NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR RESTORING TRUST IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract. *Public organizations have to serve the public interest as responsive institutions by embracing technologies of information and communication in order to connect with citizens and sustain public trust improving openness, transparency, governmental legitimacy and accountability to foster interaction between public institutions and citizens in order to engender trust. New technologies drive modernization of public sector leading public organizations to build a permanent culture of transparency and openness encouraging citizens to interact and engage with the public administration more and more transparency and information provision oriented.*

Keywords: *public interest; e-government; e-governance; trust; public organizations; transparency.*

Introduction. Towards a public administration re-discovering the public interest

The public institution has to build and restore the trust of citizens by improving the quality of services and enhancing interaction and communication with the public. The aim of this study is to elucidate how public organizations embracing technology tend to sustain change by modernizing public administration, driving the transition from e-government to e-governance, fostering transparency for accountability in order to restore trust with citizens. The study relies on archival data drawn from the analysis and review of the literature concerning the role of technologies in supporting public administration to rediscover public interest and behave as a responsive and transparent organization in front of the citizens. Public sector reforms tend to drive strategic and organizational change within public administration leading public organizations to build and maintain trust with citizens.

Since the 1990s, new public management doctrines emphasizing the performance achievement seem not to adequately develop the paradigm of democratic accountability in order to enhance the trust of the public in government performance (Behn, 1998). Public institutions have to develop continuity and credibility of organizational activities by gaining legitimacy and maintaining the organizational reputation in front of their stakeholders (Suchmann, 1995; Krause, Moynihan & Carpenter, 2012) by embracing technology in order to better deliver services and improve interaction with citizens (West, 2004; Dawes, 2008; Bannister & Connolly, 2012).

New technologies driving modernization of public administration contribute to sustaining change and promote trust by emphasizing transparency by leading the transition from e-government 1.0 only technology-driven to transformational

government 2.0 enabled by ICT incorporating knowledge on the use of ICTs and relationships (Lips, 2012). Public organizations are moving from responsiveness to collaboration with citizens as partners that legitimize government by voice, support, and satisfaction, being accountable and transparent in public sector operations to be continuously monitored for providing better economic performance (Vigoda, 2002). Public organizations tend to follow the public interest producing benefits and outcome for citizens and stakeholders by building and maintaining trust relying on agency officials adhering persistently to it (Thomas, 2008). New governance processes require public organizations to build partnership with citizens and other stakeholders for work of government by helping citizens to meet their shared interests rather than steering society in order to make a meaningful contribution to society and community (Bingham, Nabatchi & O'Leary, 2005; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000).

The role of technology in sustaining public trust in government

The main activity and role of public administration should consist of building public trust in government for making a democracy possible (Goodsell, 2006). Trust is essential and central to democracy because of linking citizens to the institutions representing them by enhancing the legitimacy and the effectiveness of government sustained by democratic methods and approach. Trust seems to be generally oriented to the future. Trust seems to be a vague and multidisciplinary concept. A clear definition of what trust seems to be lacking or not properly clear in the literature. Trust concerns some expectations that one person or actor will hold about how one person or institution will perform on some future occasion. Institutional trust is related to the extent of which people are confident that public institutions will able to perform satisfactorily their tasks. Institutions well performing tend to generate trust. On the contrary, untrustworthy institutions tend to communicate and produce distrust and disaffection. Trust and distrust tend to be rational responses to the performances of institutions. Trust in government is determined by the level of public satisfaction and public expectation of government performance.

The decline of public trust undermines the legitimacy of representative government. Information technology seems to offer a useful opportunity to enhance public trust and citizen satisfaction improving transparency, effectiveness and policy participation (Moon, 2003). The increasing perceived decline in trust relies on the incapacity of government to provide citizens with the public services they really need. Public organizations have to revitalize their image coping with a growing disengagement of citizens and paying attention to causes of the decline of public trust in order to communicate with citizens and restore public trust sustaining openness, improving transparency and enhancing accountability. Recent trends in public sector reform seem to lead to trust-based steering and collaboration (Van de Walle, 2010).

Trust implies a risk about the expectation of gain or loss determining whether the trust will be or not. Trust is always conditional and contextual relying on expectations, choice or uncertainty (Coleman, 1990). Trust can be produced, maintained and restored (Thomas, 1998). ICT-based public services contribute to enhancing and restore trust (Welch, Hinnat & Moon, 2005). ICTs contribute to empowering social and political interaction between public institutions and citizens driving government

processes relying on collaboration and cooperation. The Internet and the technologies help governments to restore public trust by coping with corruption, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness of services (Moon, 2003). Interactivity and transparency seem to be associated with citizen trust in government. Citizens expect that e-government should attend to issues of transparency and interactivity to engender citizens' trust and acceptance of democratic and public institutions (Welch, Hinnant & Moon, 2005). E-government serves as means for enhancing trust by empowering citizens and sustaining governmental accountability (La Porte, Demchak & Jong, 2002). E-government as a way to increase process-based trust by improving interactions with citizens and perception of responsiveness (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006) is not able to induce *per se* trust for an unresponsive and distrusted government (Parent, Vandebeek & Gemino, 2005). Building trust in government relies on providing services that benefit the citizens or shift imbalance of power towards citizens (Smith, 2010). A mature government technology-driven should strengthen the role of citizen as an active user of governmental services and refer to digitalization of core activities following a perspective more focused on beneficial for the end-users and citizen-centered (Andersen & Henriksen, 2006; Layne & Lee, 2001).

Sustaining transparency and accountability for building trust between public institutions and citizens

Transparency as part of public sector reform is seen by policy makers as a panacea for fighting the increasing mistrust of citizens for government and enabling good governance holding elected and appointed officials accountable for their actions. Enhancing transparency allows citizens to monitor and participates in policy processes by increasing government accountability and putting pressure on government performance. With regard to public sector transparency can be defined as the availability of information about public administration to permit to citizens to oversee the internal workings or performance of public servants and officials in terms of: institutional relationship between two actors in which one actor can monitor the other one; information exchange about the internal workings or performance of an actor are visible; transparency of workings (in terms of inputs, outputs and outcomes achieved) and performance (how these results are achieved) (Meijer, 2013). Transparency can contribute to strengthening public confidence by enhancing the social legitimacy of public institutions (Curtin & Meijer, 2006). Informing citizens leads to improve policies and enhance governmental legitimacy (Meijer & Thaens, 2003). Transparency and provision of information contribute to transfer governance to the community by information (Bannister & Connolly, 2012). People frequently having contact with government or perceiving government as closed institution tend to demand more transparency and open government. While a not enough access to government is a driver for demand for transparency, a high level of confidence of citizens in their officials is likely to produce less interest in transparency (Piotrowsky & Van Ryzin, 2007). Transparency should contribute to promoting and increase government accountability by providing information as a strategic asset for citizens about what governments are doing (McDermott, 2010). Transparency tends to be a goal itself despite effective issues emerging as rhetoric means for mobilizing resources, people, and organizations (Curtin & Meijer, 2006). Governments adopting laws for access to information and embracing technology for providing online service and communicating with businesses and citizens tend to foster information flow for

increasing the chances of economic investment and development in a nation even if there are no advances in the perception of government transparency (Relly & Sabharwal, 2009).

National culture values may play a significant role in how citizens perceive and appreciate government transparency. Thereby, transparency may do little in order to improve the opinion of citizens on the government in the short term at least (Grimmelikhuijsen, Porumbescu, Hong & Im, 2013). Transparency leading to more knowledge about government agencies as the highly informative source could help government agencies to increase citizen trust. Transparency does not automatically lead to high level of trust. Only providing a high level of transparency helps citizen to have trust in government. Democratic institutions have to behave as transparent organizations to function for building and maintaining the trust of citizens in government institutions (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2009). Public organizations tend to behave as transparent but not always as accountable and responsible institutions in front of their stakeholders. Transparency does not automatically lead to accountability. While transparency implies dissemination and access to available information, the accountability requires the capacity to produce answers in terms of sanctions, compensation or remediation. Thereby, transparency and accountability can be conceived along a continuum in which the institutional answerability is the area of overlap whereas a clear transparency, which refers to information access policies and leads to reliable information on institutional performance, is able to lead to a soft accountability (Fox, 2007).

Managing information and technology for driving change

New technologies offer opportunities for access to government information and contribute to improving efficiency and effectiveness of public organizations reshaping public administration in the last decade. Managing strategically information in the public sector implies to choose coherent information technologies that help reinforce and redefine government services for maintaining relationships with critical stakeholders (Andersen, Belardo & Dawes, 1994). Governments are increasingly embracing the technologies of information and communication (ICTs) in the attempt to modernize public management systems, the communication with citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders by driving a double change (Bellamy & Taylor, 1994): the role of consumer is changing from being a mere recipient to becoming a proactive choice maker; from automatization as mere substitution of human labor by machine to information perspective based on development and management of information that implies that data collected are integrated and shared to become significant resources for wide application. ICTs contribute to improving the information management as a means for public organizations and redesign the work processes overcoming the traditional bureaucracy and driving the drift paradigm towards an infocracy by enabling the informational architecture (Zuurmond, 2005). The adoption of technology seems to progressively lead to e-government organizations and agencies building knowledge and sustaining learning for improving the productivity and maximizing the performances (Fang, 2000). ICTs contribute to creating a rational organization of public administration solidifying political relationships by stabilizing the informational architecture, rationalizing public policy and transforming both legal processes into administrative-technical processes and citizenship into consumership (Zouridis &

Thaens, 2003). ICTs contribute to enhancing a public value perspective coherently with public sector reforms managing the complex relationship between citizens and public organizations (Cordella & Bonina, 2012). New technologies contribute to re-address reform processes driven by new public management doctrines (Npm) towards a digital era governance coherently with reintegration in terms of reinstating central processes and re-engineering back-office functions; reorganization based on clients' needs, interactive and information-seeking, agile government processes; digitization processes in terms of disintermediation, zero touch technologies, moving toward open government, facilitating co-production and isocratic administration coherently with a community/citizen-centered approach where citizens tend to interact with government agencies (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow & Tinkler, 2005). ICTs contribute to enforcing democratic public values as impartiality, equity, honesty and fairness of government for engendering and sustaining initiatives coherently with public sector reform agenda towards a greater responsiveness (Cordella & Bonina, 2012; Cordella, 2007).

From e-government to e-governance

ICTs contribute to developing new policy proposals mobilizing the support of citizens, help for the steering of government and support to strategic processes by connecting elected representatives with citizens for deliberating and generating new ideas (Zouridis & Thaens, 2003). ICTs contribute to enhancing democratic processes providing a dynamic environment for ongoing learning and action (Dawes, 2008) leading to new forms of governmental legitimacy and spaces of governance (Navarra & Cornford, 2012). The adoption of technology in the public sector is a useful means for innovation in government and opportunity for democratizing public life and the relationship between public organizations, citizens, and their stakeholders. Technology in public administration refers to the concepts of e-government and e-governance as issues of public management reform agenda and cultural change.

E-government refers to the use of information technology to enable and improve the efficiency with which government services are provided to citizens, employees, businesses, and agencies. E-government contributes to enhancing the responsiveness of public administration (West, 2004) even if some barriers tend to obstacle the slow advancements of e-government: lack of technology and web staff or expertise, lack of financial resources, lack of support from elected representatives (Norris & Moon, 2005). While e-government tends to sustain a life more convenient for consumers with regard to an administrative plan, e-governance is focused on a politics plane in which the role of citizens is sanctioned (Calista & Melitski, 2007). E-governance implies an interactive and dynamic communication between government and citizens driving the government to interact democratically with citizens by increasingly promoting a meaningful citizen engagement looking at the democratic potential of information and communication technologies in terms of manageability and sustainability (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2012). E-governance is related to the use of ICTs in government for driving government to build collaboration networks and foster citizen participation (Qian, 2010) in order to alter governance structures or processes, create new governance structures or processes the about the 'how' of government in terms of power exercised and policy created enforcing values as transparency, accountability, integrity, efficiency (Bannister & Connolly, 2012).

Promoting transparency for accountability

ICTs should contribute to increasing transparency and empower citizens to monitor government performance. The Internet plays a key role as an enabler of transparency (Curtin & Mejier, 2006). Building a transformational government enabled by technologies of information and communication implies to support an open and transparent government (Lips, 2012). With regard to transparency, the impact of ICT seems to be both positive and transformational (Bannister & Connolly, 2012) even if transparency enabled by technology takes the risk to damage the reputation of government (Bannister & Connolly, 2011). Information technology pressures leading to increased public accountability contribute to promoting a citizen-centered transparency to improve citizen engagement and involvement (Jaeger & Bertot, 2010). The Internet contributes to making public organizations as open and responsive institutions willing to serve the interest of citizens (La Porte, Demchak & Jong, 2002). ICTs should contribute to creating a permanent culture of transparency and permit to public organizations to improve the knowledge and information about decision-making by building an accountable relationship with citizens (Meijer, 2013). Social media lead government to promote transparency by improving access to public information and offering multiple, dynamic interactive channels; addressing specific citizen interests; 'meeting' populations who might not otherwise encounter the government information; releasing sensitive information; better informing the public; monitoring government corruption (Jaeger, Bertot & Grimes, 2012).

Thereby, technology can help but also offers some problematic points. Technology is a necessary means but not sufficient resource to build a strong government-technology driven (Qian, 2011). Technology does not seem to lead to substantial changes in the style of the relationship between government and citizen reinforcing the existing structures (Pina, Torres & Royo, 2010). In a networked society, the role of ICTs is to support public accountability driving the transition from e-government to e-governance for building horizontal accountability involving not only public agencies but also different actors (Meijer & Bovens, 2003). Thereby, transparency technology-driven does not always lead to real and effective accountability enhancement helping the agencies to use new governance interface with citizens as a political channel for promoting their vision (Wong & Welch, 2004). Government organizations that have not yet recognized the power of social media and networking to engage with the public should move towards an open information paradigm to sustain transparency and follow behavioral changes online adopting coherent off-line behaviors (Mergel, 2012).

Conclusions

Public organizations coping with a growing disengagement of citizens have to face the decline of public trust embracing technology for enhancing transparency and promoting accountability in order to build new governance structure citizen-oriented in the public sector. Technologies seem to lead governments to behave as transparent and open institutions and drive public institutions to interact with citizens providing data and information, developing public communication and trust with citizens. It is necessary to sustain the transition from e-government to e-governance perspective moving towards the understanding of needs and demands of citizens enhancing communication and strengthening information provision for dialogue and

transparency of government information than merely providing e-services. Technology alone cannot indicate the one best way to solve all the problems about rebuilding relationships trust-based and the reconnection of citizens with public institutions as organizations. Public organizations focusing only on technological and technical aspects tend to promote transparency in order to provide efficient e-services as responsive institutions seeking legitimacy in front of distrusted citizens. Public organizations embracing and shaping technology in order to connect effectively with citizens should behave as open institutions enhancing transparency and sustaining accountable relationships with citizens to restore trust with people. The study is descriptive and only exploratory. New technologies drive modernization of public sector leading public organizations to build a permanent culture of transparency and openness encouraging citizens to interact and engage with the public administration more and more oriented to transparency and information provision. Future research perspectives imply to investigate further the relationship between technology, public organizations, and citizens towards a digital and smart public ecosystem to improve the wealth of communities and society.

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