Preface

THE RISE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL GOVERNMENT

...This is a time to push forward, faster and on all fronts: open up the system, break down its monoliths, put the parent and pupil and patient and law-abiding citizen at the centre of it. We have made great progress. Let us learn the lessons of it not so as to rest on present achievements but to take them to a new and higher level in the future...

—Prime Minister, Tony Blair, July 2005

The combined influence of the Internet and supporting ICTs have seen commercial enterprises reaching out to people and exploiting business opportunities that would have previously not been possible. Internet enabled e-business has also contributed to a significant increase in the speed and ease of business transactions making not only competition intense between organisations, but also requiring companies to integrate new and faster systems and adjust to new technology to meet the needs of customers. Although commercial enterprises and governments had little in common prior to the e-commerce era, government and industry e-commerce agendas have become more closely linked in recent times. Conversely, more people are now less tolerant of poor, impersonal service in the public sector as they become aware of the power of the Web and experience good services in the private sector. Therefore, it is in every government’s interest to make their public services more efficient and available in order to satisfy citizens’ expectations, which has often eluded many governments and political leaders in modern society.

One of the key issues that public sector managers have to face when dealing with service improvement is traditional public administration practice that have been influenced by organisational cultures and practices that date back several decades. In many countries, the public services offered are highly bureaucratic and siloed where the citizens have no choice of service provider. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are overlaid onto existing organisational structures and processes without any consideration to how they can be improved. Consequently, changing the processes and behaviour of government organisations and establishing cooperation between government agencies is fraught with difficulty. In this backdrop, the concept of electronic government (e-government) was introduced to many countries around the world in the mid/late 1990s. The essence of e-government revolved around offering key public services on-line using a Web portal. While it was relatively easy for governments to create national Web portals to assert their e-government presence, this merely amounted to information being reorganised without any fundamental change to existing back office processes or information systems and technology (IS/IT). Moreover, from a strategic perspective, for e-government implementation to be widespread and successful, exemplary strategies and practices also need to be identified in addition to establishing and prioritising processes to be e-enabled. Furthermore, every e-government programme
needs to have a clear idea of the proposed benefits to citizens, what challenges need to be overcome and the level of institutional change that needs to take place for it to be successful in a given context.

In the last few years e-government implementation efforts have evolved from basic information provisioning to more integrated and joined up service offerings in most developed countries. Having successfully implemented a number of transaction-based e-government services by e-enabling front office and customer facing processes, most developed countries are now working towards realising transformational government (t-government) as shown in the figure 1 below. The t-government phase is dotted as this is not accomplished yet, and might be followed by a next phase that is not known yet.

The gap between the previous phases has been relatively small, whereas the gap to the t-government phase is a bigger one. In the previous phases technology has primarily been used to reinforce existing structures. The transformational phase of e-government involves reengineering and e-enabling back office processes and information systems to enable more joined-up and citizen-centric e-government services. However, public sector transformation is a massive and complex undertaking involving distributed decision-making that requires a good understanding of the political context, culture, business processes, and technology. Transformation requires design and engineering methods for breaking through the traditional boundaries between organizational units which requires the interplay between social and technological aspects. Therefore, transformation initiatives should not only target technological issues and deliver sound enterprise architectures and business processes, but should also consider the multi-actor environment and the change of culture and even the institutional setting. The overall aim of this book is to provide an understanding and highlight some of the key challenges, issues, and complexities involved in the transformational phase of e-government. It will help to understand the strategic, organisational, technical, and social issues influencing business process and information systems change in public sec-
tor organisations in the context of t-government and the resulting overall impact of t-government upon citizens from a global perspective.

In most western countries, t-government has naturally evolved from e-government. Yet, there remains considerable confusion about t-government. The definitions offered for e-government differ according to the varying e-government focus and are usually centred on technology, business, process, citizen, or a functional perspective. These different schools of thought show there is no universally accepted definition of the e-government concept. However, we can distinguish between t-government and e-government; t-government covers a broader organisational and socio-technical dimension which involves radically changing the structures, operations, and most importantly, the culture of government. Given this context, we propose a definition for t-government that encapsulates a wider perspective of the transformational aspects of e-government. The new definition is as follows: “t-government is the ICT-enabled and organisation-led transformation of government operations, internal and external processes, structures, and culture to enable the realisation of citizen-centric services that are transparent, cost effective, and efficient”. This definition suggests a variety of objectives that need to be realized in parallel and we propose that the creation of citizen-centric services requires considerable changes at all levels which might need radical changes, rather than incremental improvement.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

This book covers theories, concepts, methods, frameworks, guidelines, technologies, and tools and techniques that are relevant to, and influence the transformational phase of e-government implementations. First, the book explores the concept of transformational government and relevant facilitators and inhibitors from a conceptual and practical perspective. Second, the book highlights the role of interoperability and integration in a t-government context. Third, the book looks at how knowledge and management support facilitates t-government. Fourth, the book highlights the significance of evaluation and measurement in e-government and t-government initiatives. Finally, the book explores adoption and diffusion related issues that influence e-government implementation and acceptance from a citizen centric angle.

The chapters that make up the book include contributions from academics, practitioners, and policymakers and thus offer a balanced perspective of the strategic, organizational, technical, and socio-cultural, as well as theoretical and practical issues that have shaped the progress of e-government and t-government. In this sense, the book is a mix of theory and practice and therefore can be useful for academia (research and teaching), as well as practice (policymakers and implementers).

The book offers readers: (a) knowledge and understanding of the content and context of ICT enabled t-government; (b) insight into public sector processes and information systems from a global perspective; (c) best practices and approaches for realizing public sector transformation; (d) overview of the key literature and theories that have shaped e-government and t-government research, and (e) the opportunity to read the contributions from leading researchers around the world in the field of e-government and t-government in one handbook of research.

We hope you will enjoy reading this research handbook as much as we did putting it together. We certainly learned much from the diverse chapters that are offered in the book.

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