Chapter II

Implementing and Assessing Transparency in Digital Government: Some Issues in Project Management*

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Abstract

The IMF has been leading efforts to develop and implement codes of monetary and fiscal transparency. Such codes aim to increase disclosure of public sector information on the Internet-representing a type of “e-transparency”. Do such codes and increased Internet-based public sector information achieve their objectives? Much e-government theory sees electronic presence and e-transparency as a first step toward transformationary e-government. Yet, e-transparency itself represents a transformation in e-government. This chapter will first describe the results of a private-sector based assessment of fiscal and monetary transparency and report cross-country ratings. Second, it will describe a new method of assessment that emphasizes the role of knowledge management and the critical role played by assessment project design. Lastly, this chapter will discuss the extent to which such e-government efforts aimed at greater transparency achieve broader objectives - such as increased trust, predictability, credibility, oversight, and political accountability in the public sector. The lessons in this chapter are applicable to governments engaged in promoting and assessing transparency as well as corporations.
Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, governments around the world have been making efforts to put documents on the Internet, report fiscal data electronically and provide more transparent descriptions of public sector activities. At the international level, such an effort has been led by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) - in collaboration with the World Bank, the Bank for International Settlements, and other international organisations - in their development and implementation of codes of monetary and fiscal transparency. According to the Fund, “the adoption of internationally recognized standards and codes of good practice can help to improve economic policymaking and strengthen the international financial system” (IMF, 2001). Implicit in both the improvement of policymaking and the strengthening of the international financial system is the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in government for the creation of an “e-government” capable of transmitting information required by the codes. Universal access to public sector information, then, reduces information asymmetries - thereby lessening principal-agent problems related to monitoring public sector performance (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2002). The availability of public sector information also reduces the panic selling of portfolio investments (Lane, 1999).

At the national level, the disclosure of public sector information through e-government initiatives (and the purported transparency such disclosure entails) has been seen as a way to promote democracy (Cullen & Houghton, 2000), increase trust in government (Heichelbech, 2002), increase predictability in public service performance (United Nations, 2001), promote credibility through better incorporation of citizen needs and access to information (Martin & Feldman, 1998; Roberts, 1999), and encourage oversight in the fight against corruption (Fenner & Wehrle, 2001; Radics, 2001). Heeks (2001), however, found mixed results for the impact of e-government on government effectiveness.

Figure 1: A teleology of e-government

Source: Hiller and Belanger (2001)
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Electronic Government-to-Government Collaboration
Users’ Acceptance of E-Government: A Study of Indian Central Excise


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