E-Government-Induced
Business Process Change (BPC):
An Empirical Study of Current Practices

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ABSTRACT

E-government (e-gov) projects have an increasing influence on how government business processes evolve and change. While early e-gov projects focused on government-to-public information and interaction, the second and third wave of e-gov projects also emphasize internal effectiveness and efficiency, along with intra- and interdepartmental as well as intra- and interbranch integration. With these increases in scope and scale of e-gov projects, existing business processes, including core processes, become candidates for improvement and change. While the private-sector-oriented literature on business process change abounds with descriptive and prescriptive accounts, no equivalent has been found in the public-sector-related literature. Although many insights drawn from the private sector may apply, the public sector seems to develop distinct practices. This paper contributes to the understanding of current practices in e-gov-induced business process change, comparing those practices to prescriptions derived from private-sector experience. Among other factors, the more inclusive approach observed in e-gov business process change may explain the higher success rate of public-sector projects compared to those reported from the private sector.

Keywords: business process change; change management; current practices; document life management; e-Gov project success / failure; electronic record management; internal effectiveness and efficiency; organizational culture; organizational learning; senior executive support; stakeholder identification; stakeholder management; workflow analysis

INTRODUCTION

In electronic government (e-government; e-gov), once the service and application potential of the early catalogue and transaction phases has been fully tapped, it is said that the next developmental step leads to the integration of services and processes within and across government agencies and branches (Layne & Lee, 2001). For this integration to happen, however, significant changes to the business logic and, hence, to the business processes, including the core processes, become a necessity (Scholl, 2003). Since the already existing information systems (IS) and applications represent and embody those old processes, they have to be adapted and streamlined, too. Without such redesign of systems and processes, the old fragmented and paper-based processes, along with their IS mirror images, would be perpetuated electronically, which some scholars have derided as “manumation” (Mohan & Holstein, 1998).
Business processes can be thought of as a high-level flow of activity and as a set of tasks with a logical relationship geared toward a desired result or product (Davenport & Short, 1990). Processes such as procurement, taxation, contracting, or licensing can contain up to hundreds or thousands of coordinated and connected workflows (Stohr & Zhao, 1997). For well over a decade, the streamlining of business processes has been practiced and studied in the private sector. Both radical (Champy, 1995; Grover, Teng, Segars, & Fiedler, 1998; Hammer & Champy, 1993) and moderate, more incremental approaches (Halachmi & Bovaird, 1997; Harkness, Kettinger, & Segars, 1996; Kling & Tillquist, 1998; Martinsons & Revenaugh, 1997) have been observed, yielding mixed results with failure rates of up to 70% (Hammer, 1996) for the more radical and disruptive approaches (Martinsons & Revenaugh, 1997).

The principle of distributed control as a characteristic of democratic governance defies the concept of top-down and disruptive process change, as seen in the private sector in the early 1990s (Mohan & Holstein, 1990). As opposed to the typically monolithic governance structures in private-sector organizations, democratic governance is limited intentionally to relatively small entities of jurisdiction and operational control, which rests on mandates awarded independently. The organization of government into relatively independent levels and branches with built-in procedures of checks and balances further accentuates the principle of distributed control. Hence, change emanates from a complex and typically lengthy process of negotiation among constituents, which effectively safeguards the system against sudden and radical changes. Yet, methods and insights developed in business process change (BPC) in the private sector may inform and even apply, when processes in the public sector need to be changed (Scholl, 2003).

This paper reports on current practices that project managers and officials use when dealing with BPC, as well as process and information integration in e-gov projects (Klischewski, 2004). For space constraints and since it has been laid out in detail elsewhere, the paper foregoes the repetition of an elaborate review of the private-sector-related literature on the subject (Scholl, 2003). Also, since this paper reports on the second part of a research project, whose first part has been published already in a previous issue of this journal (Scholl, 2005), the detailed description of the study design is omitted.

The paper is organized as follows. First, along with a brief reintroduction of those practices known from the private sector, eight propositions based on the private-sector BPC literature are restated. Then, the qualitative research design, which guided the study’s data collection and analysis, is briefly described. Third, the empirical results and observations for each proposition are presented. Finally, the paper discusses those results and their relationship to each other and presents conclusions regarding the observed BPC practices in the context of e-gov projects, along with suggestions for quantitative testing based on a larger sample size.

**BPC PRACTICES PRESENTED IN THE PRIVATE-SECTOR LITERATURE**

**Stakeholders**

Some scholars in the early reengineering movement suggested that
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