

Introduction to the Electronic Government Cluster of Minitracks

Hans J. (Jochen) Scholl
The Information School
University of Washington
 jscholl@u.washington.edu

Government at all levels (federal, state, and local) and branches (legislative, executive, and judicial) is the biggest single investor in and user of Information Technology. Given its enormously varied missions, government employs a vast range of information technology applications which have dramatically changed the way government is conducted and will continue to affect the way citizens and businesses expect government to function in the 21st century. Government is also a powerful incubator, creator, influencer, precursor, and director of information technology programs, initiatives, and trends. The creation of the Internet and the National Science Foundation's current multiyear Information Technology Research and Digital Government programs are examples of this kind of government involvement in Information Technology development.

The close and complex relationship between information technology and government has become a major focus of academic research in fields such as public administration, organizational behavior, information science, and technology innovation. Though at first glance the "e-Government" (e-Gov) initiatives as well as the underlying technologies in government practice may resemble those known from the private sector under the labels of "e-Commerce" or "e-Business," the research agenda for e-Government cannot be assumed to be identical to its private-sector counterpart. In practice the implementation of e-Government technologies and processes in the public sector also follows different priorities and requirements, as do the organizational and political implications of e-Government, which may have even more far-reaching impacts than those of the private sector.

Electronic Government has been defined as "any process that the citizenry, in pursuit of its governance conducts over a computer-mediated network" [1, 137]. Along these lines, public administration obviously finds itself at the doorsteps of a major mid- to long-term transformation with respect to how governmental business is done (inter-branch, inter-level, intra-branch, and intra-level) but also regarding the government-to-business (g2b) and government-to-citizen (g2c) relationships. However, the technological change may represent the least challenging aspect. Since technology cannot be separated from the institutional and social contexts, the interplay of technological, economical, institutional, legal,

and social factors presents the major challenge to e-Government research. The e-Government cluster of minitracks is chartered with advancing a research agenda that helps better understand those particular challenges and choices, citizens and governments face when transforming traditional modes of governing and government into technology-enabled modes of the 21st century. At this year's conference four minitracks with two sessions each contribute to this end:

E-Gov Management covers characteristics, development, implementation, and uses of information systems that support the full range of management and administrative functions that are internal to agencies, link multiple public organizations, or connect government to its business suppliers and partners.

E-Policy addresses how public policies are related to the use and development of information and communication technologies (ICT) both in government and in society at large. Government policies and legislation can create the technological environment for e-government and e-democracy applications.. Policy issues and their analysis pertain to the digital divide, infrastructure development, and educational uses of ICT.

E-Democracy presents research that investigates whether and how information technologies contribute to democratic processes and outcomes. The Internet promises to invigorate democratic processes by facilitating public discourse among citizens and between government and all stakeholders. However, these technologies can also foster anti-democratic outcomes.

E-Gov Services showcases research dedicated to the rapidly developing field of electronic service in the public sector. Citizens expect and demand such services matching private-sector services in every aspect of quality, quantity, and availability in a 24/7 and year-round fashion. Government agencies all over the world are deploying electronic services that have the capacity to meet these emerging service needs and demands.

Reference

- [1] H. J. J. Scholl, "E-Government: A special case of business process change," presented at 37th Hawaiian International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS37), Waikoloa, HI, 2003.