Reading Christopher G. Reddick’s *Homeland Security Preparedness and Information Systems: Strategies for Managing Public Policy* was a reminder of how far the information technology (IT) revolution has come in 25 years. My first computer in graduate school was the boxy, heavy Kayrpo II, which served as a typewriter upgrade and dumb terminal to connect (via a very slow phone modem) to Florida State University’s mainframe. We have come a long way in that quarter century, and the computer has become a central part of most Americans’ lives. And as Professor Reddick details, it has become a mainstay of one of the most important policy “spaces” of the 21st Century—Homeland Security.

The centrality of the IT to bolster Homeland Security is a central theme of this work. But as Dr. Reddick notes, implementation of enhancements in the Homeland Security Information Systems (HSIS) realm does not come easily. IT facilitates the sharing of information across multiple agencies and levels of governments, but this capacity conflicts with deep-seated cultural preferences for privacy and transparency. Increasing citizen involvement is a cornerstone of effective HSIS, but America still suffers from a digital divide that puts older, less-educated citizens at a disadvantage in their ability to provide or gather information on natural or manmade disasters. Meanwhile, a younger generation of Americans will view the Internet as their primary source of information, but it remains to be seen if many cities and states have the financial and human resources needed to build information systems that can “bridge” to these cyber-savvy Americans.

Dr. Reddick also reminds us of one of the critical bugaboos of implementation in American public administration: the mixed blessing of the Federal system. Multiple layers of government have served to blunt hyper-centralized top-down administrative policies. But this structure also presents challenges to effective information sharing and may exacerbate the differences between “have” and “have not” IT entities at the sub-national levels. The 21st Century and IT offer breathtaking opportunities for bringing a frequently disillusioned citizenry back into fold of governance. This indeed is a “force multiplier” in terms of enhancing IT’s potential for improving Homeland Security. That said, without appropriate infrastructure and computer literacy, IT may provide nothing more than a glorified Yellow Pages for contacting public officials.

One of the central themes of this book is that organizational culture matters. Senior IT officials cannot expect their employees to learn about cyber security through osmosis. Building organizational roots that grow awareness of threats to security requires intensive training and commitment. All governments operate in an IT environment that is highly regulated in many dimensions. Yet as Dr. Reddick notes,
most breakdowns in cyber-security are not the result of onerous regulations but rather, the inability of organizations to adequately train personnel in appropriate procedures.

Dr. Reddick bolsters his findings with surveys of “real world” officials in senior ranks. This buttresses the validity of his findings while underscoring the often broad chasm between the potential and reality of what IT can deliver in helping to improve prevention and mitigation of natural and manmade disasters. Thusly, Reddick’s work is both informative and thought-provoking.

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