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e-Government and Employment Services

A Case Study in Effectiveness



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Preface

The objective of this volume is to give a framework to understand the complex phenomenon of Electronic Government (e-Government) and to present some models able to explain the way e-Government works successfully in some cases, while in many cases it does not fulfil its purposes. Then, this volume proposes a Use Case in the area of *Services to Employment* by analysing two systems, the *Italian Borsa Lavoro Lombardia Portal (BLL)* and the *Catalan Services to Employment Portal (SOC)*. The aim is to show how the differences in the employment policies and in the adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) bring two different solutions but eventually two similar results.

The idea is that ICT in its innovative forms (service technologies, communications means, web-based cooperative and the like) is sufficient to label services provided by Public Administrations (PA) as *electronic Government*. This gives the impression of an enhancement in efficiency and effectiveness of government functions by public entities. However, in most cases, what happens is a pure enhancement in the supply and exploitation of public services, which is far from being a true improvement of government activities.

By analysing Services to Employment and presenting our experience within Regional, National, and European Projects in this domain, we give a framework and then propose a comparison between the Italian and Catalan systems, which operate on very similar economic and social areas. From the comparison, and given our methodological framework of analysis, we discuss the reasons for failure and success of the two systems according to their initial purposes and to the obtained results.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Abstract This chapter contains an introduction to the basic e-Government concepts that frame the approach followed in this publication. We also analyze the historical evolution of these systems in terms of the main actions carried out by institutions in support of their development. The analysis in support of the development of the proposed framework is applied to two real-life cases to improve understanding of e-Government and of why conceptual models sometimes fail.

Keywords e-Government · Coopetition · Public employment services · Information and communication technologies (ICT) · Public administration information systems

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is currently massively present in Public Administrations (PA) to support administrative functions, to provide added value services to citizens, enterprises, and organizations, although simply favoring customized and updated knowledge, and to provide government functions.

As a common agreement, the use of ICT in Public Sectors is named e-Government, giving the idea of an improvement of quality in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in government functions by PA. As such, e-Government seems to be targeted to create a revolutionary network infrastructure, where government departments share information and deliver services to their stakeholders to accomplish their needs through services Government to Citizens (G2C), Government to Business (G2B) and Government to Government (G2G).

However, e-Government seems still far away from being a true tool of governance and, in the largest meaning, e-Democracy, which needs actual sharing of knowledge and accessibility to advanced functions by various actors: citizens (progressively becoming e-Citizens), enterprises, organizations, and institutions. These actors should be enabled not only to retrieve information and forms from the web (administrative and passive functions), but also to participate in the administrative life and political debates of matters regarding the PA and community life. E-Government maximizes the exposure of PA to public services provisioning; this

means that, within the next few years, citizens will be able to look through the black-box of Government becoming much more than a voice in the democratic process.

The objective of this volume is to give a framework to understand such complex phenomenon named *e-Government* and to illustrate the different conceptual models that can explain why e-Government sometimes works successfully while in many cases it has been unsuccessful. The framework proposed in this volume aims first at classifying e-Government applications and secondly to identify, for each class, the main problems still awaiting a solution so that true e-Government, intended in its full meaning, can be achieved.

We present *e-Government systems* supporting *Employment* as a paradigmatic example of e-Government functions. These systems, in their complexity, well collect most of the salient aspects of e-Government system.

The volume shows that the main difficulty in developing systems of Electronic Government lies in the prevailing integrated nature of social systems supported by the PA. The crucial point, in our opinion, which is among the focuses of the volume, is that the job market, in order to work properly and to be well governed, needs a federation of adequately supported and coordinated initiatives (although in a competitive and/or cooperation context, which we call *coopetition*, as explained in the volume). As a consequence, their support *information systems* should be based on federations of information systems (or cooperative information systems), such that local autonomies are preserved while a loosely-coupled cooperation is created to support *knowledge sharing*. Hence, the volume examines how ICT can be the basis for federated information systems, evidencing not only the possible solutions but also the main technological problems which still remain open. To this aim, the volume presents some actual ICT-based systems developed in Italy, in Catalonia, and at the European level as an integration of pre-existing systems.

The main thesis of our work is that the envisioned technological solutions can provide only the enabling features; however, these need to be coupled to suitable organizational, political, and cultural measures. And, in order to achieve actual performing and fruitful solutions, all these measures have to be harmonized. To this purpose, the volume focuses on a comparison between the Employment Systems in Lombardy (Italy) and in Catalonia (Spain). From such comparison, some general conclusions can be drawn.

1.1 The Concept of e-Government and Its Evolution

The concept of e-Government has evolved over time to incorporate new approaches based on information processing and electronic communication systems and technologies developed to address the specific needs of public administration, government and interactions with citizens. The new possibilities offered by innovations from the information and ICT area, especially regarding the Internet, help governments improve processes and services and better communicate and interact with citizens and organizations. The concept originated in the closing decade of the last

millennium, when electronic governance acquired certain acceptance in the 1993 US National Performance Review, whereas e-Government seems to have first come to prominence in 1997 (Heeks and Bailur 2007). A United Nations report of 2001 on benchmarking e-Government (UNDEPA and ASPA 2002) indicates that e-Government can include virtually all ICT platforms and applications in use by the public sector. At the same time, for the purposes of this report, e-Government is defined as use of the Internet and the World Wide Web to deliver government information and services to citizens.

E-Government nomenclature is large and complex, covering diverse approaches and categories. For example, government-to-government (G2G) involves sharing data and conducting electronic exchanges between governmental actors at different government levels. Government-to-business (G2B) involves business-specific transactions regarding commercial provision of goods and services and taxes and fees. Government-to-consumer/citizen (G2C) involves initiatives designed to facilitate people's interactions with government as both consumers of public services and as citizens and including participation in consultation and decision-making processes (UNPAN 2003).

Another interesting approach is to consider the stages of e-Government, namely:

- **Emerging.** A government web presence is established through a few independent official sites. Information is limited, basic and static. Links to ministries/ departments may exist, as well as links to regional/local government, and so on.
- **Enhanced.** Content is updated with greater regularity, with interaction mainly from G2C. The government provides sources of current and archived information, such as policies, budgets, laws and regulations, reports, newsletters and downloadable databases.
- **Interactive.** Users can download forms, contact officials and make appointments and requests. The provision of online public services enters in the interactive mode, allowing users to mail back downloadable forms. Some form of input from the public is admitted through the provision of e-mail and other contact information.
- **Transactional.** Users can pay taxes or apply for identity cards, birth certificates, passports, license renewals and other similar C2G interactions.
- **Networked.** This is the highest mode of e-Government, covering G2G, G2B and G2C (and the reverse) interactions. The government is willing and able to involve society in a two-way dialogue and solicits the views of people acting as consumers of public services and as citizens. Here we have the integration of consultation and collective decision making (UNDEPEPA and ASPA 2002; UNPAN 2003).

Among the related concepts pointed to by United Nations reports there is e-Participation. It is defined as a participatory, inclusive, deliberative decision-making process, achieved by using the ICT to increase the supply of information for these processes, to enhance consultation and to facilitate people's participation in relationships with their government (UNPAN 2003). Another key concept is e-Governance, where governance refers to interactions in the public sector, society's arrangements for collective decision making and the transparent mechanisms for