

Chapter 5

Government and Inter-Organizational Collaboration as Strategies for Administrative Reform in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

The use of Information Technologies in government as a strategy for public sector reform has increased in the last few years. Governments around the world are attempting to obtain the benefits of what is now called “electronic government.” However, Information Technologies are only one component of what should be a much more complex reform strategy involving changes in organizational characteristics, institutional arrangements, and contextual factors. Based on a survey of public servants from the federal Mexican government and using institutional theory as the analytical lense, this chapter presents descriptive results about the characteristics, objectives, results, and success of inter-organizational electronic government initiatives. Overall, the projects were considered successful, and some of these aspects could be considered important for administrative reform efforts. The areas identified with the greatest success were (1) improvement in the quality of service, (2) creation of a more transparent government, and (3) creation of the necessary infrastructure for the use of Information Technologies. In contrast, the areas with room for improvement were (1) fostering citizen participation, (2) cost reduction, and (3) increased agency productivity.

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INTRODUCTION

Countries around the world have envisioned information technology (IT) applications in government, or e-government, as powerful tools for public sector reform and organizational transformation. In fact, there is a long tradition of research analyzing the effects of IT on organizational change (Checkland & Holwell, 1998; Cherns, 1977; Fountain, 2001; March, 1981; Orlikowski, 1992, 1996). Although it is common for managers and policy makers to believe that IT *per se* will change organizational performance, most recent research in this area recognizes complex and dynamic interactions among technology, organizational practices, and institutional arrangements. To better understand the effectiveness of e-government programs as public reform strategies and tools, it is necessary to understand not only IT, but also organizational and institutional configurations.

Therefore, theoretical approaches that overemphasize or only pay attention to the technology-related aspects of electronic government offer partial and limited understanding of this phenomenon. In recent years, researchers have developed and used integrative and comprehensive theoretical lenses for e-government research (Fountain & Gil-Garcia, 2006; Orlikowski & Iacono, 2001). One of these lenses is institutional theory, which has been identified as a powerful way to study information systems in general and electronic government in particular for several years and from diverse disciplines (Hassan & Gil-Garcia, 2008). Fountain (2001) proposes a comprehensive and integrative theory based on the more general institutional tradition developed in disciplines such as economics (North, 1999; Rutherford, 1999), political science (Peters, 2001), or sociology (Brinton & Nee, 1998). This chapter uses the technology enactment framework (Fountain, 2001) in order to understand public managers' perceptions about collaboration in terms of organizational, institutional, and contextual factors, as well as the technology-related characteristics

and substantive results of inter-organizational e-government initiatives as strategies for administrative reform in Mexico.

The chapter constitutes a summary of questionnaire responses from participants in inter-organizational IT projects in the Mexican federal government during President Fox's Administration (2000-2006). The questionnaire was pursued as part of a research project on e-government and inter-organizational collaboration. The main goal of this research was to better understand the difficulties and potential impacts of IT projects that integrate government processes across multiple agencies to offer informational or transactional services. Many of these initiatives in Mexico have been motivated by both the availability of new information technologies and international trends associated with new public management (NPM). Most of these projects started as part of two important initiatives in Mexico: the e-Mexico program and the Good Government Agenda.

The chapter is organized in five sections, including the foregoing introduction. Section two provides the historical and theoretical background of the chapter, including a brief explanation of institutional theory and its importance for the study of electronic government initiatives. Section three briefly described the research design and methods used to conduct a survey to public servants from the federal Mexican government. Section four presents the main results of the survey, highlighting different aspects of the respondents and their initiatives such as project success, project results, and organizational and institutional factors. Finally, section five provides some concluding remarks and suggests ideas for future research in this area. This final section also includes some general recommendations to guide reconfigurations of institutional frameworks and improvements in organizational structures and processes.

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