Reflections and Proposals on Public Officials Training and Promotion of E-Government

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ABSTRACT

Argentina is a country characterized by successive discontinuities and heavily conditioned by a troubled political-institutional history. This article will argue that only the interaction and coherence between training and management systems created simultaneously as the dynamic expression of change can result in public organizations in tune with the characteristics of the knowledge society. Only those projects that have incorporated from their inception self-regulation, interaction, and readjustment mechanisms may provide answers in times that are difficult to compare with other periods in public administrations. The nation’s problems have never been as complex as they are today, nor did we have tools as powerful as the ICTs to solve them. From a complexity approach, it explores the synergic bonds between the promotion of e-government (EG) and the training and learning processes of public officials.

Keywords: IT in public administration, Internet usage at work, virtual community building, IT in developing countries, electronic government, public sector, social learning

INTRODUCTION: HYPOTHESIS, OBJECTIVES, AND METHODOLOGY

Argentina is a country characterized by successive discontinuities (CLAD-SIARE, 2005) and heavily conditioned by a troubled political-institutional history (Tesoro, 2004). This article will argue that only the interaction and coherence between training and management systems created simultaneously as the dynamic expression of change can result in public organizations in tune with the characteristics of the knowledge society. Only those projects that have incorporated from their inception self-regulation, interaction, and readjustment mechanisms may provide answers in times that are difficult to compare with other periods in public administrations. The nation’s problems have never been as complex as they are today, nor did we have tools as powerful as the ICTs to solve them. Therefore, focusing on current public administration in Argentina is to focus on complexity.

This article is intended as a reflective essay and an implementation proposal. From a complexity approach, it explores the synergic bonds between the promotion of e-government
(EG) and the training and learning processes of public officials. By EG “the use of information and communication technology in public administrations combined with organizational change and new competencies in order to improve public services and democratic processes, and strengthen support to public policies” (EU E-Government Commission, 2003) is meant.

The study’s methodology implies a dialectical approach to the interaction of all e-government goals, as stated in the current Plan Nacional, particularly as regards: improvement of citizen services with the use of ICTs; ICTs characteristics, especially learning the Internet as a new language; and identification of strategies that will facilitate the mobilization of available resources and make means and goals consistent, in the least possible time. Thus, the goal is to make public officials training strategies consistent with the open and participatory processes that the Argentine public administration is calling for in its relationship with the citizenry.

The key aspects of the conceptual model adopted, and the premises to conceiving public officials training strategies that will promote EG are developed in the second section. The third section focuses on a series of proposals that seek to generate skills to deal with EG processes, based on the potentiality of the intranets and the available technological resources in public administration, particularly the emergence of the so-called Web 2.0 or social Web. Lastly, the fourth section identifies resistances to the inclusion of new ICTs in public administration, and proposes a series of recommendations in its concluding remarks.

CONCEPTUAL DIMENSIONS

Main Conceptual Dimensions

Ethical-Valuation of GE’s Training
Respect for an individual’s dignity, loyalty, solidarity, ethical correctness, and mutual trust are fundamental pillars of humanist thought—which is believed to be essential to conceptualize the relationship between public administration and citizens, and the relationships inside the actual public sector. Far from conceiving the organization as a “heavenly” model, it is argued that the environments that are most likely to solve coexistence dilemmas are those in which reflection, expression, and communication are encouraged. Numerous research studies have surveyed citizens’ low levels of trust in public institutions. There is a need to constantly renew legitimacy, reassuring the quality of public services in order to guarantee a positive “social assessment,” that is, a high degree of satisfaction in the social environment where public organizations perform their activities. This notion in turn casts new lights on how professional ethics are understood. When moving from an ethical-valuation framework to a pragmatic dimension and analyzing EG’s results in detail, the only “good results” or “quality” results considered are those that include a social dimension. EG will only be effective if it is capable of achieving the ends, goals, and objectives that society expects of it. In the current knowledge and information society, administrative efficiency is one of the core aspects of notions of equity or equal opportunity. EG’s management will “work well” not just by virtue of the amount of computer equipment installed or the number of visits to a government Web site. Rather it will work to the extent that it contributes to a more equitable distribution of the social product, and to improved and more transparent regulatory and monitoring actions. In countries like Argentina, with high poverty and exclusion levels, if EG is not effective for those who are most in need it will not be capable either of providing equity, and thus it will be ethically incompetent.

Epistemological Dimension: An Approach from Complexity Theory
According to Edgar Morin, one of the most renowned complexity theorists, the challenge is how to approach complexity in a non-simplifying way, since the simplifying modes of knowledge mutilate the realities or phenomena they intend to explain. It is actually about training ourselves in ways of thinking that attempt to engage in dialogues, to negotiate with what is real. For
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