Chapter 6

From E-Government to Digital Government:
The Public Value Quest in the Tunisian Public Administration

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ABSTRACT

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) know a steady evolution that leads to the development of digital technologies. These affect human lives and organizations' activities. In particular, they have become ubiquitous in the public sector almost throughout the world. The extensive use of ICTs in public administration (PA) contributes to the emergence of digital government. It is perceived as a means of public value creation and represents a part of a paradigm shift in public management. This chapter intends to review the milestones of PA reforms in a developing country, namely Tunisia, to highlight how it is using ICTs to create public value. A content analysis of data on public sector reforms and e-government strategies is performed. The results show progressive ICTs deployment by Tunisian PA over time. They illustrate a search to public value creation through the digital government.

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have known continuous progress leading to the development of digital technologies and simultaneously digital government. These technologies were recognized for their potential to re-invent the public sector. Benefits result from their capacity to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public services, reduce costs, and improve communication, interaction, as well as collaboration between people and public administration (PA) (OECD, 2003; UN, 2002-2018; Gill Garcia et al., 2018). Moreover, it was assumed that they help to build trust, equity and transparency and to combat corruption (Gross Lopes et al., 2019; Valle-Cruz, 2019). Briefly, according

to these authors, ICTs and digital government have the capacity to transform the public sector and to lead to the creation of public value. The latter is the value created by PA through services, laws regulation and other actions. It refers to various benefits for society, which are determined by citizens' preferences (Kelly et al., 2002; OECD, 2014; Valle-Cruz, 2019).

Public value has been introduced in the sphere of public sector since the work done by Moore (1995). Recently, several authors have shown an interest in the public value and have agreed that ICTs and digital government are critical to its creation. This has led to a growing body of research, both theoretical and empirical, on the value of e-government (Twizeyimana and Andersson, 2019). The latter authors have classified the existing studies on the topic into three streams of research. The first stream is concerned with understanding the value of e-government. The second one seeks to hypothesize the value of e-government by developing methods for measuring e-government from a value perspective. The third stream is concerned with hypothesizing the value of e-government for developing methods for the design and implementation of e-government from a value perspective.

This chapter intends to review the evolution of the approaches of the public management and in parallel the progress of ICTs' use by the PA. It studies their contribution to the PA modernization and the public value creation. At the empirical level, the author will carry out a descriptive study based on a content analysis of secondary data related to the use of ICTs and digital government by Tunisian PA. The purpose is to highlight the progress of the ICTs' use by the Tunisian PA and to check how they are being used as a means of the PA modernization and public value creation.

Conducting this research may be justified at theoretical and managerial levels. The theoretical level is related to the fact that although the digital government was studied from a public value viewpoint, researches from a developing country's perspective remain scarce (Karunasena and Deng, 2012; Deng et al., 2018; Okong'o and Kyobe, 2018; Gross Lopes et al., 2019; Twizeyimana and Andersson, 2019). So, a contribution to reduce this theoretical gap on the topic may be made.

At a managerial level, mechanisms to measure the success of Tunisian e-government initiatives are not defined (Chaabouni and Kamoun, 2018). Yet, the public value perspective has been proved "appropriate" and "necessary" in evaluating the performance of e-government initiatives in developing countries (Karunasena and Deng, 2012; Deng et al., 2018). Therefore, this perspective is mobilized to identify the public values that are searched through Tunisian digital government initiatives. This may lead to dress a list of public values that projects managers can use as a diagnostic tool to assess their success and to justify the expenditures in a context of resources scarcity.

This chapter is organized as follows: the first section will review three approaches of public management, namely the traditional PA, the new public management and the public value management. Second and third sections describe the evolution to digital government and the concern for creating public value. The pursued method is highlighted in section four. Results about the evolution of ICTs' use and digital government in Tunisian PA and the quest for public value creation are exposed in section five.

APPROACHES TO PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

When discussing the modernization of the PA, researchers (Kelly et al., 2002; Marcon, 2014) evoke three principal approaches. These are the traditional approach of PA, the new public management, and the public value management. These will be briefly exposed in the following.

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