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Public Attitude, Service Delivery and Bureaucratic Reform in e-Government: A Conceptual Framework

Gajendra Sharma, Xi Bao and Wang Qian
School of Public Administration and Law, Dalian University of Technology,
No. 2 Linggong Road, Gaoxinyuan District, Dalian 116023, China

Abstract: Electronic government or e-government provides the convenience and availability of government services and information to public. The study of e-government is focused primarily on government information online, public service delivery online and on the attitudes and implication patterns of people. e-government can provide important insights into bureaucratic reform, political development, the policy-making process and the role of civil servants in information societies. The purpose of this study is to investigate formation of effective e-governance and its influence on public attitude, public service delivery and bureaucratic reform. A conceptual framework of e-government was developed based on literature survey to highlight a fully functional e-government. The study of e-government, using an institutional perspective, provides an opportunity to observe the collision of stable practices and traditions with technological innovations, experiments and flexibility allowed to bureaucrats for smooth functioning of e-governance. e-government has the potential to build better relationships between government and the public by making interaction with citizens smoother, easier and more efficient.

Key words: e-government, public attitude, public service delivery, bureaucratic reform, ethics

INTRODUCTION

E-governance is the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for providing government services, exchange of information and communication between government and public. The government services are made accessible to the citizens in an efficient, convenient and transparent way through e-governance. e-government usually refers to the use of IT, ICTs and other web-based communication technologies to improve and develop efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery in the public sector (Harris, 2000). e-government delivers the implication of technologies to facilitate the government operation and the distribution of government information and services. The government services will be made available to the public in a convenient, efficient and apparent manner through the e-governance. The three salient target groups that can be distinguished in governance concepts include government, citizens or public and businesses organization. As such, e-governance has no distinct boundaries (Garson, 2006). The four fundamental models of e-government include government to citizen, government to employees, government to government and government to business (Rossel and Matthias, 2007). e-government permits for government transparency and responsibility. Government transparency is vital as it facilitates the people to be informed about the government action as well as the policies they are trying to employ (Atkinson and Daniel, 2008). e-government is a well-situated way for the public to be more engaged in political movement.

The purpose of this study is to investigate formation of effective e-governance and its influence on public attitude, public service delivery and bureaucratic reform. The scope of e-government study can be highly strengthened and enhanced by importation of several streams of institutionalist investigation and methods. Institutional studies, establishing on a rich base of theoretical and empirical research in e-government are more difficult than the technical issues. Such study is not meant to succeed studies of information and service provision of citizen attitudes and uses of e-government, but to harmonize them by examining institutional and organizational structures and processes and their role in structuring the context within which bureaucratic reform is designed and implemented (Gajendra *et al*., 2012). Formal institutions also involve wide societal agreements on such matters as property rights and suitable accountability, oversight and resource allocation

Corresponding Author: Gajendra Sharma, School of Public Administration and Law, Dalian University of Technology, No. 2 Linggong Road, Gaoxinyuan District, Dalian 116023, China Tel: +86 18242980468

structures and practices. So, a multilevel integrated information system affects behavior directly and indirectly in government (Fountain, 2007; Nee and Ingram, 1998).

Implementation of e-government has increased in number of countries but the rate of adoption varies from nation wise. Usually developing countries have been lagging behind in e-government implication as compared to developed countries (West, 2006). Various sources specify that strong political leadership is one of the important components for e-government success (TAF, 2007). A fully functional e-government website should include an e-participation framework which provides online information on government policies and programs, laws and regulations, budgets, e-consultation mechanisms and tools and e-decision making (Gil-Garcia and Martinez-Moyano, 2007). Technology has enabled reforms in number of areas and e-government is largely recognized as elementary to the change and as a modernization and enhancement of government (Foley and Alfonso, 2009; Bhuiyan, 2011; Qiang and Sharma, 2009). e-government highlights a new element of government that is transforming interactions between government and public around the world (Morgeson and Mithas, 2009).

Public service delivery refers providing people with services of public interest. Examples are education, security, energy, healthcare, water and public transport. The requirements that are placed on public services are different from products and services that are provided by the market. Public service delivery quality is a multifaceted perception (Steenhuisen, 2009). Thus, it is difficult to evaluate quality (De Bruijn, 2007). The quality of public service delivery in some cases suffers from efficiency and cost (Blok *et al*., 2010). The influence of new technology on information access, government service delivery and public attitudes about government has long been debate (Sharma *et al*., 2010; Gajendra and Sun, 2010). e-government refers to the delivery of government information and services electronically through the internet or other digital media. Unlike traditional media, internet delivery systems are nonhierarchical, bilateral, nonlinear and available 24 h a day, seven days a week. The nonhierarchical character of internet delivery facilitates public to search for information at their own convenience. The interactive features of e-government allow both public and bureaucrats to receive and send information. By providing two-way interaction, e- governance has been considered as a way to develop service delivery and responsiveness to public, creating higher public confidence in government (Raney, 2000).

Administrative, political and ethical issues derived from e-government such as privacy, security and digital divide should be well considered. e-government implementations must reflect on security and privacy issues to ensure protection of individual rights (Fang, 2002). Security refers to protection and controlling of information. Relevance of security is specific to the situation and sensitivity of the information. Security protection as an example, for public information, such as the minutes of committee meeting on the web, is not rigid as would information specific to a personal information. Privacy in general, refers to respecting the information right attributed to an individual. Information privacy protection laws are usually put in place to scrutinize (Chung, 2007). In order to make sure that nations avoid creating a digital divide and create environment to ensure the growth of the knowledge economy contributes to carrying out a democratic process of equitable, efficient and sustainable development and new patterns of cooperation among public, private civil society are needed (Sharma and Qiang, 2010).

PUBLIC ATTITUDE AND ETHICS

The impact of new technology on public-sector service delivery and public attitudes about government has long been controversial among political observers. The study investigates the content of e-government to locate whether it is taking advantage of the interactive features of the internet to enhance service delivery, democratic responsiveness and public outreach. Besides this, a national public opinion survey observes the capability of e-government to influence public views about government and their self-belief in the efficiency of service delivery (West, 2004). Implementing internet contents and public assessments, the e-government revolution has fallen short of its capacity to transform service delivery and public trust in government. It has the possibility of enhancing democratic responsiveness and increasing beliefs that government is efficient (Gajendra *et al*., 2012).

The people are limited to retrieve information by government officials. They can place order and accomplish a handful of services online and start to manipulate informational databases. Moreover, they can search web sites for desired information, as opposed to the information officials would like to present to them. This helps them to access information in the form they prefer. The state has single place where all other agencies can be accessed, that enhances public ability to locate information. New communication technologies increase interaction by removing geographical constraints, promoting ideological variety, opening public to more diverse viewpoints and encouraging deliberation

(Thompson, 1999; Gajendra *et al*., 2010). Government sites are interconnected with each other and a range of fully executable services are available to public and organizations. Government sites offer choice for web site personalization to have integrated and fully executable online services. These features help public to customize information delivery and take advantage of the interactive and two-way communications capability of the web.

The interactive feature of web technology and its ability to speed communications has the potential to make governance function better (Gajendra *et al*., 2011; Hui-ying *et al*., 2010). Government activities are mediated by a range of factors such as institutional arrangements, group conflict, cultural norms, budget scarcity and prevailing patterns of social and political behavior, each of which restricts technology's capability to transform politics and society (Fountain, 2001). The governments are divided into competing organizations and jurisdictions that limits policy makers' ability to get bureaucrats to work together to encourage technological innovation. In viewing the stages of e-government transformation, it is useful to sketch out how to measure the extent of alteration. There are four practical stages of e-government development that distinguish where different government agencies are on the path of transformation: (1) the billboard stage, (2) the partial-service-delivery stage, (3) the portal stage, with fully executable and integrated service delivery and (4) interactive democracy with public outreach and accountability enhancing features. In the first stage, officials deal government web sites as highway billboards, that is, static mechanisms to exhibit information. They post publications and reports to offer data bases for viewing by online visitors. There is a less opportunity for public interaction or two-way communication between citizens and government officials. The people can read government reports, observe proposed legislation and discover who works in specific offices but they cannot control information or have interaction with it.

Electronic services are advantageous to both public and government. Agencies become conscious about cost reductions and improved efficiency while people receive prompt and convenient services (Trinkle, 2001; Gajendra *et al*., 2012). The success and reception of e-government movements, such as licence renewal and online voting, are dependent upon public intention. A number of studies have analysed user adoption of e-commerce (McKnight *et al*., 2002; Gefen *et al*., 2003; Pavlou, 2003; Van Slyke *et al*., 2004). There is now a need to recognize center elements influencing public adoption of e-government. A survey of chief administrative officers at government offices states that 74.2% of government organizations have a web site, but 90.5% have not conducted a survey to observe what online services people and businesses actually desire (ICMA, 2002).

Some important ethical issues connected to e-governance are e-communication legislation, e-commerce legislation, e-procurement legislation and database legislation (Sachdeva, 2008). The e-governance implication needs to make the trust of people. It needs to make sure that the data and transactions of the information are secure. The information shared by the public should also remain safe and the privacy of the people needs to be preserved. Whenever, an individual gets into any transaction with a government agency, he discloses a lot of personal information which can be misused by the private sector and anti-social elements. Thus, the public should be ensured that the information flow would pass through reliable channels and secured network. Trust in cyberspace emerges as an important factor, once the communications networks enable unprecedented level of convenience in the workplaces and homes, i.e., online shopping and e-transaction which may affect the quality of life in a positive way (Chung, 2007). e-government implementations must reflect on security and privacy to ensure information systems and individual rights are respected. Generally security refers to protection of the information systems resources and controlling access to the information itself (Fang, 2002). The online culture of disclosure holds important promises for people, including empowerment of themselves and others, the creation of communities of support around shared struggles and the development of a broad ethical sense of responsibility with respect to privacy (Silverstone, 2007). Good governance is one of the most important public concerns that the government can deliver to its people. It is one of the fundamental reasons why we have governments and we agree to abide by roles and responsibilities which fall under different forms of governance.

PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY AND BUREAUCRATIC REFORM

A successful implication of Public Service Delivery (PSD) requires that governments develop better capacity to handle potential hazards. Such distinct systems, with different socioeconomic and political institutional environments influence the effectiveness of collaborative service delivery management between the countries. Collaborative PSD refers to public management innovations that involve private sectors in providing public services, such as contracting out, vouchers and public-private partnerships. By assembling the

advantages of both the public and private sectors, PSD is expected to generate worth for the money, managerial flexibility and customer choice and community empowerment (Jing and Savas, 2009). Claimed advantages are dependent on a government's ability to monitor new relations, issues and uncertainties (Van Slyke *et al*., 2004). The likely problems of PSD are inadequate competition, declining performance, loss of monitoring and corruption (Sclar, 2001; Von Weizsacker *et al*., 2005). These challenges are more serious in developing countries that implement the PSD strategy. Thus, it needs to recognize the government capacities needed for efficient PSD and identify how they are used in different countries.

PSD must be supported by the government so as to be sustainable for long period. The important issue is to develop market competition, especially when governmental expenditures concern for a major part of the demand. PSD usually requires connecting public and private labor markets by outsourcing low-skilled jobs or minimizing their reimbursement to market levels. The unemployment, wage and benefit cuts, lack of trust and loss of control may discourage public employees and managers. Union confrontation is the most serious restriction on PSD in number of nations because of the high level of unionization in the public sector. In order to overcome political and legal barriers, a transparent dealing of employees is becoming the regulation rather than the exception (Clark *et al*., 2000). Federal contractors are needed to fulfill with the minimum wage requirement. PSD may challenge the political legality of the government by delegating to private contractors the power of implementation that influences the public interest. Public concerns such as honesty, decency, integrity, accountability and impartiality may be weakened (Jorgensen and Bozeman, 2002). PSD indicates delivering people with services of public interest. Some examples are education, security, healthcare, energy, water and public transport. The demands that are placed on public services are different from services and products that are offered by the marketplace. PSD quality is a multifaceted notion (Steenhuisen, 2009). Therefore, it is difficult to estimate quality (De Bruijn, 2007). The quality of PSD in some extend suffers from efficiency and cost (Blok *et al*., 2010).

In a democratic society, public take up multiple positions such as service recipients, taxpayers, service providers and owners of government (Kettl, 2002). The public administration literature in general, treats people as inhabiting both ends of a political continuum viz. the ultimate governed and the ultimate governor. In this connection, public often provide views on policy issues that conflict with bureaucrats. Political power in a democratic society initiates from the public or citizen and is then delegated to elected officials and bureaucrats, who govern through legislation and public policy. The public play two pivotal roles in the government, the bureaucracy functions mainly as a policy framer or implementer. Politicians and bureaucrats follow policy changes that appear to reveal inventiveness and entrepreneurship to mobilize political support. They may create to preserve long-term public interests. Bureaucratic entrepreneurship may greatly benefit the public, such as defense programs, space programs, or large-scale IT projects. Bureaucrats may demonstrate boldness when implementing new programs to increase their independence, developing the public's awareness of the innovativeness. Disclaiming the conventional perception of bureaucrats' unsatisfactory performance, Goodsell (2004) employed various sorts of evidence to protect the bureaucracy and presented bureaucrats as often being very capable, committed and mission minded. It is feasible that the government starts different policy innovations and persuades people to support the new approaches.

Unlike bureaucrats, people examine the speed of technology adoption without regard for concerns about equity and access. Public are much more aware about privacy and security issues and higher levels of concern in these areas are associated with an aspiration to sluggish e-government implementation. Public are less eager about e-government, less interested in higher expediency and more information and serious about security and privacy. Bureaucrats are more enthusiastic, drawn by the promise of the technology and confident of their capability to exploit it in actual fact. However, awareness of operational constraints and their responsibility to equitably provide information, services and access is crucial. In comparison to citizens, bureaucrats seem to be more well-known with e-government, better informed and more confident about its predictions. As leaders in modernizing e-government, public servants support its rapid implementation. The formal governmental institutions include regulation, legislation, budgetary processes and the structures and regularized practices to executives, legislative and judiciary branches of government. Informal, micro-level institutions involve those social processes that have been studied as "social capital": norms, trust and networks of individuals (Putnam, 1994; Fountain, 1998; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Burt, 2005).

The number of services available online or the cultural shifts in civil service attitudes toward cross-agency arrangements are important. The principal motivation in the study of e-government in general, is to examine whether the government being created is more democratic, along some dimension, than the government

being left behind. Therefore, normative inquiry, informed by strong scholarly foundations in political philosophy and theory and in political science and political sociology, is highly essential in the e-government field. Understanding these differences between public and bureaucrats and the reasons for them is a vital public management concern. Government decisions about the rapidity of new technology use and communications with public must take into account these different rational models. If not government directly addresses the privacy and security concerns of public, it increases risk substantiating their lowered expectations and misbelieve. In the same manner, quick implementation that fails to take deliberate, procedural protections could lead to security oversights and inequities. There appears to be a concern among public about inferior service and access standards. Government decisions about the speed of e-government adoption must identify the public or citizen as ultimate governed and governor. As the ultimate governed, public will be most affected as technology transforms service delivery, participation and information dissemination. The ultimate governor, citizens can inflict confusion with those whose actions lead to negative consequences and disgruntled expectations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As a service provider, the state or government increasingly transforms into a regulator of outsourced or privatized services. The government policy-making will remain unaffected by changes of outsourced services. The government has a key role for the transformation of its operational activities to its public. It has to monitor the provision and the providers of the services, along with their quality, their prices and public accessibility to them. The globalization arises on policy levels, a global and concurrently a local level, as well as intermediate regional levels, above and below the nation-state. If the government is not merely go around by these new policy levels, it has to find ways to articulate its activities such as decision-making, operations and regulation with the actions going on at various levels. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of e-government on policy level.

The government has three prominent functions: operations, policy-making and regulation. The globalization and liberalization policy force government to distinguish more clearly on each of these three functions. The policy-making function is increasingly divided between the global, the regional, the national and to the local levels, involving each time actors from civil society and the private sector. More or less the same can be stated as the operational function, from which the government is increasingly moving forward. The regulatory function, remains primarily at the nation-state level and involves non-state actors such as consumer organizations to a limited extent. E-governance is thus the combination of four above aspects. It is a dynamic concept which implies the growing use of the ICTs for the three government's major functions (e.g., e-government, e-regulation and e-democracy), increasingly including non-state actors (Sharma *et al*., 2010). Taking into consideration of current literature, it can be identified three main concepts of e-governance, i.e. e-governance as customer satisfaction, e-governance as processes and interactions and e-governance as technology.

There are different stages of e-government which reveal the extent of technical complexity and interaction with users: information dissemination (one-way communication); two-way communication; service and financial transactions; integration and political participation (Table 1). The basic form of e-government uses IT for disseminating information, simply by posting information on the web sites. Two way communications is characterized as an interactive mode between

Table 1: e-government framework with examples

Government type	Examples
Government to government	Information flow, bilateral communication, financial transactions
Government to government employees	Pay taxes online, employees benefit statement, pay dates, holiday information
Government to individual-political	Election dates, receive election forms, receive election funds, registration and online voting
Government to business-public	Online regulation pat taxes online, receive program funds, regulatory information, submitting comments online
Government to business-marketplace	Request clarification, request for proposals, online payments, marketplace for venders

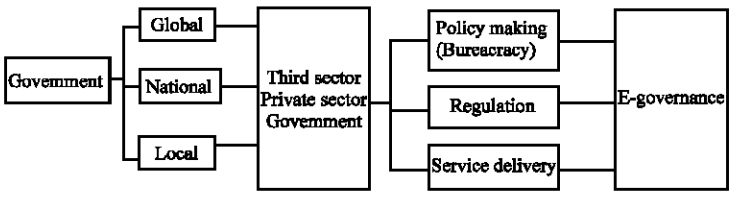

Fig. 1: Conceptual framework of e-government

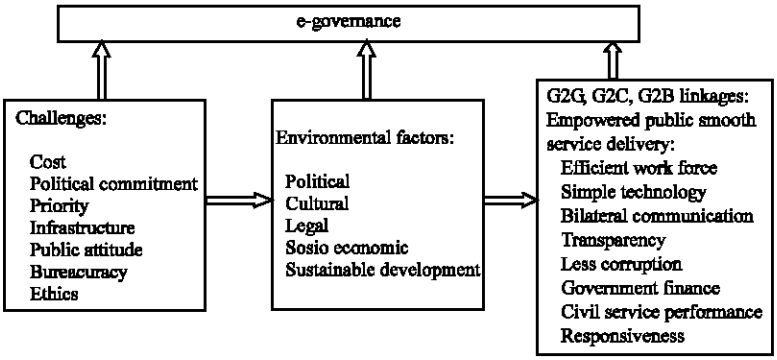

Fig. 2: A proposed framework on challenges and influencing factors on e-governance

government and public. In this stage, the government incorporates email systems as well as information and data-transfer technologies into its web sites. An appropriate example is the Social Security Administration's web site, where the agency receives new Medicare card applications and benefit statement requests, then processes and responds to service requests (Hiller and France, 2001). The government allows online service and financial transactions by completely substituting public servants with internet-based services. This transaction- based e-government can be achieved by inserting live database links to online interfaces (Layne and Lee, 2001). Through this online service and financial transaction, people can renew licenses, pay fines and apply for financial support (Hiller and France, 2001; Layne and Lee, 2001). In next stage, the government attempts to integrate various government services for the enrichment of efficiency, user friendliness and effectiveness. This stage is a highly challenging task for governments as it requires a long time and resources to incorporate online and back-office systems (Hiller and France, 2001). The next stage involves the development of web-based political participation, in which government web sites involve online public forums, online voting and online opinion surveys for more direct and wider interaction with the public. This stage highlights direct participation of internet-based political activities by the people.

A proposed framework on challenges and influencing factors on e-governance is shown in Fig. 2. The framework presents four key variables of the service operation from an e-governance perception. These include linkages in terms of G2G, G2C and G2B, focus on customer service and cost-cutting through trouble-free service delivery in a timely manner. It focuses the need to minimize bureaucratic problems. It is characterized by uncomplicated communication technology applications including telephone and VoIP to maintain a bilateral communication network. It delivers key form of e-services using an efficient workforce. Furthermore, it aims to empower public, reduce administrative corruption, increase efficiency in service delivery and improve in areas such as government finance, transparency, responsiveness and civil service performance.

The framework also provides the primary e-governance implementation. In addition, it focuses that the e-government services are not trouble free. A systematic interchange of challenging issues, together with the political, socio-economic and cultural environment may influence the policy making and implementation of e-governance architecture in developing countries. As a cost-saving and time saving mechanism e-governance has the potential to contribute to sustainable development as well. The above framework provides some guidance to policy-makers and government sector managers with respect to the nature and prospect of such operations. As the significant issues are identified and discussed, it will provide them with a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities of e-governance services. It also provides academics and researchers with prospect of conducting empirical research to further enhance the framework.

CONCLUSION

The e-government presents a number of challenges for public administrators. Governments are going online and using the internet to deliver public services to its citizens. Electronic government is thus a government's use of technology, particularly web-based internet applications to enhance the access to and delivery of government information and service to its people, business partners, employees, agencies and government entities. It has the potential to establish better relationships between government and the public by making interaction smoother, easier and more efficient.

While there are many emerging programs and initiatives on e-government throughout the world in all levels of government, it is our argument that it will require implementation over another decade, as infrastructures must be built, policy issues resolved and interoperability established. As e-government becomes more and more prevalent, the public sector organizational structure will change accordingly. The focus of change will be on the system efficiency and the public. The power conflicts over departmental boundaries and control of services will surface as integration progresses. Government processes will be organized for public convenience instead of the convenience of the government. The universal access and privacy and confidentiality including standard ethical issues as well as public focused change must be considered throughout e-government development. Government should well understand the public attitude through interactive communication which will ensure the bureaucratic reform and effective public service delivery. Future research needs a deep investigation with empirical data to understand the bureaucratic reform for smooth e-governance process and its influence on service delivery.

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