM?
- What factors are contributing to UCGM's successful adoption in Chinese cities?
- What challenges do cities adopting UCGM face when they rely on UCGM to provide public services?

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO E-GOVERNMENT SUCCESS

Following the years of development of e-government projects worldwide, e-government evaluation and measurement are becoming increasingly important tools in understanding the benefits and challenges government innovations bring to traditional administration. Different methods have been employed by different scholars in the evaluation of e-government projects (Alshawi & Alalwany, 2009; Heeks, 2002; Gil-Garcı´a & Pardo, 2005), and critical issues and factors have been identified in many academic publications (Evans & Yen, 2005; Reffat, 2006; Becker et al., 2004; Park, 2008). These are described in the next two sections.

Measurements

Hard Measurements

Hard measurements refer to those that are relatively easy to gauge, because of their quantifiable and less ambiguous nature. Many scholars have developed hard measurements for e-government developments. Gupta and Jana (2003) identified hard measurements for e-government evaluation. They used tangible aspects including cost benefit analysis and benchmarks in e-government evaluation. They also introduced indicators and analytic tools such as return on investment (Sakowicz, 2004), cost benefit analysis (Kertesz, 2003), payback period, and present worth (Alshawi & Alalwany, 2009). Jain (2001) and Glazer (2002) also emphasized that cost benefit analysis is fun-