Digital Government Online Education for Public Managers

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**INTRODUCTION**

The opportunities that arise from the practice of digital government continue to increase. Public managers responsible for adopting and implementing such new practices will be searching for existing best practices to incorporate into their respective communities. They may choose to rely on their information and communication technology (ICT) departments to develop necessary digital government applications, but an appealing option for public managers is to familiarize themselves with the most recent digital government applications through Web-based courses. Online education eliminates distances, allows for flexible scheduling and can incorporate current best practices of electronic-government on a timely basis.

Public managers play a critical role in the development of digital government initiatives (Halachmi, 2004; Heeks, 1999; Ho, 2002; Melitski, 2003; Weare, Musso & Hale, 1999). Although public managers can refer to numerous individuals within government municipalities, in the case of digital government, the chief administrative officer (CAO) is often the key individual in deciding the direction of government initiatives. By completing Web-based courses, CAOs can assess and strategically plan for effective and efficient digital government in their communities. Melitski (2003) argues that there is a need for public managers that are “familiar with both IT and the programmatic goals and missions of public organizations” (p. 389). With respect to implementing digital citizen participation in government, Holzer, Melitski, Rho, and Schwester (2004) state, as their primary recommendation, “governments should work harder to identify, study, and implement best practices” (p. 28). The means to study such best practices, however, have generally been scarce, and the literature has been limited to specialized e-government reports and articles. But Web-based courses now offer the means for a CAO or any other public manager to study digital government practices and theories in a more effective and convenient manner.

**BACKGROUND**

In order to optimize their city’s e-government performance, public managers now have opportunities to educate themselves via a growing number of courses that address digital government in public administration and management programs. Some of these courses are also being offered online; however, Web-based courses that focus on digital government’s opportunities and challenges are still rare. Web-based education, which is also termed online education, utilizes the Internet to deliver distance education.

Web-based education involves two types of learning: asynchronous and synchronous. In asynchronous online education, students do not need to interact with the instructor in real time. Students can complete a Web-based course on their own time and schedule. Asynchronous online education currently dominates Web-based education because of the advantage of individual control of time (Kim, 2004). Synchronous online education has an advantage when geographically dispersed students and the instructors interact in real time using communication technologies such as digital audio, digital video, and text-based messaging software (Martinez, 2004). Synchronous education is more popular in academic programs than in training programs (Kim, 2004).

Web-based education results in significant, positive outcomes, so that institutions need to learn “how to leverage the technological resources in curriculum and course design, student access and support” (Mayadas, Bourne, & Moore, 2002, p. 9). Web-based education requires effective tools to create, manage, and deliver content and collaborative activities. For that reason, “the selection of a course management system, which uses
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