



To explore managerial issues and their implications on e-Government deployment in the public sector: Lessons from Taiwan's Bureau of Foreign Trade

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to explore the experience of reconciling the strategic information system (IS) management with the radical transition of the Information Technology (IT) infrastructure in Taiwan's Bureau of Foreign Trade (BOFT) between 1998 and 2003. This investigation will be beneficial for the implementation of IT projects, as well as the comprehension of the organizational and managerial issues related to the discontinuity of IT development in office automation. This paper conducts an interpretative approach by means of qualitative methods – namely through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with fourteen informants – to reveal the managerial issues and their implications on the adoption of electronic government (e-Government). Through the method of content analysis, this study reviews the process of decision making, implementation, and other issues emerging as a result of the adoption of new technologies in public authorities, such as the cognition of the employee toward the benefits and effectiveness of IS in public authorities.

Learning from this case, this article identifies key lessons and provides suggestions regarding the managerial issues related to the discontinuity of technologies in the workplace. These goals are achieved through reflexive exploration of the sense-making process among civil servants. In addition, this study shares the experience and suggestions with a government CIO through the proposition of a

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framework of SPECISM approaches to cope with the challenges from the appropriation of new IT in a public authority.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In terms of modern government, information technology (IT) and information systems (IS) are seen as a catalyst for the government reinvention and creation of better and more efficient services, in addition to the paradigm shift towards the emerging form of the e-Government (Ho, 2002). The primary objectives for IS deployment in government are to achieve productivity and effectiveness everywhere. However, issues of paradigm shift and disruptive changes have arisen with the introduction of online service delivery and in public organizations. The strategic roles of IT have evolved in important ways that are transforming governance – empowering citizens as well as possessing the potential to reframe the context of authority – which serves as a key element in the strategies involved in government modernization (Grant & Chau, 2005).

Brown University's Taubman Center for Public Policy conducted a study to evaluate the government Web sites of 186 regions. It is interesting that Taiwan, Singapore, the United States, Hong Kong, and China were found to have the leading government Web sites (West, 2005). It is obvious that the Chinese regions invest heavily in constructing an e-Government in this digital era. In fact, this study showed that Taiwan's Web sites received the highest marks in 2002, 2004, and 2005.

The status of e-Government based on the national vision and strategic agendas in public policy are embedded with the unique and specific institutional requirements. Meanwhile, the recognition is also reflective of the e-Government mindset and the anticipation that overall national competitiveness will be enhanced in relation to the development of e-Commerce and an information society across Asia. While, the difficulties in executing e-Government initiatives include not only the need to address the discontinued technological and organizational changes as usual, but also the need to meet the institutional and managerial issues which arise from the IT evolution in public authority. In particular, when ample impediments exist – such as the red tape, routine procedures, a rigid regulation regime, and a bureaucratic mindset in public organizations – the organizational change and adoption of e-Government innovations are often more obstructed than in the private sectors.

1.2. Research objective/contribution

The defining features of bureaucratic organizations are a system governed by the rule of law, hierarchical structure, budget controlled by legislation, specialization, and normalization of

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