Digital Government Development Strategies: Lessons for Policy Makers from a Comparative Perspective

Yu-Che Chen, Iowa State University, USA
Richard Knepper, Indiana University, USA

Abstract

This chapter provides policy makers with a comprehensive framework for developing national digital government strategies. This framework raises the importance of technical and economic situations, cross-country comparison of laws and institutions, and the necessity of considering political contexts. More importantly, it outlines the general developmental strategies and critical success factors for improving the practice of national digital government efforts. To illuminate the utility and application of the framework through an examination of Poland and Taiwan’s experience, this chapter also yields insights into specific considerations for designing and improving digital government.
Introduction

Digital government has a better chance of success if it follows a well-articulated and sound strategy. Failures of digital government projects in terms of cost overrun, delay in delivery, and problems in implementation are the rule rather than the exception (Heeks, 1999). Having a sound strategy is considered as the first and most important step in securing the success of information technology projects (Fletcher, 1999). More importantly, a strategic master plan helps align information and communication technology investment and resource allocation with the objectives of organizations. If done properly, a strategic plan can help public organizations realize the full potential of an information technology investment.

The key question that guides this study is: How can a national digital government strategy be better designed and developed? As reflected in the research question, this chapter takes a normative perspective of policy and institutional design with emphasis on policy makers. A large number of countries around the world have recognized the importance of information and communication technology for staying competitive in the information age. Moreover, it is recognized that a national strategy is the critical first step in building an information and communication infrastructure and allocating the necessary critical resources to build digital government. Some European countries, Asian economies, and North and South American nations, have some form of a national digital government plan, such as UK Online, e-Japan, and e-Korea.

However, there is a shortage of research-based frameworks for guiding the development of a national strategy. This chapter fills this gap by offering policy makers a comprehensive framework for developing national digital government strategies. Moreover, the authors further examine the experiences of Poland and Taiwan to illuminate the proposed framework and to provide insights into specific considerations for designing and improving digital government through strategic planning.

Background

Digital government refers to the use of information and communication technology to better the relations between government and its employees, citizens, businesses, nonprofit partners, and other agencies by enhancing the access to and delivery of government information and services. The terms of digital government and e-government are used interchangeably in this chapter because, in the authors’ view, they cover the same set of activities as outlined in the definition of digital government. Digital government strategic plans are national plans to guide the development of a country’s efforts to deliver information and service via digital means.

An overarching national digital government plan is less studied than individual digital government projects. Most of the critical success factors come out of studies of individual IT projects at state and local levels (Dawes et al., 1997; Heeks, 1999). Since national strategic plans provide the framework in which most digital government projects
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