

Chapter 93

Web 2.0 and Government Transformation:

How E-Government and Social Media Contribute to Innovation in Public Services

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ABSTRACT

The existing body of knowledge on public sector transformation explores the concept that e-government contributes to improving public sector services and increasing the participation of citizens in government planning and change initiatives. This chapter provides information on the potential for a digital ecosystem of government, citizens and businesses to use Web 2.0 and social media innovation to shape government transformation and contribute to government's quality-of-life mission. The chapter includes examples of how web-centric technologies affect e-government innovation and proposes a new planning framework for web-centric services.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years the impressive and mostly unforeseen growth in individual use of Web 2.0, social media and related technologies resulted in many citizens thinking about these technologies and tools as an essential part of their daily life and a new dimension in quality of life (e.g., a *digital quality of life*). A consequence for government is

that public sector leaders have opportunities to develop web-centric services that add value to government services, contribute to quality of life, and enable a higher level of citizen engagement and social inclusion. To pursue these opportunities, government planners are confronted with a new reality that systems comprised of e-government, social media and broadband technologies represent a new category of public infrastructure (*e-infrastructure*) required to deliver an expanding portfolio of e-services.

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In addition to the technology and e-infrastructure complexities, government planners must consider the variations in demand for *E-Government and Social Media* (ESM) services. Just as consumer *market segments* exist in the private sector, there are diverse *citizen segments* in the public sector. Developing an understanding of these citizen segments, deciding how to serve segments with ESM services, and overcoming barriers to change are all part of the planning challenge. Strategic planning frameworks are needed that enable the public sector to create innovative solutions on a segment-by-segment basis.

This chapter addresses the actual (and potential) impact of Web 2.0 on government strategy and innovation in public services. The chapter provides analysis and commentary on the evolution of e-government, public sector application of web-centric technologies, and a planning framework for delivering ESM services that contribute to quality of life.

BACKGROUND

A recurring public sector theme is that government needs to change and become more customer-focused, e.g., public sector services should be designed based on the needs of the citizen as a customer. At a time when public sector managers attempt to transform government organizations from an internal focus to customer-focused cultures and develop new services and performance metrics, they face additional pressures to provide innovative access to government for citizens who use a wide range of digital devices to connect via social media, mobile, wireless, and broadband networks. As individuals, families and businesses become increasingly dependent on network-based services and near-continuous online connectivity, their expectations for e-government also increase. Adding to these trends—in the midst of recent economic and financial crises—are the pressures for governments to reduce budgets, streamline

operations, and derive more returns from income-generating services while creating competitive, knowledge-driven, sustainable economies. Unfortunately, the pressures to reduce government spending places some segments of society at greater risk, in particular disadvantaged groups (such as low income, unemployed, minorities, disabled and elderly citizens) that have higher dependence on government services and support. Therefore, an issue for public sector planners is how e-government, social media and other innovations will enable improved (and lower cost) access to public services. Public sector policy makers are also mandating that governments ensure citizens and businesses are cooperative participants in government plans and decision-making activities, including participation enabled by e-government.

The breadth and depth of these forces acting on the public sector lead to concerns (Yu, 2007) about whether existing strategy models are adequate to plan the next generation of public sector services, especially in light of the growing need to coordinate ESM plans more closely with other aspects of government planning and measure results in terms of the impact on quality of life. Other challenges for public sector planners involve innovations in e-government and e-infrastructure that look beyond low-risk incremental changes to complex breakthrough solutions. “Progress in a host of policy areas—including health care, transportation, energy, environment, public safety, and the economy—will be determined in part by how well nations develop and deploy information technology.” (Atkinson and Castro, 2008, p.12)

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In the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. Government implemented a wide range of technology programs designed to provide new ways for its organizations to communicate by means other than the *Plain Old Telephone System* (POTS). The U.S.

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