Book Review

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE: NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR IMPROVING PUBLIC SERVICE AND PARTICIPATION

Michael E. Milakovich, Digital Governance: New Technologies for Improving Public Service and Participation (New York: Routledge, 2012), 376 pp.; US $135. Hardcover.

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Using information communication technologies (ICTs) to reform government structure, politics, and public administration has been widely considered a good strategy to develop modern democracy and improve the quality of public service delivery. More and more academic and practical studies have expanded their discussions from the topic of electronic government to the concept of digital governance. Digital Governance is a book that thoroughly explores the development from electronic government to digital governance from the American point of view in this era when governments face more public distrust, financial depletion, and economic downturns. The author argues that governments should properly use ICTs and implement digital governance to earn back public trust, change organizational structures, encourage citizen participation, improve government performance, deal with financial difficulties, and respond to globalization challenges, which can be viewed as the main theme of this book.

The ten chapters are organized into four parts to address the idea of digital governance. The first part comprises chapter one and reviews the background, emergence, and development of digital governance. The assumptions underlying the e-government revolution are particularly examined in light of the current situation, when private companies, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations face severe financial difficulties.

The second part explains why and how democracy can be transformed and reinvigorated by the application of ICTs. Chapter two addresses how electronic and digital applications have emerged with the widespread use of ICTs and have therefore

changed the political linkages between citizens and governments. The author also introduces the online citizen participation model and presents cases to show how deliberative and participatory democracy are improved and advanced by ICTs. Chapter three explains why it is significant and necessary that government moves from a traditionally hierarchical structure to a more horizontally networked and citizen-centric system. Citizen Relationship Management (CzRM) is introduced here and viewed as particularly critical, with the requirement that it be paired with digital governance. Chapter four discusses the emergence and effect of e-learning and virtual education. Quality awards and national/international accreditation standards are also proposed here as good strategies to motivate governments to enhance the quality of their public service delivery, which also responds to the reform of measure-for-results and the need for performance improvement in modern society.

The third part of this book presents the implementation of digital governance in government performance improvement. Chapter five begins to illustrate the importance of balancing political accountability and administrative effectiveness with the use of ICTs. The author advocates that administrative effectiveness depends on whether citizens can equally access the Internet and other Web-based media, thereby exercising democratic freedom. Chapter six further describes the connection between digital governance and performance management. It addresses the evolution of federal legislation and regulations on government performance improvement and discusses current citizen attitudes toward online government in the United States. Chapter seven lists examples of how governments are using ICTs to enhance interaction and interoperability among agencies and to advance government-to-government ICT applications (G2G), government-to-employee services (G2E), government-to-business relationships (G2B), and government-to-citizen services (G2C).

The fourth part of this book studies the impacts of ICTs on globalization-related issues and their future challenges. Chapter eight compares progress in selected world regions, underscores lessons from leading nations, and introduces various cases of how governments in different countries use ICTs to improve public service delivery. This chapter also touches on issues related to global digital divides and proposes the author's view of the future direction of digital governance around the world. Chapter nine describes how ICT-driven innovations accelerate the growth of globalization. The applications of ICTs are observed as one of the key global flattening forces that enhance changes in world trade, green policy, and education. The last chapter summarizes the main points in the book and underlines ten recurring themes that public officials need to consider further. Paradoxes and future challenges related to digital governance are also discussed.

This book possesses several strengths. First, it covers a wide breadth of material, which is useful for readers to thoroughly understand the concept of digital governance and its related topics, such as e-government, citizen participation, and the digital divide.

Second, the author comprehensively explores why current society demands that governments take a citizen-centric approach to delivering public services. Third, this book successfully connects digital governance with public administration from the perspective of improving government performance and public service quality, which provides scholars with a fresh view to study the impact of ICTs on public administration. Fourth, this book not only theoretically discusses the definition, emergence, and development of digital governance but also lists legislation in the United States and examples from around the world to clarify the practical implementation of ICTs in public administration, which can be treated as a characteristic of this book. Finally, this book helps connect the emerging debates in digital governance with issues of globalization, world trade, the U.S. economy, global warming, and education, which is very useful to advance the current literature.

I would also like to indicate two limitations of the book. First, I felt the author demonstrates an optimistic attitude toward the widespread application of ICTs and the development of digital governance, but does not address their possible negative impacts. For example, although the Internet and social media provide the public with more channels to express their opinions about public policy, citizens may become accustomed to addressing their thoughts anonymously in the virtual world and become reluctant to physically attend public hearings and express their concerns in front of people, which can be harmful to the spirit of participatory democracy. Moreover, since the Internet and social media are convenient, citizens more frequently share their comments/complaints on a specific public service item via e-mails, an online mayor's box, or even on the public agency's Facebook page, and then expect to receive instant responses. Public officials, therefore, need to expend more time and energy than before in order to rapidly respond to this huge volume of online comments/complaints, which may delay their routine work and decrease their administrative efficiency. In other words, the implementation of digital governance is not always beneficial. A discussion about these possible negative impacts is also critical for readers to thoroughly understand digital governance and should not be ignored. I suggest the author add this perspective to the book in a future edition.

Second, in my view, this book focuses on addressing American experience and how to respond to the United States' current "wicked problems" in economy, globalization, world trade, green policy, education, and governmental finances through the implementation of digital governance. Therefore, the discussions about the emergence, development, impacts, and challenges of ICT application on governments in other world regions are relatively limited. Although in chapter eight we find summaries of current global e-participation and e-government readiness rankings and digital governance practices in other countries, there is no analysis from these other historical and cultural perspectives to thoroughly illustrate and compare the background and development of digital governance in different nations. Scholars in other countries must therefore step

back and consider whether the arguments and examples in this book are totally suitable to their nations or cultures.

In sum, I think the strengths of Digital Governance outweigh the above two limitations. Thus, I highly recommend this book and view it as a significant source of knowledge about digital governance in the United States. This book is appropriate to be listed as graduate-level course reading and is especially useful for scholars and students whose research interests center on administration effectiveness, government performance, e-government, and global governance.

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