Chapter 13

Digital Government Competences for Digital Public Administration Transformation

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ABSTRACT

The development of digital government leads to the digital transformation of public administration. This requires a mix of competences to design, implement, and manage digital government endeavors and the resulting transformations and to use new digital tools. However, researchers agree that digital government competences are under-studied. Moreover, the rare existing studies focus on singular aspects of digital government competences such as technical skills. Thus, this chapter proposes a synthesis of the extant literature about the digital government competences and how they are approached by researchers. The supply-side perspective and the demand-side perspective are proposed to organize the extant literature. Competences are categorized according to each perspective. An empirical investigation is needed to determine the most important competences and to propose the necessary training programs for the lacking ones.

INTRODUCTION

Governments around the world have been intensively adopting information and communication technologies (ICTs) and more recently digital technologies, such as mobile technologies, social media, the Internet of things, wireless technology, sensor networks, artificial intelligence and Big Data (Gil-Garcia et al., 2018). Digital technologies lead to the development of digital government. It is “the use of digital technologies, as an integrated part of governments’ modernization strategies, to create public value” (OCDE, 2014, p.6).

The UN reports (2002 - 2018) demonstrate a continuous and heavy use of digital technologies by public administration to deliver public services and interact with citizens, businesses and other stakeholders. Promoting efficiency, efficacy and transparency, reducing corruption and enhancing citizen’s

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empowerment are among the expected benefits. They are going to be achieved thanks to the potential of digital technologies as a driver of changes and transformations or what is called digital transformation (Hess et al., 2016; Nwankpa and Roumani, 2016; Heilig et al., 2017). Digital transformation is concerned with the changes that digital technologies can bring about in a company’s business model which result in changed products, organizational structures or in automated processes (Hess et al., 2016). The same case is in the public sector that can be reorganized by making use of ICTs, which have the potential to rethink public services; how they are produced and which actors are involved in the process (Schulz and Schuppan, 2012).

However, it seems that the expected benefits in terms of digital transformation are not always achieved. The failure rate of e-government projects in developing countries is very high; 35% have been classified as a total failure and 50% as a partial failure (Heeks, 2003). Moreover, many examples of organizations have been unable to keep pace with new digital reality (Hess et al., 2016), while the success of digital transformation lies especially in the adoption of organizational aspects and not only in using advanced technologies (Heilig et al., 2017). For governments, they need to change the way they work and organize themselves, work collaboratively and engage with citizens and businesses (OECD, 2019). This will require having the needed skills and abilities to design, implement and manage e-government projects and use new digital tools (Bertot and Jaeger, 2008; OECD, 2019). Without the required competences, projects risk being hindered. This may be an issue in developing countries where a chronic lack of qualified staff and inadequate training of the human resources are common features of the public administration (Bannister, 2003; Ndou, 2004, etc.).

Griffin and Schappun (2010, p.6) defined e-government competencies as “the skills, abilities and knowledge required of a person to carry out a task or a set of tasks to a degree of competence (i.e. a standard of performance, usually specifically defined)”. However, e-government competences are rarely discussed in the academic debate (Schulz and Schuppan, 2012; Hofmann and Ogonek, 2018). It is also difficult to find an established understanding of these competences, especially with the fact that the rare existing studies have focused on singular aspects of digital competences such as technical skills (Hofmann and Ogonek, 2018). Moreover, a comprehensive empirical analysis of the required digital competences does not exist in both public and private sectors (Hofmann and Ogonek, 2018).

Since scientific literature focusing on digital government competences hardly exists, this chapter intends to deal with this theoretical gap. A literature review will be made based on the scarce previous researches on e-government competences. The main objective is to propose a synthesis about the digital government competences and how they are approached in the extant literature. To achieve this objective, three sections are going to be developed. The first section will deal with the digital government and the digital transformation of the public administration. The second section will discuss the criticality of competences for digital government success. The third section will deal with competency requirements for digital government.

**BACKGROUND**

**Digitization, Digitalization, and Digital Transformation**

Several definitions of digital transformation have been proposed in the extant literature. Some of these definitions are selected in table 1.
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