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ABSTRACT

ICT enables business-to-government (b-to-g) information exchange, which can be used to enhance control and compliance by businesses. However, sharing information can cause resistance by businesses, as for them information is key to competitive advantage, whereas governments need this information to conduct their tasks at lower costs. In this paper, the adoption of a b-to-g information-sharing platform is analyzed from a stakeholder theory perspective. The analysis shows that for stakeholders not the information-sharing infrastructure itself is their primary concern, but it is the governance thereof. A successful adoption and stakeholder management strategy was that companies have the sense-of-urgency and clear requirements to develop a public-private governance model. Governments can set the conditions to ensure that public functionality is also developed. The authors argue that stakeholder analysis should be used in developing adoption and implementation strategies.

Keywords: Business-to-Government, Information Exchange, Information Infrastructure, Public-Private Platform, Stakeholder Theory, Transformation

INTRODUCTION

Governments are initiating programs that aim to transform business-to-government (b-to-g) information exchange to reduce the administrative burden for companies and improve the accountability at the same time (Winne, Janssen, Bharosa, Wijk, & Hulstijn, 2011). A key instrument is establishing an information platform for exchanging information both within the business community and between the businesses and government. Platforms have been given
much attention in the private sector and can be defined as “products, services or technologies that connect different types of customers to each other” (Hagiu & Yoffie, 2009, p. 75). Both businesses and government agencies can use the data that is exchanged through a platform to realise their goals better; the platform can thus support both business-to-business and b-to-g information exchange.

In this paper, we focus on the stakeholder dimensions in the development of a platform for information exchange platforms between businesses and governments involved in trade. The related information quality issues and parties involved in international trade are described elsewhere in this issue (see Klievink et al., this issue). Important for the study presented in this paper is that the development of a platform for data exchange is currently a pressing topic, primarily due to both the low quality of the information currently available (Hesketh, 2010) and the potential to improve compliance at lower costs (Bharosa et al., in press).

With the advancement of technology innovations it becomes possible improve the information exchange information worldwide, by creating connections between organizations. Government can tap directly into the information flow of company’s information systems (Bharosa et al., in press; Tan, Bjørn-Andersen, Klein, & Rukanova, 2011). This re-use of the company’s own business information for government control purposes is also called the ‘piggy-back’ principle (Tan et al., 2011). This should result in a significant reduction of transaction costs and improve the information quality.

As there are so many actors involved in trade, the data become even more valuable if pieces of information from different actors are linked and combined. For example, Port Community Systems (PCSs) are information platforms that offer added value to customs and businesses by combining various data elements. Combining information requires the development of information exchange platforms that are used by a wide variety of stakeholders having diverse interests. The technical complexities of implementing platforms is compounded by the number of stakeholders affected by and involved in the decision making process. As a platform is a concern of both private and public parties, the governance mechanisms of the platform are of equal importance. Governance includes determining how communication, responsibilities and decision-making structures are formalized (Weill & Ross, 2005).

We analyze the stakeholder interactions in the design of a b-to-g information-sharing platform for the Dutch trade and logistics sector. For this, we use stakeholder theory, which is often used in e-government (Flak & Rose, 2005; Kamal, Weerakkody, & Irani, 2011; Lim, Chee-Wee, & Shan-Ling, 2007; Sæbø, Flak, & Sein, 2011). The principle idea behind stakeholder theory is that success can be increased by focusing on a wider set of stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). Sæbø et al. (2011) show that inadequately understanding the stakeholder dynamics can easily result in failure. Kamal et al. (2011) argue that few studies have examined the role of stakeholders and surrounding challenges when implementing integration in local government. In a similar vein, few studies have focused on the development and adoption of b-to-g information exchange.

BACKGROUND

Stakeholder theory originated in strategic management and concerns the viewing of an organization as having a broad range of stakeholders, all having their own interests and goals, and to strategically manage them (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders are “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 25). A stakeholder can be an individual person or collective, like an organization or an institute (March, 1988). Stakeholders’ goals, interests and perception might change over time and are influenced by each other. Rowley (1997) tied stakeholder theory to social network analysis. He argued that firms do not simply respond to each stakeholder individually; they respond
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