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Chapter XVIII

The E-Government Challenge for Public Administration Education

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ABSTRACT

As public sector agencies use the e-government model to improve delivery of their services, it is important that this model become integrated into education of future leaders of the public service. A fully scaled implementation of e-government requires more than simple automation of the existing processes. It can affect significantly the overall organizational structure of public agencies, their missions and goals, and the way they interact with customers and with each other. Because of its profound impact on the functions and even structure of government, implementing e-government involves significant challenges, including resistance to change and the problem of lack of information technology skills among public managers. To address these challenges, public affairs programs must include into their curricula courses that would prepare cadre qualified for the era of e-government. Survey results are presented outlining efforts of graduate public affairs programs to meeting demands related to the e-government model. Major components of the model are outlined and the extent to which these components are covered in graduate courses in leading public affairs programs is assessed.

INTRODUCTION

Today in public administration there is a new focus on the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) as a mechanism for improving public service. For government agencies, entering the new millennium was accompanied by a rapid increase in the use of various forms of ICT. The Internet is the most vivid example. Citizens can use Internet technology not only to obtain information about government services, download various documents and forms, but also to conduct their business with government through electronic transactions. Using ICT to facilitate government services has been called electronic or digital government. Descriptions of e-government in the literature indicate that it offers an extra value to both government and its customers (Kim & Layne, 2001; NECCC, 2000b; Zweers & Plangué, 2001).

The extra value of e-government is now possible because use of the Internet by citizens and businesses with which government conducts its business has been dramatically increasing. In 2000, the number of Internet users in the U.S. was estimated to be 110 million (GAO, 2000). Worldwide, more than one billion people will be using the Internet in the first decade of this century (Layne & Lee, 2001). Of all Internet users in the U.S., more than 60 percent interact with government web sites (OMB, 2002a). Those who are comfortable with using Internet technology can gain access to government services and information online through web portals any day of the week at any time of the day at their convenience. For government transferring services online also means savings in time and resources. It has been estimated that government can save up to 70 percent of its costs by moving its services online (NECCC, 2000a).

Overall, government agencies on all levels are embracing e-government and are increasing the number and the range of services provided online (West, 2000). The Federal government alone features 22,000 web sites and over 35 million web pages (OMB, 2002a). E-government is one of the key elements in the five-part President's Management Agenda for improving performance of Federal government. According to this agenda, the President's Budget proposes a \$20 million e-government fund for 2002 and \$100 million over the years 2002 through 2004 (OMB, 2002b). The Government Paperwork Elimination Act requires that by October 21, 2003, Federal agencies, when practicable, provide the public with the option of submitting, maintaining and disclosing required information electronically (GAO, 2001).

The notion prevails among government agencies and academia that implementing e-government will meet modern expectations of citizens and businesses regarding improvement of government services. According to this notion, full-scale e-government is much more customer-centric than is possible with the "traditional" way of conducting services over the counter. E-government features as "one-stop-shopping" to enable citizens and businesses to access to all government services and information through a single web portal. In a fully implemented e-government model, citizens would no longer have to be concerned with organizational boundaries of government agencies or limited jurisdictions of different departments. Government web portals are supposed to be structured in a way that would allow a customer to pay for a parking ticket and apply for a Federal scholarship at the same portal. Portals featuring single touch-point entry should allow a person to input his or her information, such as change of address, just once, and software would automatically update all government databases that use this information.

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