

# Public Management Report

An occasional (and maybe insightful) examination of the issues, dilemmas, challenges, and opportunities in leadership, governance, management, and performance in public agencies.

On the differences among:

## M-Gov, E-Gov, and I-Gov

In his original “reengineering” article in the *Harvard Business Review*, Michael Hammer distinguished between automating business processes and reengineering them. Automation has “delivered disappointing results,” Hammer argued, because it is the mere use of “technology to mechanize old ways of doing business.” Instead, Hammer told businesses to “reengineer”—to “use the power of modern information technology to radically redesign our business processes in order to achieve dramatic improvements in their performance.”



The subtitle of Hammer’s article contained his key admonition: “Don’t Automate, Obliterate.” Still, much of what has been touted as E-Government is little more than the automation of some manual process: Do not send payroll checks through the mail; deposit employees’ pay in their bank accounts electronically. Do not send employees their pay stubs through the mail; send them an electronic notice telling them how to download their pay stub. Manual Government has become Electronic Government, but the core of what government is doing remains unchanged. Yes: E-Gov is more efficient than M-Gov, but it is not fundamentally different.

Some public agencies have, however, done more than automate M-Gov into E-Gov. Some engaged in true reengineering. Chicago created its 311 call system by radically redesign-

ing a core activity of government: accepting, tracking, and responding to citizen requests for service. Chicago obliterated its old systems. Now, if citizens want the city to tow away an abandoned vehicle, to fill a pot hole, or to trim a tree, they just need to call one, three-digit phone number: 311. Moreover, city employees—from the front-line worker who is responsible for handling service requests, to the local alderman who wants to know what is happening in his or her ward—have access to this information. Chicago has used technology to make the kind of “dramatic improvement” that Hammer advocated.

Further, some public agencies have employed the statistical analysis and the data networks that all of the little electrons make possible to create information-based innovations. They have moved beyond Manual Government and Electronic Government to what is truly innovative: Information Government.

Indeed, 311 is more than reengineering. The 311 computers contain lots of information, which Chicago’s analysts have examined to detect patterns and develop new ways of responding to standard, frequent, or difficult requests. For example, to detect potential outbreaks of West Nile Virus, Chicago analyzed 311 calls to find concentrations of dead crows. Then, it sent city crews to these locations to find and kill mosquito larvae.

Two other examples of I-Gov are Compstat invented by the New York Police Department and Baltimore's similar CitiStat process. In both cases, computer technology has been central to the innovation. William Bratton, who as Police Commissioner drove the creation of Compstat, has noted that, as a young police lieutenant in Boston, he employed a strategy similar to Compstat; yet, without the technology, he could not have expanded his approach from a single precinct to all of New York. Similarly, without the technology, Baltimore could not have created its CitiStat strategy. Technology, however, was not itself the core of these I-Gov innovations.

Still, many reports have emphasized the technology of CitiStat. Recently, *TIME* magazine called it "a computerized score sheet." Indeed, if you visit a Compstat or CitiStat session, you can easily be mesmerized by the dazzling technology—particularly the maps and graphs flashed onto the walls during a session. Moreover, the people who manage Compstat and CitiStat are proud of their technology and love to demonstrate it. But this focus on the technology misses a more fundamental point: Compstat and CitiStat were neither created by automating a standard government process, nor were they created by reengineering an existing government process. Rather, both are fundamentally new governmental strategies. Both Compstat and CitiStat are true innovations.

They do more than collect and organize data electronically. They use the data stored in the electrons to create new forms of information. Compstat and CitiStat *convert data into information* and use this information to create new strategies for managing either a police department or a city.

Obviously, the phrase "E-Government" covers a variety of different public-sector activities that are enhanced or permitted by

the data-processing capacity of those speedy electrons. Here are four distinct categories.

(1) *E-Gov Information* makes existing information more widely available to citizens by putting it on the Internet. On May 17, 2000, when New York City put the results of its restaurant inspections online, this web site averaged 23,000 hits per hour from citizens checking out their favorite eatery.

(2) *E-Gov Automation* takes manual work and converts it to electronic work. In 2005, more than half of all U.S. citizens filing their federal income tax did so not on paper but electronically.

(3) *E-Gov Reengineering* is the radical redesign of an important but existing process. Technology is essential for it makes it possible to redesign the process.

(4) *I-Gov Innovation* begins not by automating or redesigning existing work. Instead, I-Gov is a completely unprecedented strategy for achieving a public purpose—perhaps even a wholly new public purpose. The innovation lies in the novel use of the information that the electronic technology makes possible.

To move from M-Gov to E-Gov requires mere automation. To move from E-Gov to I-Gov, however, requires true innovation. **B**

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*E-Gov is more efficient than M-Gov but not fundamentally different. In contrast, I-Gov is a true innovation—an unprecedented strategy that exploits the ability of all those little electrons to convert data into useful information.*