Chapter 13

A Goal-Driven Management Approach based on Knowledge Exploitation for e-Government Projects

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of electronic Government projects in public sector organisations is a challenging task, due to technical, organisational and cultural specificities of the domain. Research shows that such IT projects have higher failure rates than similar approaches in the private sector, also indicating the lack of a method to transfer knowledge and apply best management practices in an effective way. The proposed management approach aims to recognise structure and reuse past successful attempts, in ways that support the overall viability of an e-Government project. After stating the fundamental principles of project management that apply to public sector IT projects, the authors present a conceptual model for e-Government project management, including entities such as dimensions, goals, activities, deliverables and roles that can be structured and adapted to cover all types of relevant projects in an out-of-the-box approach. This knowledge base of predefined project components can then be populated and utilised in making more informed decisions for effective project management of e-Government initiatives. This way, the proposed method supports public officials and practitioners in learning from past experience projects and in designing and running e-Government projects in a more systematic manner, thus, significantly increasing the likelihood of project success.

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INTRODUCTION

The inability of governmental organizations to successfully complete public information technology projects threatens to undermine efforts to implement e-Government. Additionally, an increasing number of countries formulate ambitious action plans for implementing e-Government. As OECD (2001) states ‘Unless governments learn to manage the risks connected with large public IT projects, these e-dreams will turn into global nightmares. Governments must get the fundamentals of IT right if they want to harvest the huge potential of going online’.

E-Government project failures are all too common - some make the headlines, but most of them are quickly forgotten. A survey of e-Government projects in developing and transition economies revealed that as many as 85 percent are a partial (unattained goals) or total (abandoned implementation) failure (Heeks, 2003a). The reasons for failure are many and varied. Common reasons include: lack of internal ownership, absence of vision or strategy, poor project management, inadequate technological infrastructure and obstacles to data interchange (Heeks, 2003b). Lack of a business case for the project, overreliance on technology as the main driver for e-Government and the lack of sufficient administrative reform to accompany e-Government are also cited (Schware, 2004).

One of the common myths and misconceptions in the traditional information technology (IT) project management world is that all projects are the same, and that similar tools and methods can be used for all project activities (Shenhar, Dvir, Milosevic, Mulenburg, Patanakul, Reily, Ryan, Sage, Sauser, Srivannaboon, Stefanovic, & Thamhain, 2005). Furthermore, most methodologies, techniques and frameworks treat all IT projects in a similar way, suggesting that success can be achieved if a common set of tools and techniques are used. To tackle the problems, many researchers and practitioners have focus on the technical aspect to improve the reliability of estimating the e-Government project size or effort (Gupta, Kumar, & Bhattacharya, 2004; Heeks, 2006).

In reality, however, e-Government projects (in this article e-Government projects contain government transformational, public sector ICT and e-Services project types) differ in many ways (Bhatnagar, 2004; Heeks, 2006), yet, very few organizations have acknowledged this in a formal way, implemented an organization-specific framework to distinguish among their project efforts, or created guidelines on how to select the right approach for each project (Boyne, 1996; Shalini & Jain, 2007). This misconception has often led to e-Government project failure (Collins & Bicknell, 1997; Heeks, 2003b; Iacovou, 1999; James, 1997; Standish Group, 2004) and disappointment (Bekkers & Homburg, 2007). Recent research has demonstrated that the “one-size-does-not-fit-all” concept (Shenhar, 2001) is both theoretically grounded in scholarly research and practically applicable in the real world e-Government practice.

There are a lot of unpredictable factors existing in the e-Government development cycle that have become contributing factors to this problem (Dhillon, Weerakkody, & Dwivedi, 2008; Shareef, Kumar, Kumar, & Dwivedi, 2009). Information technology is not the most critical factor in the realization of e-Government projects (Heeks, 2006). A fairly fragmented operational and organizational structure is frequently encountered in the public sector. More important than information technology and its implementation is application of the appropriate project management procedure. Demands arising from the aims of e-Government projects require consistent alignment of all associated resources and processes. Projects that do not take e-Government critical factors (political, social, organizational, marketing, multidisciplinarity etc.) into account lack integration and sustainability and are at best short-term solutions (Weerakkody, Dwivedi, Brooks, Williams, & Mwange, 2007).

Knowledge about the e-Government project components and the way they interact has to be