Foreword

By now, we are all familiar with the pervasive impact of information systems on the administration of government. Accessing local, state, and national Web portals for access to information is now commonplace for most citizens of advanced industrial societies. In the academic discipline of public administration, the study of information technology is now a mandated topic, required for the accreditation of degree programs in the field. More and more governmental operations, from applying for driver's licenses to paying taxes, are now accomplished electronically with greater convenience to the citizen and with greater efficiency for government.

Yet, in spite of the pervasiveness of public information technology, much of the literature available to the student or the interested reader has fallen into one of two genres: dull and excessively uncritical governmental reports on the one hand, and on the other hand, highly generalized academic treatments of the expansion of information technology (IT) in the last few decades. By providing extensive case treatments of important topics and issues in the public management of IT, Bruce Rocheleau has gone a long way toward filling an important gap in the literature.

The cases which Rocheleau has brought together, taken as a set, provide a comprehensive view of managing information technology in the public sector: contract management, control issues, customer orientation, ethics, evaluation, funding and fees, implementation, intellectual property, intergovernmental coordination, interorganizational dynamics, IT governance, outsourcing, political leadership, political participation, portal strategies, project management, systems acquisition, and vendor relationships are among the topics treated. Moreover, treatment is not at an airy and generalized level but is put into the more useful context of actual recent cases which have challenged practitioners in the field.

Case study research is a time-honored, traditional approach to the study of topics in public administration and management. Case study research has the capability of uncovering causal paths and mechanisms, and through richness of detail, identifying causal influences and interaction effects which might not be treated within the technical parameters of statistical studies. And these very research advantages are pedagogical advantages as well, drawing students into the interesting processes and issues of managing public information systems.

There has been a dearth of good case studies up to now, and this volume makes an important contribution to the field by helping to fill the gap. The contribution is enhanced by involvement of many practitioners in the writing of detailed case studies which help bridge theory and practice. The kinds of problems and issues dealt with by these case studies are a healthy sampling of issues faced by IT practitioners and academics, whether studying IT at the local, state, or federal level. In summary, case studies represented in this volume contribute in important ways to learning about public-sector information management and will help students of public administration understand and prepare for the coming era of digital government.

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