

Chapter 13

Bridging From e-Government Practice to e-Government Research: Past Trends and Future Directions

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the state of the field of e-Government research to assess strategically how scholars may best target future research initiatives. While e-Government research is characterized by a great deal of interaction between practitioners and academic researchers, most research continues to either lack sufficient rigor to produce generalizable results or in search of rigor becomes too abstract to be directly useful to guide practice. Thus, despite the explosive growth in the field, there remain numerous opportunities to develop research projects that can both interest and aid practitioners and generate new theoretical and empirical knowledge. Through two reviews—one of the specialized e-Government literature and the other of general public administration and political science journals—this conceptual chapter identifies a number of research areas in which e-Government scholars and practitioners in the emerging economies may target their efforts.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the state of the field of e-Government research to assess strategically how scholars and practitioners in emerging economies

may best target future research initiatives. E-Government—the application of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to a broad array of governance processes—and research on e-Government are both burgeoning fields. Governments throughout the world and at all levels

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-0324-0.ch013

of government have been making significant ICT investments. In 2007, the United States federal budget allocated \$64 billion for ICT investments and a similar amount is being invested by state and local governments (Cresswell, Burke, & Pardo, 2006). Across the European Community, spending is well over \$100 billion per year. In Asia, the gross levels of investment are lower, but the rate of growth is much higher. In the Asia-Pacific region, excluding Japan, investments are growing by more than 8% a year. In China and India these growth rates are even higher at around 15% (Cresswell, Burke, & Pardo, 2006). While the current economic crisis may slow investment in the United States, the new Administration is likely to place renewed emphasis on e-Government given President Obama's skillful use of the Internet during his campaign and transition and his intention to create a chief technology officer position in the White House. In 2009, based on President Obama's White House Open Government Initiative, federal government agencies were directed to implement specific actions online based on "the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration" (Orszag, 2009, p. 1).

At the same time, academic researchers have been drawn to this new phenomenon. They have been motivated by the revolutionary rise of the Internet and the significant impacts ICTs have had on other areas of society including political campaigning, blogging, and e-Commerce, and examine if and how similar changes will arise in the public sphere. The rapid development of e-Government has also raised concerns and new questions. There have been notable project failures in which technologies fail to meet their most basic goals (Heeks & Bailur, 2007). Managers of ICT projects continue to be buffeted by significant political, organizational, and technological risks that attend major investments in new technologies, and there is wide spread doubt that public organizations have been able to fully reap the benefits offered by these technologies. Political officials

are calling for improved evidence that their investments in public funds are yielding dividends. On top of that, is the sense that e-Government is interacting with other social trends—notably globalization and innovations in public management practices—to redefine the very nature and structure of government (Dawes, 2009).

This widespread interest has sprouted a number of specialty journals and conferences devoted to e-Government, and these topics have begun to be more prominent in main stream public administration and some political science journals in the U.S. In addition, a number of research institutes have sprung up. Major examples in the U.S. include the Center for Technology and Government at SUNY, Albany, the Digital Government Research Centers at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, the Rutgers e-Governance Institute, and the e-Government program at Brown's Taubman Center for Public Policy. Internationally, other examples include the e-Government program within the European Commission's Information Society Program, Taiwan's e-Governance Research Center, and the United Nations e-Government program.

To see where the scholars and practitioners in developed and developing countries may most profitably target future research, we conducted two surveys of the literature. The first focuses on the specialized e-Government scholarship including a number of journals and conference proceedings focused on e-Government. The second examines the academic literature, focusing on the top public administration and political science journals. While the research tradition is increasingly rich, it is also highly varied, examining a broad set of technologies and governance questions. Thus, many areas remain understudied. The strength of the specialty literature is its rich institutional detail and policy focus, but its main weakness is its lack of theoretical and methodological rigor, which diminishes the generalizability of its findings. In contrast, the academic literature is firmly grounded in theoretical traditions and typically employs

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