Reviews


Rodrigo Sandoval Almazán
Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México

A novel field of study, electronic government has been built from different dimensions, and thus, it is difficult to focus on a single one. Therefore, it must be studied more thoroughly. To start with, it is a field that continues to evolve; its dynamic responds to changes in the economic and social environment, but above all, to new advances in technology and the needs of the government and the governed alike.

In this context it is difficult to find texts that allow us to rigorously and scientifically study this field in depth while at the same time contribute specific ideas on the implementation or application of the advantages electronic government has to offer public administration.

Consequently, this book by J. Ramón Gil-García, Research Professor of the Division of Public Administration at CIDE, fills an urgent need and uses an academic approach to present us with a model for helping implement and measure the achievements of electronic government. To complement this theoretical perspective, the book analyzes the portals of the United States Government and delves deeper into two specific cases: New York and Indiana.

The main idea around which the arguments in Enacting Electronic Government Success are built is an important topic in the field of electronic government: How to apply technology in public administration? But beyond this: How to comprehensively measure its application? Despite the
existence of systematic efforts to try and respond to these questions, not all have approached these questions comprehensively, and instead they present partial analyses, different approaches, or analyses by stages or divided into parts so the phenomenon can be studied.

Gil-García on the other hand, tackles this problem starting with a model he developed from a theoretical review and proven in practice through the cases studied.

To achieve this task of presenting both a theoretical model and practical analysis, the book *Enacting Electronic Government Success* is divided into seven chapters, which we can summarize in two broad sections: the first one puts forward the problem he attempts to solve with his model; in a second broader section, he puts his model into practice and analyzes case studies to put his arguments into effect.

In the first chapter, the author establishes the theoretical grounds and key ideas on which his model will be built. It essentially explains the problem of conceptualizing electronic government and the factors of success, and emphasizes the basic concepts of the discipline which are analyzed systematically in detail to pinpoint their intersections and clearly establish their limitations and advantages.

The second chapter deals with the concept of success factors, under the theoretical framework of organizations and technology, which help to specify the theoretical model he introduces further on. To achieve this, Gil-García relies on structuration theory, including others related to information technology structures, in addition to key components of institutional theory and the theoretical framework proposed by Jane Fountain known as Technology Enactment Framework (Fountain, 2001), which has undergone subsequent expansion and review (Fountain, 2006).

From a detailed and insightful theoretical review, Gil-García proposes three categories that group success factors to be considered in the field of electronic government: first, we find the organizational structures and processes; second, the institutional arrangements; and finally, the environmental conditions.

Based on this model of success factors, the author used the third chapter to analyze the websites of
the 50 states of the United States. This chapter breaks down the headings defined by each of the success factors analyzed and uses a least squares statistical model to test their connections before analyzing them systematically and structurally to identify the relationships and inter-relationships between each concept from data collected from fifty states.

Gil-García’s findings stand out for their theoretical and practical value to the implementation of digital government; for example, among them are the factors that directly influence the functionality of electronic government websites, which include: management strategies and practices, general organizational characteristics and the size of the state economy. These findings have been confirmed in later studies (Luna Reyes, Gil-García, Luna-Reyes, Sandoval-Almazán and Duarte Valle, 2012; Gil-García and Sandoval-Almazán, 2012) in which organizational characteristics and strategies have turned out to be deciding factors for the implementation and success of state websites. Gil-García also found that job permanency can determine success in the implementation of electronic government strategies; for example, in his results he observed that contract or casual technology employees were more interested in publicizing the achievements of the web portals where they work than career civil service members who do not.

These are just some of the findings of the model which were derived from a descriptive analysis, but greater detail and learning is included in chapters four and five where Gil-García addresses the cases of the states of New York and Indiana, both representative of his initial research —chapter three— in which he takes a meticulous look at each case examining the structure, practices and strategies of the implementation of electronic government, the way in which government is organized, institutional agreements —regulations, legal ordinances, etc.— that encouraged or hindered the implementation of digital government in each state, as well as the environmental conditions, organizational limitations and the results obtained in each case.

The contribution of both practical examples will surely help those responsible for information technology in public administration make
better decisions, understand the scope of technology projects in the government and avoid the mistakes that have been made in other governments. The cases of Indiana and New York both share similarities, but also many differences, which the author addresses in his knowledgeable and systematic descriptions of each one.

Last of all, Gil-García offers us a final chapter where he broadly discusses his model and clarifies certain points, but above all, endeavors to elaborate on each and every component accurately and meticulously so that it may be put into practice by the heads of government technology departments, and developed further by academics and scholars specializing in this field.

One last section of conclusions and an appendix containing the research design and methodology end the book, which include a theoretical and conceptual contribution of both success factors and electronic government as a whole.

Gil-García’s contribution in this text to the field of electronic government can be read from different perspectives. The first is that it provides a notion of electronic government that seeks to break into the discussion of the term. The second perspective is based on the construction of his theoretical model which integrates different approaches that have already been studied, but above all it provides a new approach to analyzing this field from an integrative and multidimensional perspective. A third perspective is the way the theoretical model is applied to a practical case; his analysis of the 50 websites of the states of the American Union is [highly] relevant, as is the statistical breakdown using the least squares method to test his model.

Two more perspectives that I feel are worth raising are that the author does more than just propose a theoretical model and test it; instead he supports his book through two important examples: the case of the state of New York, and the case of Indiana. In this sense, he offers us a fresh and attractive perspective for decision-makers in this field by converting the book into required reading in order to understand the effects of the implementation of electronic government and help obtain better practices, as a result of a systematic and ordered model.
Finally, no less important are the conclusions that Gil-García reaches from presenting this extraordinary facet of research and proposing new routes and key doubts, as well as discussions on topics related to electronic government, which must be studied in the near future.

Without doubt, the contribution made by the book *Enacting Electronic Government Success* will draw the attention of academics who see in the text a key piece for building theory that has practical applications and specific examples of a model that can help us to understand the interactions between citizens and government, and its various agencies, and the renewed influence of technology on public administration. For information technology managers, those responsible for government websites and the general public, this book will become an essential tool for understanding the implications of electronic government, its conceptual limitations and its enormous potential for transforming public administration through the use of information and communication technologies.

REFERENCES


The last few years have seen rapid growth in the use of digital social networks among the population. This is due to the rise of different types of mass social tools, such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, which in their short existence, have accumulated hundreds of millions of users around the world. In this context, many governments are joining this wave of innovation through their presence on the main digital social networks.

This phenomenon is not being ignored by disciplines like political or management sciences. The growing interest in the use of digital social networks that is being generated in the academic world and among public managers (Bertot et al., 2010; Boyd et al., 2007; Chun et al., 2010; Criado, 2009) is a clear indication of the usefulness of publishing works such as this which tries to serve as a practical guide to a field that is only just being explored. At the same time, high expectations from the appearance of one of the first works in this field of study means an added incentive to interest in this work.

The book by professor Ines Mergel titled Social Media in the Public Sector: A Guide to Participation, Collaboration, and Transparency in the Networked World covers a field of study within the literature on e-government that has received little attention up to now in a systematic way. The contents of the work is extremely practical; it includes experiences from different levels of government in the United States and makes recommendations to public managers, as well as hints at a potential change in the paradigm of certain key areas of the public sector. The work is predominantly based on in depth interviews that took place between 2009 and 2011 with managers and professionals of federal, state and local administrations in the United States, in addition to interviews with specialists in the private sector who work in government. The author’s efforts
clearly benefit from her long career in this study area.

The author bases the entire work on the notion that the use of digital social networks is still in the early stages of development. However, Mergel highlights that the growing interest in studying such phenomena relies on the fact that they enable interaction and bidirectional communication between government and society. She defines Government 2.0 as “the use of social technologies to increase participation, transparency, and interagency collaboration in the public sector” (page 33). In addition, she points out that the use of digital social networks is allowing governments to release information in real time, and it allows citizens and organizations to give their opinion and evaluate the message governments are sending. This produces information feedback which may be useful to government. Such processes are innovative within the public sector compared to earlier forms of electronic government based on Web 1.0.

The book is organized into two parts: the first one entitled “Understanding social media use in the public sector”, is composed of seven chapters. In the first one, the introduction, the author looks at the history of some of the most important milestones in the appearance of digital social networks in the United States. From there, the successive chapters address some key issues on putting digital social networks into practice, such as incentives for encouraging use (“drivers”), existing barriers to their development, regulations and directives in the American context, and an approximation of the methods for measuring the use of digital social networks in the public sector. In the second part, entitled “Social media practices: participation, collaboration, and transparency”, the author develops the concepts of Participation 2.0, Collaboration 2.0, Transparency 2.0 and, by way of conclusion, hints at the future development of digital social networks in the government.

As we have seen, the first part of the book is dedicated to explaining the peculiarities of using digital social networks in the public sector. After the introductory chapter, the second chapter looks at the three factors that act as incentives, according to the author, for developing digital social networks in the public sector. First, we
find the behavioral factors, which focus on the importance of the actors to be involved in the process (citizens and public managers) and to be aware of the usefulness of such tools. Second, we find the technological factors, which refer to the influence that the high level of knowledge of the Internet by a growing part of society and the widespread diffusion of broadband have had on the use of digital social networks. Moreover, technology 2.0 facilitates the cogeneration of software and content, as well as of open collaborative efforts or “crowdsourcing”. Third, are the economic factors, which hint at the importance that digital social networks be supplied by private providers free of charge, something that constitutes an enormous incentive for their use by government and citizens.

The author dedicates chapter four to reviewing the different barriers that make it difficult to put digital social networks into practice. To Mergel, there are five types of barriers: systemic; organizational and cultural; informative; technological; and legal. The public sector is facing a challenge that may imply significant changes in the way administrations think and conduct their business, but to achieve this objective, they must be capable of breaking such barriers.

Chapter five revises at the regulations and directives on the use of digital social networks in the public sector. It reviews the regulatory initiatives that are being rolled out in the United States for the development of information technologies in general and digital social networks in particular. The underlying reason that causes these problems is that digital social networks, including user data and government information, are hosted in the cloud and therefore, are managed by companies outside the administration itself.

Chapter six expresses some views on public policies aimed at encouraging digital social networks. In first place, Mergel indicates that there is a lack of formal guidance on the implementation of digital social networks. Their management, depending on each institution, is oriented toward units more focused on communication or on information technologies. Second, the author reviews the situation of government managers and personnel in respect to the use of digital social networks. Lastly, she proposes different strategies and
tactics for putting digital social networks into practice.

The author dedicates the seventh chapter to the analysis of data extracted from the use of digital social networks. She recognizes that the public sector is still in the early stages; however, the use of tools, such as Klout and IdeaScale, or text analysis applications, as well as programs for analyzing feelings or benchmarking, provide a more qualitative analysis that can help interpret the data better, and therefore, improve the presence of government in digital social networks.

The second part of the book is dedicated to more practical aspects of digital social networks, and includes some points of interest for correctly positioning these digital tools within the public sector. Chapter eight starts with an explanation of Participation 2.0. It does this by creating a participation scale that looks at the number of attributes the government offers to citizens. According to this criterion, there are five levels of participation (in ascending order): information, enquiry, inclusion, collaboration, and empowerment. It continues by providing some case studies of administrations that have put experiences into practice, and describes some of the tools and platforms used. All this takes into account some of the difficulties faced when putting projects like these into practice, such as the danger of digital exclusion and elitism in decision-making.

In chapter nine, which focuses on Collaboration 2.0, the author draws attention to the difficulties of rolling out these types of initiatives within highly regulated, hierarchical and bureaucratic public administrations. It looks at the adverse context in which sharing information involves significant restrictions, and its distribution, use and storage is regulated. According to Mergel, digital social networks can help generate collaboration networks between public employees that facilitate the exchange of knowledge. These collaboration networks can be formal, if they are facilitated by government, or informal, when the initiative comes from public employees outside the administration. Currently, the most useful collaboration tools according to the author are the so-called Wikis. In order to gain a better understanding of these tools, this chapter includes some relevant recommendations and case studies.
Lastly, in chapter ten, the author provides an approximation of Transparency 2.0 through an analysis of some best practices based on the open access content housed in the data.gov platform of the United States. In order for Transparency 2.0 to be effective, there must be two essential collaborators. On the one hand, it requires an administration that offers access to comprehensive and reusable data. On the other, it is fundamental that there is an active society capable of extracting information that it can use to exercise the right to accountability.

In conclusion, it must be pointed out that the development of the book is fluid and well-structured. The numerous practical cases included in the study clearly illustrate the contents and help give an understanding of the vision of professionals from within the public sector. Similarly, the work includes several tools widely available on the Internet that enable collaboration between public institutions and citizens. In this sense, the book has arrived to fill a gap in the literature dedicated to the study of digital social networks within the public sector.

However, an analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the interviews and the quantitative data included in the appendix is missing from the book’s largely descriptive approach. Similarly, the theoretical approach on which the author bases this work should have been developed more than simply indicating that theories from public administration, network governance and information management were used.

In addition, it is important to take into account that the conclusions drawn from the work are the result of information extracted from public institutions in the United States and as such, may not be taken universally. However, it must be pointed out that the majority of the conclusions reached by the author in the case of the United States coincide with a recent study on social media in Spain’s regional governments (Criado and Rojas, 2013) and with earlier work conducted by Chen et al. (2010), Picazo-Vela et al. (2011) and Bonsón et al. (2012).

In any event, this is a book that constitutes compulsory reading aimed at public managers and private sector professionals engaged in the management of Government.
2.0, primarily in the United States. But besides the American case, it could prove useful to public employees of other countries whose governments are rolling out similar initiatives, given the inclusion of recommendations and cases of good practices which may serve as a guide and support for their efforts.

REFERENCES


By Gabriela Quintanilla Mendoza, PhD from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Currently she is making a postdoctoral degree at Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas.

E-government is still a topic of great interest, given the enormous growth and development that information and communication technology (ICT) continues to enjoy around the world. Much has been written about the topic, but seldom has there been a book such as Public Administration and Information Technology which examines the influence of ICT on almost all functional aspects of public sector organizations, with special attention to the changes demonstrated by different areas of public administration.
The rise of social networks and Web 2.0 technologies is forcing governments more than ever to seek out new ways of addressing social demands, eliminating corruption as much as possible, and streamlining organizational processes in order to achieve greater efficiency. Therefore, this work, which may be used as a text book, allows us to gain an understanding of the way in which ICT has been adopted to help public organizations deliver more efficient, effective and transparent services.

The book is organized in four parts. The first chapter, titled ‘Public Administration and Information Technology’, serves as a conceptual and contextual framework that explains some concepts and includes theories of Public Administration and Information Technology, and emphasizes how both attempt to use information systems to bring about organizational change in government. Part one, called “The External Environment”, is composed of three chapters: “E-democracy”; “E-participation”; and “E-governance”. Part two, titled “The Internal Environment”, contains the chapters “Leadership and Management”; “E-government and Organizational Change”; and “Enterprise Architecture”. Last of all is part three, “Major Issues”, which is divided into the chapters: “E-procurement, E-commerce, and Online Financial Reporting”; “Human Resources Information Systems”; and “Information Security and Privacy”. Each of these chapters gives a thorough explanation of the elements that comprise them for the purpose of understanding the impact of ICT in public sector organizations. All three parts, which interact to create a scheme that demonstrates how ICT and public administration engage with one another, are examined and discussed in detail to provide a highly critical panorama of the functional aspects that must be considered to achieve effective change in e-government.

The book is highly didactic from the onset. It is written from a socio-technical perspective which, as the author explains, makes it easier for the readers to appreciate the social and technological aspects of ICT in order to understand their influence on organizational change. Consequently, each chapter contains a case study that includes the steps taken to address the situation, the objectives and an introduction that serves as a guide
to help the reader comprehend the context in which the topic is debated.

The author believes that it is highly relevant for organizations to study the impact of ICT on citizen trust in government, the money it spends on information technologies and the lack of performance of existing systems, as well as the growing pressure on managers to increase the quality of the services that government delivers. He also indicates that the use of ICT allows the public sector to be more responsible and open, and helps [government] make its internal processes more efficient.

In part one of the book, Reddick takes a look at the external environment in which public administration and ICT are constantly interacting in order to help narrow the gap between citizens and government. The author believes that government is able to encourage the use of electronic means for voting, participating, achieving greater commitment in political processes, in the processes of formulating public policy and drafting of regulations, as well as in the search for means to improve the quality of public service delivery.

The author argues that the success of e-democracy lies in delivering information to citizens online, because when citizens are more engaged, their trust in government and political processes (campaigns and electronic voting) can be fostered once more. Their research arrives at a very general conclusion which states that acceptance of the use of ICT in e-democracy depends on party ideology, especially in the United States, although it continues to acknowledge the Internet’s essential role in political processes, transforming into an invaluable resource during elections. Moreover, it analyzes the roles of citizen participation in political processes and citizen commitment, and the transformation this aspect has undergone as a result of the use of information and communication technologies, and the rise of social networking sites. Keeping in mind the digital divide, it explains the influence of ICT on the processes of formulating public policy and drafting of regulations, encouraging the development of proactive citizens, in addition to analyzing the possibilities offered by Web 2.0 technologies for fostering e-participation.

Lastly, Reddick underscores the importance of e-government in the interactions between government
and citizens, and the efficient and effective delivery of public services using information and communication technologies to improve quality. He emphasizes that only incremental changes are observable in the delivery of services, which contradicts the opinion of many authors, such as Zhiyuan (2002), who view it as a transformer of government.

In part two of the book, Reddick reviews the internal environment of public sector organizations, and describes the difficulties faced by leaders and administrators of public organizations to ensure the adoption of ICT, as well as its importance in achieving better e-government and with it, efficiency, cost reduction and transparency, and enhanced participation and delivery of services, which together challenge information systems to bring about organizational change.

In the chapter on leadership and management, the author describes the differences between the two, differentiating between the roles of leader and public sector administrator. In this sense, the author highlights the importance of the ambiguity of the goals of public organizations compared to private sector organizations, where they are stable and therefore widely known. This ambiguity translates into uncertainty about the mission, which makes it difficult to effectively incorporate information and communication technologies into public administration.

The distinction he makes between leader and public administrator is very valuable because it demonstrates that although leaders are essential to the development and evolution of ICT in the public sector, as the introduction of technologies into the mission and strategic direction of organizations depends on them, it is public administrators who are responsible for introducing ICT into organizations to promote change. Therefore, some argue for the benefits and challenges that the adoption of e-government brings in relation to promoting change, efficiency and quality in service delivery, as well as the promotion of public participation. It is interesting to note how the paradigm of bureaucracy, characterized by the fact that authority and power rests with senior management, is focused on the paradigm of e-government, where power is found throughout the orga-
nization and the decision-making process is decentralized. According to the author’s research, e-government has evolved slower than the transformation to a government delivering high-level services because it has taken place in the information and e-commerce phases, impacting administration, projects and resources.

The author also compares the management of information systems in the public [and] private sectors, indicating that both are different in terms of structure, motivation and environment. However, he indicates that in order for ICT to be integrated into public organizations, it is necessary that there be an allocation plan for all functions. Moreover, he emphasizes the importance of ICT as part of the strategic factors of public organizations, taking into account the organizational mission, cloud computing (which allows greater openness and flexibility in the construction of websites and applications), interoperability of technological systems (which facilitates interaction between information systems) and planning of resources.

Lastly, in part three, Reddick touches on some very important topics without giving an explanation as to why they were not included in parts one or two, especially since they are areas relevant to organizational development. In this way, he takes a look at e-procurement (electronic procurement), e-commerce (electronic commerce) and online financial reporting as areas through which public resources are channeled and managed in order to provide information or acquire goods, and explains the reasons why public administration benefits from the introduction of ICT to improve operations and simplify government procurement systems. Furthermore, he highlights the way human resource information systems have sped up processes and allowed greater inclusion of these areas into public organizations.

Finally, in the last chapter, Reddick provides a prescription on the way information about security and privacy relate to public administration, and demonstrates the position that important topics such as these must hold in the formulation of public policies and the types of protection that must be put in place to safeguard information systems. In addition, he emphasizes that both
security and privacy are aspects that must be watched closely in public sector organizations due to the availability, confidentiality, privacy and integrity of the data they collect.

The literature on public administration and ICT regularly analyzes the transformation government has undergone through the adoption of such technologies to improve management and narrow the gap with society (Reece, 2006). The originality of Public Administration and Information Technology lies in its approach to the way ICT has influenced the way the majority of areas in public administration operate, bringing about not just organizational change, but forcing public administrators to be aware of the impact of ICT on the organizations for they work.

As a text book, it not only highlights the importance of ICT in public administration, but also explores its innovative role in reforming the public sector, and improving organizational efficiency for delivering better services. Its detailed research gives the reader a realistic view of each topic, and emphasizes the current importance of electronic government to achieve more proactive public management.

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