Chapter 1
To Cross or not to Cross the Boundaries?
A Reflection on Electronic Public Service Integration

Kuan-Chiu Tseng
Tamkang University & Taiwan E-Governance Research Center, Taiwan

Lung-Teng Hu
National Taipei University & Taiwan E-Governance Research Center, Taiwan

ABSTRACT
Parallel with the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies, customer service delivery is confronting a radical transformation in both the public and private sectors. One-stop service delivery with inter-organizational integration, even joined-up with government, has become an appealing vision, as well as a desideratum of future public service provision. However, while a significant body of literature on business process reengineering and inter-organizational system presents the possibility of ubiquitous public service delivery, some governmental organizations remain reluctant to adopt this model.

This chapter aims to deal with the following questions. Is electronic cross-boundary service integration a desirable vision of e-governance? If so, why isn’t everyone jumping on this bandwagon? What are the potential factors which the proponents of electronic cross-boundary governance should take into account which may influence departmental adoption of electronic public service integration? Is electronic cross-boundary governance a one-size-fit-all solution? This chapter seeks to answer the questions with a case study of Taipei online e-services provided by the Taipei City government. Because Taipei online e-services attempts to provide a digital platform by which citizens in Taipei City are able to complete most applications, requests, payments, even tracking requests, it is regarded as a system which threads multiple service operational procedures as well as databases across departmental boundaries. The vision raised by Taipei online e-services is very close to the promise offered by e-governance proponents.

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Still, certain services cannot be completed online fully. Most service deliveries which cannot be fully completed online fall into the departments which are significantly associated with the government's economic performance as well as citizens' quality of life, such as economic development, urban development, land, transportation, civil affairs, social welfare, and finance. In fact, the departments indicated above have to collaboratively interact with each other in order to provide citizen services.

To explore the reasons why certain services could not be digitally integrated and fully provided online, some focus-group interviews were conducted with key officials of the municipal departments mentioned above. Governmental insiders were able to offer some compelling factors which critically influence the integration of e-services. Surprisingly, some officials raised challenges: Is it merely rhetoric or is it imperative to integrate full services across departmental boundaries under e-governance? Research results and implications for electronic cross-boundary governance will be discussed in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Typically, a one-stop service center is “an umbrella organization that operates on top of existing functional departments in order to maximize the convenience and satisfaction of users through service integration” (Ho, 2002, pp. 436). Due to the fact that specialization and information silos are two of the key factors behind the occurrence of fragmented responses (Linden, 2010, p. 19), one-stop service with inter-organizational integration, even joined-up government (Perri 6, 2004; Pollitt, 2003), has become an appealing vision as well as a desideratum of future public service. For example, Choudrie and Weerrakody (2007) believe that the achievement of horizontal integration among local authorities in the e-government context can better deliver e-services to citizens.

With the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs), customer service delivery is being confronted with a radical transformation in both the public and private sectors. This chapter focuses on this issue: Is the electronic cross-boundary governance (ECBG) a one-size-fit-all solution? There are various stages of e-government, each of which reflects a degree of technical sophistication or maturity (Moon, 2002, p. 426): (1) simple information dissemination (one-way communication); (2) two-way communication (request and response); (3) service and financial transactions; (4) integration (horizontal and vertical integration); and (4) political participation. This implies that governments have to deal with the numerous and significant impediments to the integration of government information and services (Cousey & Norris, 2008, p. 525). A report notes that unless governments endeavor to transform themselves into integrated entities through developing integrated back-office infrastructures, they will find it difficult to fully respond to the needs of their citizens (UN, 2008, p. 16). It would be valuable, therefore, to examine what and how potential factors would affect the process at different stages of e-government evolution, especially those more sophisticated features.

Although citizen-centered service is an emerging issue in e-government (Alshawi & Alalwany, 2009; Bertot, Jaeger, & McClure, 2008; Ho, 2002; Schedler & Summermatter, 2007), scholarly literature reminds us that government actions are mediated by many factors, each of which restricts ICTs’ ability to transform society (e.g. institutional arrangements, budget scarcity, group conflict, cultural norms, and prevailing patterns of social and political behavior) (Fountain, 2001). Thus technology innovation in the public sector tends to be incremental rather than transformational (West, 2004, p.14). With this in mind, certain researchers have used different theoretical lens to examine the causes of the diffusion of e-government in-
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