

Chapter 9

The Games People Play: Exploring Digital Addiction within the Context of the Gamification of ICT Project Design for Public Sector Administration Reform

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ABSTRACT

The recent global diffusion of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) has dramatically raised expectations for technological change to support widespread global socio-economic progress and political reform. Against this backdrop, the chapter seeks to, through the use of a case study based in the Indian city of Bangalore, unravel the social, economic, and political dynamics shaping e-government projects used to reform public sector institutions, and to the further application of this knowledge as elements of game design used in the conception, development, and eventual implementation of associated software and hardware platforms. In particular, the work aims to determine whether the day-to-day use of the new digital technologies in the public sector leads eventually to radical transformations in administrative functioning, policymaking, and the body politic, or merely to modest, unspectacular political and bureaucratic reform and to the emergence of technology-based, obsessive-compulsive pathologies and maladjustive Internet-based behaviours amongst individuals in society.

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the last two decades, globalisation and Information Technology have been rapidly dismantling traditional barriers to trade, travel and communication, fuelling great promise for progress towards greater global equity and prosperity. Attracted by the ‘hype and hope’ of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), development actors across the world have adopted computer-based systems and related ICTs for use in government as a means reforming the inefficiencies in public service

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0778-9.ch009

provision. Whilst a number of these electronic government or ‘e-government’ projects have achieved significant results, evidence from the field indicates that despite the reported success stories, the rate of project failure remains particularly high.

Much as been written about e-government within a growing stream of literature on ICT for development, generating countervailing perspectives where optimistic, technocratic approaches are countered by far more sceptical standpoints on technological innovation. However, in trying to analyse both their potential and real value, there has been a tendency for scholars to see e-government applications as isolated technical artefacts, analysed solely as a collection of hardware and software. Far less work is based on empirical field research, and models put forward by scholars and practitioners alike often neglect the actual attitudes, choices, and behaviour of the wide array of actors involved in the implementation and use of new technology in real organisations, as well as the way in which the application shapes and is shaped by existing social, organisational, and environmental contexts.

This chapter seeks to, through the use of a case study, unravel the social dynamics shaping e-government projects used to reform public sector institutions. In particular, the research analyses actor behaviour, motivations, and interactions surrounding the conception and maintenance of e-government software platforms facilitating these transformations. The value of such an approach is based on a review of existing ICT and development literature which tends to be overly systems-rational in its approach and, as a consequence, often fails to recognise the degree to which project failure (viz. the general inability of the project design to meet stated goals and resolve both predicted and emerging problems) is symptomatic of a broader, much more complex set of interrelated inequalities, unresolved problems, and lopsided power-relationships both within the adopting organisation and in the surrounding environmental context.

The main goal of this chapter is thus to examine the issues thrown up by the organisational and institutional transformations that occur in public administration through the conception and application of ICT platforms therein from a multidisciplinary perspective, through the use of a single central case study. The case study from which this chapter is drawn focused on a project aimed at digitising property tax records and administrative processes within the Revenue Department of the Greater Bangalore City Municipal Corporation. In recognising the need to turn property tax into a viable revenue instrument that delivers high tax yields without compromising on citizen acceptance, the Bangalore City Corporation sought to improve its property tax administration system through the introduction of a computerised database and digital mapping techniques used to track compliance and to check evasion.

E-GOVERNMENT: DEFINITION AND SCOPE

Simultaneous with the shift towards a more inclusive process of participation in political decision-making and public sector reform has been an increased interest in the new digital Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the ways in which they may be used to effectively complement and reform existing political processes. Developments in communication technologies have historically resulted in changes in the way in which governments function, often challenging them to find new ways in which to communicate and interact with their citizens, and ICTs today are seen to possess the potential to change institutions as well as the mechanisms of service delivery, bringing about a fundamental change in the way government operates and a transformation in the dynamic between government and its citizens (Misra, 2005). The work of the public sector has traditionally been highly information-intensive; government has been, and still remains, the single largest collector, user, holder and producer of information (Heeks,

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