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BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION OF E-GOVERNMENT IN POLAND

Abstract

Over a span of the last two decades governments of many countries have made an attempt to implement e-Government. The goal of e-Government is to transform thoroughly business processes of administration on the basis of ICT and to make management of the state – by using money of taxpayers in the most efficient way as possible – intelligible and predictable, based on the open cooperation with citizens, enabling to control activities of the state and serving of well-being of all citizens. The topic of the article are barriers in e-Government implementation, divided into three categories – strategic, tactical and operational – are discussed. Since the obstacles overlap with each other it is sometimes difficult to define them unambiguously. In the article they are analyzed from the most general to the most particular ones.

Key words: public sector, informatization, e-Government

Introduction

Over a span of the last two decades governments of many countries have made an attempt to implement e-Government. E-Government has been defined by European Commission as an initiative that aims to improve the quality of services provided by administration and to make the process of democratic legitimization of policy [Bogucki, 2005: 11] more effective through redesign of organization and use of information and communication technology (ICT). The goal of e-Government is to transform thoroughly business processes of administration on the basis of ICT and to make management of the state – by using money of taxpayers in the most efficient way as possible – intelligible and predictable, based on the open cooperation with citizens, enabling to control activities of the state and serving of well-being of all citizens [*E-administracja...*, 2013].

The approach to informatization and digitalization on a larger scale, however, has been fragmentary and chaotic so far; and according to the authors of

the report *State 2.0* ‘turned things upside down’ [*Raport Państwo 2.0...*, 2012]. The topic of the article are barriers in e-Government implementation, divided into three categories – strategic, tactical and operational – are discussed. Since the obstacles overlap with each other it is sometimes difficult to define them unambiguously. In the article they are analyzed from the most general to the most particular ones.

Barriers to e-Government implementation

The crucial drawback of e-Government implementation is a lack of a strategic approach. In Poland many strategies, plans and programs, which aim at computerization and building of the information society have been created¹. There is a lack, however, a more general perspective, a vision of Poland after implementation of these projects. On 1st January 2011 *The State Informatization Plan for 2007–2010* ceased to be effective. The works on the next project were delayed, it was issued only in the middle of 2011, and it was so heavily criticized that still it has not been approved.

Currently effective Cabinet regulation from 12th April 2012 on Domestic Framework for Interoperativity and minimal requirements for tele-information systems, public registers and exchange of information in electronic form (Dz.U., item 526) [<http://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm7.nsf/InterpelacjaTresc.xsp?key=782BA8DE>, access: 16.02.2013] was created to facilitate cooperation between websites and registers [*Krajowe ramy...*]. We lack the consistent, long-term plan for state informatization. The document *State 2.0*, which is often referred to, is the report that synthesizes and summarizes actions for e-Government implementation that have been undertaken so far [*Raport Państwo 2.0...*, 2012].

Then the most important obstacle to e-Government development is the lack of comprehensive and multidimensional approach as well as forward planning. Yet these are the hindrances, which have emerged not only in Poland, but also in other countries [Lenk, 2006: 192]. Since the representatives of public sector from Singapore, Australia, Hong Kong and New Zealand, who took part in the research, pointed out similar problems [Lam, 2005: 518].

The lack of strategy resulted in implementation of numerous field solutions² in particular areas of public administration, which operate in isolation from sys-

¹ *Inter alia*: Strategia Rozwoju Kraju 2007–2015, Narodowe Strategiczne Ramy Odniesienia 2007–2013, Strategia rozwoju społeczeństwa informacyjnego w Polsce do roku 2013, Narodowy Program Foresight “Polska 2020”, Kierunki zwiększania innowacyjności gospodarki na lata 2007–2013, Narodowy Planu Rozwoju 2007–2013, Program Operacyjny Innowacyjna Gospodarka 2007–2013, Program Operacyjny Rozwój Polski Wschodniej 2007–2013, Regionalne Programy Operacyjne 2007–2013.

² *Inter alia* STAP, CEPIK, E-DEKLARACJE, TREZOR, ELEKTRONICZNA PLATFORMA GROMADZENIA, ANALIZY I UDOSTĘPNIANIA ZASOBÓW CYFROWYCH O ZDARZENIACH MEDYCZNYCH, PLATFORMA UDOSTĘPNIANIA ONLINE PRZEDSIĘBIORCOM

tems, which in fact require cooperation. They work solely thanks to use of the inefficient structures, which rely on, for instance, duplicating of content of the main state registers [Zalącznik..., 2011]. At state level there is a lack of infrastructure and organizations, which would be capable of ensuring reliable, safe and exchange of information between field systems, that would be possible to account for.

The consequences of this barrier will not be leveled until the foundations for cooperation between information systems of public administration entities are laid; it regards both cooperation between particular entities and with main state stakeholders. These foundations are build by redesigning of organization achieved through process management [*Linia współpracy...*, 2012].

Real introduction: question of E-government

E-Government is the most often identified with providing online services and creating internet portals of offices [Lenk, 1997: 151–163]. Even if we take such a narrow definition it requires flow of information within and between organizations. The information expected by citizen rarely regard only one unit or/and locality. Therefore public sector entities are faced with necessity of establishing of multidirectional cooperation between units, which are subject to separate legal acts. However, the functional model of management is not conducive to the flow of information since within this framework the independent and not cooperation-oriented entities generate information in huge ‘silos’, as a result it is difficult to extract them quickly in order to use them efficiently. Therefore the process approach is employed to find a way to respond more efficiently to changing needs of citizens. This approach enables to focus on main goal, that is a common good; it also assumes that every process should contribute value added [Grajewski, 2012: 22]. In favor of introducing the process approach into public administration speaks the fact that it facilitates more effective management by setting the goals and controlling them as well as connecting processes with ‘products’ of public organization, which in turn respond to identified needs of clients and stakeholders. Moreover, it also prompts to abandoning thinking solely in terms of own field of activity (which due to its nature is fragmentary) for holistic and comprehensive approach to public organization and cooperation on behalf of it [Batko, 2011: 41–42]. Management in public sector requires skillful building and sustaining relationships with employees and citizens, which are based on partnership as well as looking for the source of strength not in power, but in collaboration [Bingham, O’Leary, Nabatchi, 2005: 54–61].

Both governmental and municipal organizations require the process approach. Widespread in public sector organizations the CAF model, which combines principles of total quality management (TQM) concept with the model of European Fund of Quality Management (EFQM), is an outpost of process approach. The former version of the model (CAF 2006), which was effective until recently, put the emphasis on the need of process management, while the latest version (CAF 2013) goes step further stressing the need of management and coordination of processes with other organizations [*The Common Assessment...*, 2013]. In those organizations, which do not manage their processes, the activities are often duplicated, additional costs are generated and resources are managed inefficiently [Fließ, Kleinaltenkamp, 2004: 392].

Situation in Poland – a case study (analyzes)

The research carried out in 2009 by website PROCESOWCY.PL shows that level of process maturity of public sector entities is lower than the average for Poland would indicate. In public sector organizations processes have been at the most identified [*Dojrzałość procesowa...*, 2010]. The SWOT analysis of state efficiency in the document *The Efficient State 2011–2020* also points out the lack of process management. In this document weaknesses and threats, which stem from the lack of process approach, are also presented [*Projekt Strategii...*, 2011].

According to the data of *eGOV.pl – Digital State Observatory* in Poland both access to public administration services provided *via* internet and their quality are below the European average. In 2010 the indicator of full online access to twenty basic services was 79%, while the European average was 82%. In 2010 the level of advancement of online public administration services (measured by five maturity levels model) for Poland was 87%, while the European average was 90% [http://www.egov.pl/wizualizacja/analiza_pozycji_polski, access: 16.02.2013]. It is worth mentioning that both in Poland and in Europe the standard of services dedicated to business is higher than those dedicated to individuals. Due to poor accessibility and small usability, citizens use electronic services only to a small extent [*Diagnoza społeczna...*, 2011]. The quality of services has to be improved and the society needs to be encouraged to make use of them.

Investment character of *Plan of Informatization of the State* completed on 1.01.2011 is in part a result of access to EU public funds for modernization of administration. The majority of sector and cross-sector projects implemented at this time was introduced on the basis of existing structures, which are intertwined with willingness of employees to satisfy superiors, who assign different tasks and execute their fulfilling.

Organizations of public sector characterizes strict hierarchy, expanded process of decisions making, conformity to the rules and regulations, focus on safety in management of employees, ensuring stability and predictability. These attributes do not constitute a fertile ground for changes in organization. They con-

tribute to shifting responsibility from results of activity to the mode of activity [Grajewski, 2012: 12], where fulfillment of duties according to instructions is considered to be sufficient guarantee of efficiency [Sikorski, 2000: 110]. In such organizations efficient functioning is achieved by formal rules and regulations [Cameron, Quinn, 2006: 56]. The consequence of such activities is a discrepancy between innovativeness of implemented information systems and organizations, which manage them. An analysis of projects implemented within framework of *Plan for Development of State in 2007–2010* shows advantage of sector projects over cross-sector projects. The lack of coordination of implemented projects, a comprehensive corporate architecture of the state [Sobczak, 2013] and uniform budget for informatization resulted in emergence of field solutions, which are applicable at most to one department.

Such a state of affairs is also an outcome of making a purchase of information systems through public procurements: the main criterion is the price, not the quality of offered solutions and usability verification by users at working stage is made difficult. The solutions chosen this way do not have a common stock of state reference data (lexicons, public registers, interfaces), in consequence, an attempt to combine two independent systems – as it happened in the case of sending data from PESEL³ register to taxpayers register – may take several months of work of information technologists and office workers [*Krajowe ramy...*].

In public sector organizations change of perspective and approach to activity from vertical to horizontal and involvement of citizens both at the governmental and municipal levels are needed. The consequences of the lack of the strategy at the national level are parallel, incompatible and unable to communicate with each other systems developed by different institutions of the administration. The lack of management and in-depth knowledge of processes at governmental and municipal levels resulted in losing sight of the stakeholders perspective and made difficult to create network of values. This mode of the e-Government implementation at strategic and tactical levels caused that at operational level the focus of attention became building and/or development of technological infrastructure within existing structures. Incoherent and chaotic activities at the highest levels resulted in chaos at the lowest levels. The information technology tools have been bought, but they are not used and they are not compatible with each other even within one entity. In 2011, for instance, many taxpayers, who submitted their income tax return only by electronic form, were called by the certified letters to submit them. It was due to the fact that the information that they did it *via* internet was not passed on time from one department to another. The most damage was done, however, at the level of human resources management. An incompetent preparation for changes and their unskillful implementation resulted in information chaos and the incomprehension of effective regulations among employees [Hawrysz, 2009: 311–319]. In the course of the implementation attitudes and values of public sector employees, such as altruism, an involvement on behalf of

³ PESEL – personal identification number on Polish Ids.

social development and public interest, were not taken into account [Tregear, Jenkins, 2007: 2–8].

As an illustrative example may serve experiences of the authors who carried out the research project on quality management in public sector. Many entities, who were invited to take part in our research, refused since owing to ‘budgetary limitations they had to give up the certification’ and therefore ‘they can not take a stance on the subject of the research’. Following this line of reasoning a guarantee of quality is the formal certificate not activities, which are undertaken by people at all levels. If these several years of involvement of employees have not brought about the change in the way of thinking about quality it means that it had only declarative and superficial character. Moreover, despite the fact that many public sector entities⁴ were obliged to implement management control, and its requirements are to a large extent consistent with principles of Quality Management System [Śpiewok, 2012: 9–11], only some managers are aware of that. Undertaking activities, involving employees and resigning at the stage when first results could be seen brings negative effect, namely even greater determination to ensure stability and predictability in public administration. It leads to passive attitude and to undertaking only these activities, which are imposed by the law. It is exemplified by the response of a manager from one of the entities we requested to participate in our research: ‘within legally binding norms there are no regulations, which would oblige employees to provide answers to such requests’. The stance of this person was by no means exception.

Conclusion

To sum up, not only public administration should be consistent, but also information solutions that support it. They should be grasped, designed, developed, managed and used within common corporate model of a state. Its particular aspects should be seen not through the prism of particular tasks, but from the perspective of the whole administration. Before ‘new start’ of e-Government, announced by the report *State 2.0*, will take place, outcomes of the activities, which have been already undertaken at micro level (that is within particular entities) should be scrutinized and taken into account.

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⁴ Binding from 1st January 2010 law about public finance introduced to entities of public finance the management control.

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