

“CORE FACTORS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL GOVERNMENT” DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

E-government is increasingly being implemented to increasing efficiency and transparency and bringing convenience and safety to citizens' lives, and consequently improving the quality of life.

E-government is a transformation of government processes, transactions, and policy making and implementation that are efficiently carried out through information and communication technologies to provide better and efficient services to the citizens while reducing waste and corruption and increasing accountability, transparency, and trust.

This paper discusses the core factors of government transformation including democratic system and citizen engagement. To accomplish this transformation, governments are introducing innovations in their organizational structure, practices, capacities, and how they mobilize, deploy and utilize the human, material, information, technological and financial resources for service delivery to remote, disadvantaged and challenged people.

Keywords: e-Government, citizen engagement, transformation, public trust, democratic system

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have transformed the world we live in and governments are no exception to this transformation. In the private sector, particularly in business, we have seen how ICTs were used to reach out to and build relationships with customers (B2C) and other businesses (B2B). Twenty years ago, a pure online business or e-business was a fiction. The private sector has gone through a major transformation within such a short time period.

While governments have followed the private sector in adopting technologies, until recently, there was no national strategic planning in fact many governments lagged behind the time when it came to adopting technologies and remain largely paper-based government compared to other progressive governments like Sweden and Denmark. Having a national strategy (or framework) on ICT in government and e-government can significantly reduce government waste, corruption, and inefficiency while increasing transparency, accountability, and efficiency. Some governments have been opening up to citizens via e-government and others are learning from successes and failures as they build their own e-government portal or infrastructure.

In this paper, we discuss about core factors of transformational government including democratic system, public trust, government transformation trends and challenges, and citizen engagement.

Background

E-government was popularized during the dot-com era in the 1990s. The emergence of e-commerce and Y2K advanced e-government, as governments began to adopt the changes taking place in the private sector. E-government is defined in various ways. (Relyea & Hogue, 2004; Seifert & Relyea, 2004) Some definitions of e-government are limited as a unit of the government, while others are very broadly defined, with e-governance integrated throughout the government. World Bank defines e-government as “the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government.” (Jeong & Kim, 2003; Kushchu & Kuscu, 2003; Trimi & Sheng, 2008) These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. (Gronlund & Horan, 2005; Reddick, 2005; Tian & Tianfield, 2003) The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and cost reductions.” (Definition of E-government, World Bank) E-government is a transformation of government processes, transactions, and policy making and implementation that are efficiently carried out through information and communication technologies to provide better and efficient services to the citizens while reducing waste and corruption and increasing accountability, transparency, and trust. Furthermore, it is about creating an one-to-one relationship with the government in which citizens are empowered to take part in the democratic process and policy making.

E-government is increasingly being implemented in all areas of government administration at both the local, regional and national levels, increasing efficiency and

transparency and bringing convenience and safety to citizens' lives, and consequently improving the quality of life (Fountain, 2001; Mulgan, 2000; Northrup & Thorson, 2003). While it was initially promoted as a means of improving internal management efficiency in public administration, e-government is increasingly considered an important measure for enhancing citizen access to government services and expediting the delivery of services to citizens (Morris & Moon, 2005; Streib & Navarro, 2006). E-government is used to enhance citizens' access to government as much as government's access to citizens using current network technologies. (Irani et al., 2006; Premkumar et al., 2006; Heeks and Bailur, 2007; Seifert and Chung, 2008)

FACTORS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Democratic System

Democracy and good governance are a goal in itself because of the values on which they rest, but at the same time, they are also the most critical means to promote development and poverty eradication. An efficient, effective and democratic government is the best guarantor of social justice and an orderly society. Only democratic governments—because they are participatory, transparent and accountable, respect plural and diverse perspectives, promote gender and social equity, and allow freedom of choice, expression and beliefs—are best suited to advance those goals and ideals. A democratic government that reflects popular will is better equipped to ensure social justice, to create an even playing field that allows its citizens the freedom to realize their full potentials and creativity; and to deliver the services and opportunities that people need. Though many studies have not been able to show that democracy will lead to greater economic growth, there is an evidence that democracy ensures greater redistribution of resources. One of the consequences of democracy is that it generates political incentives for decision makers to respond positively to the needs and demands of society. The stronger a democracy is the greater and more effective will be the pressure of these incentives on the decision makers, thus the higher the well-being of the whole society.

Having in place a democratic system, however, is not sufficient. Government institutions must be based on clear and widely accepted rules; have committed leaders and qualified people to undertake appropriate reforms in the economic and social spheres; be able to mobilize resources and manage expenditure; and to operate in the most cost-effective way possible by making use of new information technologies. In other words, a democratic government must be effective or it will alienate citizens. The absence of effective government makes citizens cynical and apathetic towards civic activities and institutions, erodes their confidence and trust in both the government and its elected officials, and generally leads to a diminution of the government's legitimacy and its authority. The suspicion of government is

reflected in declining voter turnout, the difficulties of attracting competent and idealistic people in public service, and in the general inability of the government to deliver services to the citizens.

Diminishing Public Trust

According to several studies and statistics trust in government has been diminishing in many parts of the world. In some advanced democracies, including the United States and selected countries of Western Europe, voter turnouts are decreasing. Furthermore, the growing influence of money in the electoral process and the strong role of special interests on public policy decision-making are being viewed in many democratic nations as “deviations” from the spirit of democracy. A similar trend is emerging in developing countries. Most critical of all some democracies have not been able to address the question of equity and social justice effectively and in the last quarter of a century poverty and lack of opportunities is still a persisting challenge in many countries around the world.

The theme of rebuilding trust in government is therefore of particular relevance to all those who are concerned with strengthening democratic institutions and enhancing government effectiveness. At an intuitive level, we can single out four main causes for the loss of confidence in the government. First, in certain contexts, government officials are perceived as unethical and deceptive. Some studies have shown that people believe that government officials are not trustworthy because they do not keep their electoral promises and do not act in the interests of society. Second, governments are perceived as ineffective in delivering services. This is of particular relevance since the legitimacy of a democratic regime is based in great part on the capacity of the state to deliver services that are relevant and of high quality to all sectors of the population in a society. This also has to do with lack of know-how or knowledge capacity building. More than ever today, public administration capitalizes and utilizes ICT for development as we are now living in what is commonly known as the knowledge society era. Knowledge management itself has become an important aspect of the work of governmental agencies at the federal, regional or local levels, because governmental organizations are basically knowledge-based organizations. The public sector has traditionally had a capacity to bring together the public and private sectors, as well as different strata of society to share knowledge about policy issues or about service delivery. The question is thus not whether governments have ever managed knowledge or whether they should, but rather how they can improve their practices to better adapt to the new knowledge-intensive economy, in the process, building trust in government. Third, they are seen as unresponsive since they do not respond to the needs of citizens, especially those of marginalized groups in society. Fourth, they are wasteful because they are perceived to use resources inefficiently.

There may be different explanations for the decrease in trust in government. To begin with while demands and challenges have greatly changed over the past decades, government institutions are still shaped in great part according to early models of democratic governance. The changing role of the State as well as new international challenges have resulted in the need for new skills, attitudes and behaviors among public officials at all levels, as well as more innovative practices and strategies.

In addition, government institutions and practices have sometimes evolved in ways that undermine the true spirit of democracy. This is certainly the case of the influence of money over electoral processes which, contrary to the tenets of democracy, does not ensure all citizens equal opportunities in exercising the right to be elected. What is more, the media may also be responsible for having a tendency to showcase only the negative actions of governments, thus nurturing among the population a sense of mistrust. Above all, citizens are much more demanding of their governments and are asking that government be reformed in order to enhance public participation, to expand political opportunities, and to improve its operations as well as the quality of services provided.

With low public trust, government officials and politicians have little legitimacy to implement political programmes, as well as represent and act on behalf of citizens. A low trust in government institutions can also lead to growth of the informal sector, tax evasion, corruption, crime, and eventually social anomy. Moreover, when trust in public institutions is low, informal institutions, such as the mafia or terrorist groups, can come to be regarded as more authoritative than the State in regulating economic and social affairs and providing services turning the State into an empty shell. History has shown that democracies are fragile in nature and need continuous support in order to survive as low legitimacy and apathy can open the doors to authoritarian regimes. In other words, a democracy is not a “once and for all” conquest but it relies on the vigilance and participation of all citizens at all times. It is interesting to note that “mistrust” in government officials and the majority is built into all constitutional democracies through mechanisms of checks and balances, including an independent judiciary. Even with the enthusiastic urging of a majority whose representatives have meticulously observed proper processes, government should not trample on fundamental rights nor should the majority. In order to protect fundamental rights, including minority rights, limits are imposed on the actions of politicians as well as on the majority itself. Constructive criticism is a key element to a healthy and well-functioning democratic system whereas mistrust can be very dangerous.

As a response to these challenges, selected governments around the world are attempting to revitalize their public administration, make it more proactive, more efficient, more accountable, more service-oriented and closer to the people. To accomplish this transformation,

governments are introducing innovations in their organizational structure, practices, capacities, and how they mobilize, deploy and utilize the human, material, information, technological and financial resources for service delivery to remote, disadvantaged and challenged people.

Government Transformation Trends and Challenges

Government Transformation Trends

Governments have been under pressure to respond to the demands from their citizens and to the increasing complexity and change in their global environments. The response to these demands has taken the form of programmes of administrative transformation, administrative reform or administrative development. Movements towards reform in the area of public administration and governance systems and institutions have emerged in all corners of the globe. In fact, most countries in the world, whether rich or poor, democratic or non-democratic are facing strong challenges from different directions and sources. Within a framework of extreme diversity in local conditions and situations leading to administrative change, it is possible to identify four major trends.

1) Construction or re-construction of a State that operates according to the rule of law

There are a number of countries across the world which are undergoing a process of State construction or re-construction. Within this trend, we may distinguish two different movements. The first one that characterizes countries that need to build from scratch or re-build their government institutions, as is the case of some African countries and Afghanistan, which have experienced war and internal conflict resulting in State collapse. The second one relates to countries that have embarked in a process of political and economic change. This is, for example, the case of the countries of Eastern Europe who had to cope with a difficult transition from centrally planned economies to market economies. The challenge in this case is to dismantle old State institutions and to bring them in line with new values of openness, participation, and transparency.

2) Modernization of the State

This is a challenge that affects all countries and is related to the adaptation and improvement of administrative structures, managerial capacities, financial management and technological adequacy to new needs and demands emerging from societies which are much more complex and heterogeneous than a few decades ago. In other words, it is a process of re-adjustment of State institutions and public management to the need for greater cost-effectiveness, quality, simplicity and participation in government. The need to enhance efficiency in the public sector and to cut public costs, which is at the heart of the New Public Management school of thought,

has resulted in a series of measures, including privatization, deregulation, and the introduction of market-like mechanisms in the public sector. In a number of countries, debureaucratization and decentralization have been increasingly coupled with new approaches to management, exemplifying openness, adaptability, participation, flexibility, diversity and responsiveness.

3) Reconfiguration of the role of the State

With the spread of globalization and the changes occurring at both the domestic and international levels, the functions and role of the State have been transformed substantially. The worldwide trends of globalization and citizen participation have compelled Governments to debate “the role of the State”, to explore various partnerships with private sector and civil society organizations and to consider re-engineering of government systems, retraining of public officials and rethinking of public policies. Given the rapid changes in technology and the global economy, Governments have also been motivated to learn to continuously re-evaluate government performance in relation to citizen demands and global pressures.

The general configuration of State responsibilities has changed and this has introduced important modifications both in the policy arena and in the State’s requirements for high-level skills and knowledge capacity building, qualitatively and quantitatively. Overall, the course of change points to a shift of focus away from hands-on management and the direct production of services and goods towards strategic planning with a view to the establishment and maintenance, refinement and reform of an enabling framework for private enterprise and individual initiative. A parallel shift has moved the State’s centre of gravity and with it the locus of power. Decentralization, debureaucratization and deregulation are adding to the importance not only of local government, but also of non-state actors on whom significant functions are devolved or outsourced. At the same time, a range of tasks and policy decisions, traditionally handled by national bureaucracies in their respective capitals, is being increasingly transposed to an inter-governmental or supranational level as a result of increased flows between countries of goods, capital, labour and information. The State is the hub of activities connecting multiple partners and stakeholders from varied fields, regions, cultures, occupations, professions and interests.

4) Revitalization of democracy

A fourth trend, which has emerged in the past years, is related to a growing demand to make democracy more meaningful and to allow for more opportunities of participation in policy-making. In many advanced democracies, including the United States and Western Europe, citizens and civil society organizations are showing increasing dissatisfaction towards how

democracies are functioning. For example, the growing influence of money in the electoral process and the strong influence of special interests on public policy decision-making are being viewed in many democratic nations as undermining full citizens' participation. As a result, citizens are asking that government be reformed in order to enhance public participation, to expand political opportunities, and to improve its operations as well as the quality of services provided.

As part of the great movement to revitalize public administration, we see all over the world, innovation and experimentation sprouting in central government, local government and individual agencies, particularly in the area of service delivery.

Government Transformation Challenges

While some countries are experimenting with new sophisticated institutional and managerial methods, others are still grappling with the establishment of a basic public sector infrastructure. Unfortunately, we are witnessing the development of an institutional and managerial divide between countries.

Governments around the world are grappling with several difficult social and economic issues, including the effects of the global financial crisis, poverty, unemployment, poor education systems, health epidemics, environmental degradation and the effects of climate change. Overall, governments are faced with three main domestic challenges. First, they must operate and provide more far-reaching and higher-quality services with reduced resources and limited operational capacities. That is to say, governments must use their resources and build capacities not only more effectively but also more creatively by, for example, enlisting the support of the private sector and civil society in service delivery. Second, governments must make public institutions more accountable, responsive, inclusive and effective by promoting a more citizen-oriented public administration and by effectively engaging citizens in policy-making decision processes. Third, and most importantly, governments must respond more adequately to citizens' demands for greater participation in public governance. At the international level, governments must deal effectively with globalization processes, and issues related to international peace and security. All of these challenges put a strain on the capacity of any state to accomplish its mission on its own.

Citizen Engagement

There is growing consensus that innovative and participatory public governance, through enhanced citizen engagement, is indispensable to achieving the MDGs by 2015. The inability of governments to deliver quality services equitably, as well as to promote more employment

opportunities and better living conditions for all has resulted in widespread discontent for the current forms of public governance. Citizens are demanding to be more actively involved in public affairs and to be engaged in many other ways than just at election day, every four or five years. This means greater participation in key spheres of policy-making decisions, including how taxes should be spent and on what, and better and more effective services. Increasingly, governments need to engage and empower citizens to co-produce public value, which, in turn, requires innovative institutions, mechanisms and processes, as well as capable human resources in the public sector, with the right mix of skills and capacities; appropriate national development strategies to engage citizens and adequate use of ICT tools.

Citizens are customers when accessing public services and should be dealt with respect, efficiency and responsiveness. They assume their full role of citizens when referring to their political and civil rights, as well as participation in the political arena through elections, consultations and other means. Furthermore, they become “co-producers” of public services when they participate in the formulation of policies relevant to service delivery or they are directly engaged in the delivery of public services. According to Jeremy Millard, a new paradigm is needed. At its core should be a desire to redistribute power so that responsibility for meeting the challenge of economic, demographic, environmental, social and cultural change is shared between citizens, states and communities, as well as with the private sector.

Engaging citizens in public governance has not only an intrinsic value in terms of deepening democracy, but it can also be instrumental in enhancing governments’ capacity including deliver quality education services, promote gender equality and empowerment in public administration and society at large, deliver health services which can help reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, as well as eradicate disease, and promote a sustainable environment. Accordingly, innovation in citizen engagement is today a necessity of every country that wishes to promote effective governance and meet the many demands of its citizens, as well as the emerging national, regional and international challenges.

In particular, there seem to be three main reasons why citizen engagement is instrumental for effective governance and inclusive development, i.e., (a) economic, (b) political and (c) social. In terms of economic rationale, it is well known that governments must do more with less and, therefore, enlisting the support of citizens in the design, delivery and/or monitoring of services is one way to overcome the limited resources governments face today. Moreover, if citizens are involved in decisions that affect their lives, as for example whether to build a bridge or a hospital in a particular village, public resources can be utilized more efficiently because they target the needs of the affected population.

In terms of political rationale, citizens are demanding for deepened democracy, which has an intrinsic value, as all people aspire to shape, in a meaningful way, the decisions that affect their lives, and is instrumental to making governance more effective. The reasons for this increased demand for participation stem from a number of factors. First, while demands and challenges have greatly changed over the past decades, there seems to be a crisis of representative democracy institutions and practices as they were conceived in the past since they no longer respond to the needs of an active citizenry, new challenges, globalized and connected world. Second, the organization and deployment of human resources in the public sector is still largely based on a traditional model of public administration whereas the changing role of the State, coupled with new international challenges and the introduction of technology as a tool to transform government, have resulted in the need for new skills, attitudes and behaviors among public officials at all levels, especially as relates to their relationship with citizens. It is not surprising then that the core competencies for the public sector of the 21st century differ in many ways from the past, especially as the demands placed on public servants, in terms of skills, knowledge and capacities, are rapidly evolving and becoming more complex. Third, citizens are much more demanding of their governments and are asking that government be reformed in order to enhance public participation, to expand political opportunities, and to improve its operations, as well as the quality of services provided. Globalization, greater interconnectedness of people living in different corners of the globe facilitated by ICT, as well as heightened advocacy of global and local NGOs, have contributed to enhancing citizens' awareness of their rights resulting in an increase of demands being placed on governments. As shown by the many popular demonstrations around the world, there is a rising appreciation that citizens wish to actively take part in decisions that affect their own lives. Citizens are also demanding that governments are more effective in the way they operate and deliver services, and that they are more open and disclose information about what they do.

Finally, in terms of social rationale, it is increasingly evident that even if governments had all the resources at their disposal to provide quality services, they do not always possess the necessary knowledge to identify citizens needs, particularly those of the poor and marginalized groups. Services can be delivered in a more equitable way if citizens take part in the design and delivery of services because they are most aware of what they need. It is well known that the most effective poverty eradication strategies stem from an accurate analysis of the population's needs and from collective ownership of the proposed solution, and this can only be done with the affected citizens. In fact, a number of innovative practices from around the world have shown that when citizens are part of the solution to the governance problems they face, rather than mere recipients of ready-made solutions, which do not fit their needs, there are

better results in terms of increased quality of life and inclusive development. The most sustainable and appropriate solutions to governance problems are found with the people not without them, and citizens are increasingly viewing themselves as active agents of change.

The multiple demands and challenges that national governments face today call for effective governance, which requires an open, transparent, equitable, sustainable, connected and inclusive public administration that is capable of designing and implementing innovative strategies, practices and tools to transform challenges into opportunities for socio-economic development. The core issue of public governance today is that governments cannot govern alone nor is it desirable that they do so. Engaging citizens and partnering with civil society and private sector is being increasingly recognized as a pillar for inclusive, equitable and effective development.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The role of ICTs has dramatically changed over the past decade. Even in the private sector, until the mid-1990s, ICTs were commonly considered as corporate expenses with limited return on investments (ROIs). Governments had more passive approaches to adopting ICTs, often lagging behind the private sector. There was also lack of a legislative framework for e-government, largely due to ignorance or unwillingness to adopt transparency and accountability. Many global organizations define e-government in transitional terms as stages or phases. This implies that e-government is an evolutionary progress. However, as we have seen in the private sector, with new ICTs, it is not always necessary to go through the same stages that others have gone through.

As a response to these challenges, selected governments around the world are attempting to revitalize their public administration, make it more proactive, more efficient, more accountable, more service-oriented and closer to the people. To accomplish this transformation, governments are introducing innovations in their organizational structure, practices, capacities, and how they mobilize, deploy and utilize the human, material, information, technological and financial resources for service delivery to remote, disadvantaged and challenged people.

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