



Chapter XVII

What Skills are Needed in an E-World: E-Government Skills and Training Programs for the Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

The transition to e-government applications for public service delivery and management involves significant changes to the traditional systems of public management. E-government applications modify the internal interaction between government units and private sector providers of public services and the external relations between government, citizens, and other members of the public. The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), in combination with significant policy changes and systems of operation, has the potential to provide greater transparency and democracy. By reducing information transaction, storage, and dissemination costs, ICTs allow for greater access to information and records. The evolution of interactive communication technologies has opened additional channels for the public to access public sector information, comment on public decisions, and interact with their elected officials.

INTRODUCTION

Unlike their private sector counterparts, public organizations typically are late adopters of new advances in information technology and are constrained by the public sector decision-making process. Public organizations are also subject to the outside view that business applications can be used without significant adaptations. Public sector managers face issues concerning how to utilize ICTs to improve government processes to meet efficiency, equity, and openness goals while operating within the financial and time resources available. Managers are often involved in the project management, selection, and implementation of information technology and may or may not have both the technical and political skills to choose the best outcomes.

E-government requires a change in public sector mindsets from government-centric to customer-centric. Organizational change, which breaks down the segmented “stove-pipes” of government bureaucracy and facilitates cooperation between agencies and government levels, will be crucial to pull together an interoperable virtual electronic government interface. Across the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries the public sector has been under pressure to be more responsive to a diverse set of concerns and to continue to improve the efficiency, speed, and effectiveness of public service provision. Public agencies across OECD governments have attempted to use e-government applications to integrate public services through information technologies in order to provide “single points of service” to improve the interaction between government and its constituents.

Information technology has also reduced the time period of decision cycles by placing an added condition of meeting public expectations for quick, efficient, and accurate decisions and actions. OECD governments have begun to have an appreciation for e-readiness that is apparent in the national and sub-national government efforts to reorganize the provision of ICT services through coordinated IT departments headed by chief information officers (CIOs).

The use of information technologies has the potential to improve the process of democratic decision making through increased connectivity between constituents and decision-makers, increased transparency through greater documentation and dissemination of public information, and by encouraging collaboration and consultation during the decision making process. There has been a widespread adoption of e-government solutions by OECD national, regional, and local governments in order to provide wider distribution of information concerning the activities and products of government. The development of a seamless e-government interface will require more than IT and project management skills. The public sector will face significant organizational change, coordination, and political issues and will need to develop continuous training and education.

To meet these challenges during the early stages of ICT development, governments have opened online channels for constituents to receive services and, in some cases, participate in the decision-making process. The widespread adoption of e-mail by individuals in the private and public sectors has added an avenue for communication with decision makers. Online access and dissemination of public information, government forms, legislation, and other public documents has lowered both the cost and time barriers to individuals who need to collect static public information. Transparency has also been enhanced through technologies, such as Web-casting of meetings, structured

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