

IS DIGITAL GOVERNMENT OUR NEAREST FUTURE?

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Annotation. This article presents the basic ideas of the digital transformation of the public sector. The current situation and trends of digitalization in the public sector are analyzed.

Keywords. Digital transformation, technological change, public sector, e-government, government services.

United Nations (UN) in their manifest “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” mentions digital transformation as one of the essential tools for reaching sustainable development. Also, they collect data and manage statistics regarding the digitalization of public services since 2003. In the last edition of the survey, Belarus is placed in a group with a “very high” e-Government Development Index (EDGI) and it takes 40 ranks out of 193 possible. This group is the best out of the four, and it includes 57 countries. EDGI index is a normalized composite index with three components: the Online Service Index (OSI), the Telecommunications Infrastructure Index (TII), and the Human Capital Index (HCI).

Interesting fact that HCI is the best Belarusian index out of three. However, this article is covering only OSI as only it covers questions about digitalization. OSI is based on the Online Service Questionnaire (OSQ), which consists of a list of 148 questions. These questions covered by 200 hundred prepared public administrators. They assessed each country's national website in the native language, including the national portal, e-services portal, and e-participation portal, as well as the websites of the related ministries of education, labor, social services, health, finance, and environment. They assessed the list of features, which could be divided into three categories as: “information about” something such as laws, policies, legislation or expenditures; “existence of” a feature such as social networking tools; “ability to” do something on the website.

The OSI helps in identifying and stressing important parts of digital transformation. In a contrast, traditional government services are delivered by a person or by the individual departments in different locations, and often by paper forms. Digital services allow the government to deliver information and services to citizens anything, anywhere, and on any device or platform. Moreover, there are tons of e-government examples one of which is the U.K., which has decent progress in government digital transformation. In fact, one-third of their local government offers services completely online. And they state that new tech solutions enable the government to streamline processes while saving time and money. The overarching objectives, in this example, are similar – officials focus on enhancing the public's online experience with the government.

Six trends could be named as key drivers of technological change in public services:

1. Citizen-centric. Public services are supposed to be user-friendly with continuous improvement with feedback from citizens to bring the meaningful value of innovation. The goal is to save time and money, improve speed and quality of services and promote efficient and transparent interaction, encourage the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes, problem-solving and co-designed public services.

2. Driven by data. The abundant amount of data makes it possible to using machine learning and artificial intelligence for predictive analytics, which provides an opportunity to analyze behavior and processes for continuous improvement for better citizen's outcomes.

3. Ready for the future. The new technologies open new opportunities for innovation. Technologies have become accessible and cheaper. Especially cloud technologies are important as it allows the public sector to neglect costs related to hardware maintenance. Subscription-based services can give the latest and greatest innovations immediately, with a cheaper money and time investigation, as public cloud providers.

4. Interoperable and accessible. The government collects the biggest amount of personal data of its citizens, and it is a valuable opportunity for sharing data. It should consider becoming a platform for an ecosystem of partners with other public services, private businesses, and non-profit organizations, and social enterprises for developing and transforming the ways of interacting citizens with digital services.

5. Security by Default. The government collects and manages the most sensitive data like health, address, criminal records of its citizens. It is expected that public services implement the best security protocol and enhance data security.

6. Technology Is Committed to Connecting, Not Dividing. Technologies as messengers, contact forms, chatbots are the simplest and fastest way to connect and get feedback from citizens. Platforms for discussion and involvement of all citizens could help to find compromises in infrastructure programs, transportation networks, public safety operations, can change budgeting priorities on the local level for better outcomes.

To summarize, economists and politicians name digitalization as one of the parts of the third industrial revolution. Some fantasists project an image of the future, where votes will be counted by computers and Artificial Intelligence will replace drivers, builders, account managers, and even politicians. However, the only simple repetitive tasks are being automatized nowadays. But overall, the trend could be noticed: better efficiency of the public sector, more citizen involvement in decision processes, and total transparency because the Internet remembers all.

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