Chapter 21
Exploring Citizens’ Visions of 2020 E-Government in Taiwan: Results from a 2008 Scenario Workshop

Lung-Teng Hu
Taiwan e-Governance Research Center & Shih Hsin University, Taiwan

Don-Yun Chen
Taiwan e-Governance Research Center & National Chengchi University, Taiwan

Kuan-Chiu Tseng
Taiwan e-Governance Research Center & Tamkang University, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

“Why do citizens not use government e-services when they are provided?” This is a question always bothering academics and practitioners of e-government. This chapter will argue that, although e-government initiatives usually are advocated as “consumer- or citizen-centered” reform efforts, the initial plans to implement them are, at best, paternalistic. The authors further argue that citizens should play a critical role in initiating e-government and make those initiatives more citizen-centric. This chapter presents the case of the “2020 E-governance Scenario Workshop,” which was held in the fall 2008 in Taiwan, to provide evidence for our argument. By discussing the results of the workshop, this chapter will not only describe the visions and action plans derived from the workshop participants’ perspective but will also show that a problem of professional asymmetry still exists in e-government planning. Further, the authors ask how elected officials can be convinced to adopt citizens’ visions and plans, as their reluctance presents an obstacle that should be overcome. Despite these challenges, the authors wish to emphasize that e-government planning is in need of a paradigm shift from a technocrat-driven to a citizen-centric model.

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INTRODUCTION

Reinventing the public sector through e-government initiatives has become a worldwide movement, and, in the past decade, information technology (IT) applications providing productive services have been widely recognized as governmental innovations. Administrative reform through e-government initiatives has become one of the core strategies to promote consumer-centered reforms as well. However, the promises of e-government, such as the transformation of how the government does business, the reduction of both transaction costs and government expense, the reinstallation of social capital and restoration of trust through e-participation and e-democracy, and the formation of e-citizenship have been questioned and criticized (Garson, 2004). Among these criticisms rests the practical but fundamental question bothering academics and practitioners of e-government, a question about follow consumer-centered logic: why do citizens not use these e-services? Brewer and others (2006) argue that offering e-government initiatives does not merely serve to improve instrumental efficiency. Indeed, public managers should serve to protect public interests, maintain governmental legitimacy, and uphold democratic values. E-government should be leveraged as the public manager’s new instrument for fulfilling these missions, rather than solely for short-term efficiency. Thus, e-government is another channel through which the government can deliver its services and information and interact with the public. To this end, public managers need to seriously consider the legitimacy of e-government initiatives, because any flaw in those initiatives’ legitimacy may undermine citizens’ adoption of the services. Thus, this chapter argues that this practical problem results partially from a lack of input or requests from the citizens’ perspective during the initial stages of most e-government projects, such as the planning process.1 Although e-government initiatives usually are advocated as consumer- or citizen-centered reform efforts, their initiating decisions are, at best, paternalistic.

As highlighted by the editor C. Reddick, the purpose of this book is to show that most existing literature focuses on what e-government currently offers, but much less is dedicated to evaluating the effectiveness of e-government, especially the impact of e-government and how it has changed citizens’ contact with the government. There is an emerging need to look back at e-government from the perspective of the public. Since the legitimacy of instituting e-government initiatives has never been recognized as a question before, the authors attempt to argue that the public should take a critical role in initiating e-government and making such initiatives more citizen-centric. By presenting as a case study the “2020 E-governance Scenario Workshop” held in the fall of 2008 in Taiwan, this chapter demonstrates the importance of citizens’ perspective in e-government, as well as showing empirical evidence that citizens can play significant roles at the very early stages of policy deliberation. Moreover, this chapter presents a picture regarding the next-generation of e-government in Taiwan.

In the following sections, we first look at the literature surrounding the debates concerning e-government development. Additionally, we wish to emphasize that participatory governance must be introduced into e-government initiative development to serve as the foundation upon which the legitimacy of e-government initiatives can be built. The chapter then continues with a short historic review of Taiwan’s development of e-government initiatives in the past decades, followed by the results of a scenario workshop held in late 2008 to consider the 2020 e-governance initiative in Taiwan. The next section discusses the implications of using a participatory approach in planning e-government development and the picture of future e-governance in Taiwan. Finally, we conclude the chapter with some remarks and suggestions.