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Chapter VI

The Organizational Culture of Digital Government: Technology, Accountability & Shared Governance

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the characteristics of government organizations that influence their capacity to employ information technology (IT) in a strategic manner such that it assists them in their quest to meet governance challenges. We explore the organizational factors, architectural and cultural, that impede large government departments from

moving beyond the adoption of IT as a mere instrument that assists the execution of routine tasks in the traditional way and move into new forms of governance that alter the relationships between individuals and units within the organization and between the organization and its external environment. Our objective is to provide a useful framework for the analysis of the barriers to, and potential catalysts of, an IT mediated transformation of the governance of large government departments. Our insights are based on explorations of the issues surrounding the development of new governance models for data and informatics management within Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the federal department with a leading role in a wide range of activities relating to Canada's marine environment. As one of the world's leading marine science institutions, this case underscores the fact that technical competence alone is insufficient to facilitate a shift towards digital government. Using IT strategically is a governance challenge that is contingent upon organizational structure and culture.

Science and engineering produce 'know-how'; but 'know-how' is nothing by itself; it is a means without an end, a mere potentiality, an unfinished sentence. 'Know-how' is no more a culture than a piano is music.

E.F. Schumacher

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the characteristics of government organizations that influence their capacity to employ information technology (IT) in a strategic manner such that it assists them in their quest to meet the governance challenges they face. We explore the organizational factors, architectural and cultural, that impede large government departments from moving beyond the adoption of IT as a mere instrument that assists the execution of routine tasks in the traditional way and move into new forms of governance that alter the relationships between individuals and units within the organization and between the organization and its external environment.

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In the next section, we outline the challenges of a socio-economic environment driven by heightened change, complexity and turbulence — outlining the important role that IT can have in coping with a turbulent conditions. In the section following that, we explore organizational factors that act as barriers to the strategic employment of IT in a manner that is consistent with and contributes to the principal governance challenges of government agencies in a digital world. The obstacles explored include those that inhibit government departments from developing information systems that integrate across their organizational units and those that inhibit a more strategic design of accountability and technology within the context of digital government. The third

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