

Conclusions

These cases highlight how information sharing, communication and coordination play a critical role in the success of E-government collaborations. As we are learning from academic research, relationships are critical underlying mechanisms in knowledge creation and facilitate the creation of new intellectual capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). The social structure of an organization provides the conduit through which information flows, communication happens, and coordination occurs. This structure exists through the complex web of formal and informal relationships among employees and is an important determinant of the feasibility and productivity of any activity. It influences the development of intellectual capital by affecting the conditions necessary for creating knowledge. In particular, the pattern of linkages among employees and the relationships built through them are the foundation through which knowledge is combined and exchanged making it available for such critical organizational tasks as resolving the uncertainties associated with producing products. In other words, who you know affects what you know (Burt, 1992) and these relationships among employees help facilitate the coordination and cooperation of activities within an organization (Putnam, 1993).

The cases illustrate examples where open and frequent communication establish and build trust among the collaborating organizations and with such overseeing bodies as the legislature, oversight commissions, and the general public. The communication channels facilitate the flow of information among employees who are dealing with many uncertainties related to building complex IT-enabled process innovations and reengineering work required to implement E-government solutions. Not only do employees have to work among their agencies, the collaborations also require them to work integratively with employees from the partnering organizations. They are often separated from understanding each other by differences in their organizational culture, level of technical or business process expertise, or other factors. Given that the collaborations tend to evolve from arms-length relationships into tightly-coupled partnerships, more communication is required rather than less; formal roles should be defined, widely understood, and allowed to evolve; and informal relationships need to flourish.

Simply implementing a policy of more communication is not the answer. Instead, managers from high performing organizations say that success relies on adopting a suite of practices to build communication practices to support the collaboration. The mechanisms for influencing employee involvement in collaborations include the following seven sets of human resource management and work-place practices (Ichniowski, Shaw, and Prennushi, 1997):

- Problem-solving teams provide employees with direct input into improving the government service.
- Rotation across jobs improves ideas for teamwork and makes use of broader worker skills.
- Information sharing is important to provide the information and motivation for greater involvement and decision making.
- Training is needed to do problem solving and to increase skills for day-to-day decision making.
- Incentive pay, in the form of some type of pay-for-performance, offers the incentive for greater employee involvement.
- Job security provides the understanding that improving a service performance will not result in the direct loss of jobs.
- Careful screening and selection of workers leads to a workforce more skilled in both direct job-related (technical and analytical) skills and the "team skills" to work together to solve problems and to respond to rewards on the job.

Collaborations are critical in the current approach to building E-government systems. As public organizations turn to outside partners, they must build mechanisms that will allow information sharing, communication and coordination. The better this is done, the greater the chance that public organizations can develop high performing E-government systems by reducing the uncertainty of marrying new technologies with old technologies, revamping well entrenched business processes, and exploring innovative ways to integrate emerging technologies and practices.