

“Implementing and Managing eGovernment” by Richard Heeks

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Reviewed by Robert Davison

I wish I had had this book to draw upon when I taught an introduction to eGovernment 18 months ago. But at that time there was simply no suitable text available. Instead I had to make do with a collection of research papers and consulting reports. “Implementing and Managing eGovernment” is a most professionally put together text that reflects the excellence we have come to expect from this author. As it makes clear in its opening statements, it does not treat eGovernment as eCommerce/eBusiness, nor does it accept the prevailing hype about the topic that we so often encounter in the trade press and consulting reports. What it does do is to situate eGovernment systems within both the Information Systems discipline and the broader human and organisational context, with all the idiosyncracies of culture, politics and public-agency bickering that we are so familiar with. It is thus a holistic text that captures a multi-faceted view of eGovernment, taking a “warts and all” approach to the analysis of eGovernment systems.

Organised around two main themes – Managing eGovernment and Implementing eGovernment – over twelve chapters, the text covers a wide range of material from a remarkably international set of geopolitical perspectives. Given that eGovernment initiatives to date have been most frequently experienced in relatively developed countries, it is unsurprisingly these countries that dominate the examples, but the less developed countries are by no means ignored. Vignette boxes stud the text, with pithy and precise examples of how eGovernment systems succeed and (all too often) fail in different circumstances. Thus, we see how eGovernment enables a centralised approach to business registration in Nova Scotia, Canada, as well as problems associated with a centralised approach to public healthcare information systems in Ecuador and the problems of decentralised systems in the US.

As an andragogical text, this book is eminently suitable both for introductory university courses on eGovernment and in support of training or project work in public sector organisations that are seeking to engage their staff in eGovernment projects. The text itself is primarily non-technical and so is readable by people who are relatively unfamiliar with the domain. Each chapter is concluded with shorter activities that can be completed in class, as well as longer assignments, exercises for practitioners and eGovernment project development exercises. It is remarkable for a single text to address such a disparate range of audiences. Some of these activities require prior knowledge of systems analysis and design.

Overall, I strongly recommend this text to students of eGovernment, whether in universities or the public sector. Each can read the book at a different level and can reap significant gain from the variety of material available. The chapters are well organised, as is the comprehensive index, while academic readers will appreciate the extensive bibliography.