Chapter XI

Pursuing Radical Transformation in Information Age Government:
Case Studies Using the SPRINT Methodology

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ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with the pursuit of radical organizational transformation in information age government. It focuses on three cases, each of which used the SPRINT (Salford Process Reengineering Involving New Technology) process reengineering method. This method was designed specifically for e-government projects with the objective of inculcating radical change. Although each reported case can be described as successful in some measure, this chapter questions why none of the cases seeds a process of ongoing innovation, and why all settle on a set of changes that is less radical than the vision set out within the originating project. Each case sees the remaking of processes within an accepted set of goals, and not the remaking of these goals themselves. This restriction is reported, using the concept of organizational alignment

with a declared set of goals. It is shown how in each case the organization favors the less radical amongst a set of alternative proposals. It is argued that in the end, SPRINT, which places great value on its participative ethos, is also constrained by that ethos. This paper reflects the implications for e-government projects more widely.

INTRODUCTION

E-government has been defined in various ways. Many definitions pivot upon access channels to government, a focus that is reflected in the UK government's widely cited performance indicator, BVPI157 (Cabinet Office, 1999). For example, Luling (2001) defines e-government as online government services (i.e., Internet-enabled interaction with government). This is perhaps a limited view, identifying e-government with access to services rather than the refashioning of the services themselves. Others take a more complex position, identifying tension between bold and cautious interpretations of its concerns (Holmes, 2001; Traunmuller & Wimmer, 2003) However, there are also more confident interpretations. Deakins and Dillon (2002) refer to e-government as an arrangement of IT capabilities, competencies, and organizational practice spanning both business-to-business and business-to-consumer activities. Dow et al. (2002) argue that it will transform not only the way in which most public services are delivered, but also the fundamental relationship between government and citizens. In this, e-government is seen as a more general concern with the technological and organizational refurbishment of traditional government bureaucracies. As such, it can be partially aligned with the literature on business transformation (Venkatraman, 1994). However, its distinctiveness is preserved by the combination of issues that come within its gamut; as well as the common concerns of process redesign, organizational structuring, and so forth; there are questions of governance, voting, and community access to information (Heeks, 2001).

The SPRINT method is a public domain resource (SPRINT, 2004) aimed at an audience of UK local government (i.e., cities, boroughs, counties, and districts). It is concerned with the analysis and design of e-government projects. It has been adopted by more than 18 councils in England and Wales, although its origins lie with just one, Salford. SPRINT forms a key element in the City's Information Society Strategy (Salford, 1999). The Strategy's aim is to harness the potential of ICT in order to enhance local service delivery and democratic processes, and to enhance the social and economic well being of the people of Salford through improved service delivery, greater social inclusion, and development of the local economy. To underpin the initiatives, a strategic methodology was required that focused on the innovative use of ICT to realize radical transformation; one of the work programs was explicitly targeted at the development of such a methodology, within which lies the genesis of SPRINT.

This chapter is motivated by the problematical definitions of e-government. It describes e-government as being concerned with IT enabled change, with an aspiration to bring about radical change. This is problematic from two points of view: that this aspiration is not shared by all, and that there are practical limitations as to what may be achieved. It follows from this that process change methodology might assist the change process. This chapter, therefore, focuses on this question: to what extent can such a methodology facilitate radical change in a problematic context?

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