Book Review

Chung, Choong-sik (2020) *Developing Digital Governance: South Korea as a Global Digital Government Leader*, **Routledge**

In the past decade, the advancement of intelligent technologies has pushed society further to keep up with the new prospects of the ways of life and modes of work. Meanwhile, the widening digital divides around the world have prompted the need for practical policy guidelines for developing countries to enhance their digital capabilities. In *Developing Digital Governance: South Korea as a Global Digital Government Leader*, Choong-sik Chung provides an extensive policy overview of the digital government development process at the global level, and with a specific case study of South Korea. The author clearly states that the purpose of the book is to serve as a policy reference for developing countries in their endeavor to implement digital government and digital governance framework based on the South Korean experiences (p. 4). There is no doubt that the book comes in hand for researchers, students, and policy practitioners who need a systemized policy review and specific guidelines for promoting digital government. My review will provide a summary of the book and discuss both the achievements and shortcomings of the author's arguments by engaging with the present discourse in the field.

The underlying theme is the transition from e-government to digital government. According to the author, digital government is the result of digital transformation, a distinct feature compared to e-government. The author argues that the early e-government model is no longer appropriate for the current circumstances, characterized as an intelligent society, and calls for a new digital government model. With this objective, the book is organized in a way whereby the readers can grasp the global trends of e-government initiatives and learn from Korea's case.

Part I opens with the global picture of the e-government development, originating from the first appearance of the term, 'e-government', in the National Performance Review of the United States in 1993. The included chapters present a variety of policy evidence from the United Kingdom, Australia, the European Union, and Sweden. Reviewing these cases, the author draws lessons on the importance of strong leadership based on a clear organizational configuration and a holistic approach that includes not only technological capacities but also budgetary and government innovation.

Part II discusses the limitations of the early development stage model of e-government and proposes a new desirable development model, which embraces future contributions to sustainable development. By doing so, the author suggests five important factors, including technology (together with the Internet of Things, the cloud, big data, and artificial intelligence), services (personalized to individuals), data (enabling real-time analysis), human resources (in government and public), and governance (country-specific legal and administrative processes, including electronic citizen participation). The subsequent review of the United Nations E-Government Survey Reports presents important takeaways for future digital government strategies, including the continuous e-government promotion and transition to digital government, the need for a strong driving organization, the integration of open government policy, the expansion of citizen engagement, and the utilization of new intelligent information technology.

Parts III, IV, and V delve into the case and policy examples of South Korea, which review national-level programs and legal actions implemented by former presidential administrations, critical success factors, and challenges in the future. To be specific, Part III shows the transition of digital government

development in Korea following the path of 'e-government to the smart government to government innovation to intelligent government,' which was supported by legal and political arrangements.

In Part IV, the author then summarizes the critical success factors in South Korea, which include strong political leadership and support throughout different administrations, a well-established information infrastructure in government and society, and a transparent and productive administrative process. It also discusses how South Korea, as the only country that has changed its status from an aid recipient country to a donor country, is now involved in official ICT development assistance programs of South Korea for developing countries.

Part V indicates challenges in the future for the promotion of digital governance during the advent of intelligent information technologies, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution as well as policy approaches that Korea has already taken to cope with such challenges. The author further contends that to improve the digital government, it is important to move away from the 'government-led' and 'supplier-oriented' approach toward a 'citizen-led' and 'consumer-oriented' approach.

In conclusion, the author draws two lessons from the digital government development case of South Korea at the national level. First, strong leadership in the early days of the presidential inauguration is pivotal to successful digital government policies. Second, the effects of installing new ICT systems may not appear immediately, thus a time-lag effect approach for evaluating digital government policies is required to correctly measure the performance. Additionally, three important aspects are noted, taking into account Korea's digital government promotion at the inter-ministerial level: a) sharing objectives from the beginning of the project and assigning roles to each agency, b) encouraging participation by securing various ways of communicating across ministries, and c) creating a dedicated organization with a strong authority to drive the national e-government projects. I concur with the author's emphasis on political leadership and administrative arrangement as digital government programs involve the management of a huge volume of finance and coordination of all sectoral, levels of government agencies.

The book's contributions are twofold. The author establishes a systematic knowledge of digital government trends globally and nationally. As a reader, I appreciated the use of examples and cases of how various governments, particularly South Korea, implemented e-government initiatives to deliver a variety of public services. Based on the systematic review of extensive policies and legal documents, the author shares practical lessons, which are timely and essential guidelines for public managers who are seeking to improve their ICT governance. Furthermore, the well-organized policy evidence and various cases of both success and failure can serve as good research references and curricular materials. Owing to the relative novelty, existing courses related to e-government and the digital government heavily rely on disparate aspects (technical or administrative, etc.), or partial pieces of information, for which instructors can use this book as a useful source for developing curriculums from a universal view (Sarantis et al., 2019).

Second, the thesis of the transition model toward digital government is refreshing for policy practitioners as it sheds light on digital transformation prospects. The concept of digital transformation is highlighted to describe the process of government adapting to digital innovation, which does not always follow a linear process but is often exponential. As the environment resulting from digital transformation in government is innovative and collaborative, the author maintains that a holistic approach is necessary, based on "leadership and a strong pan-governmental propulsion system, namely ICT governance (p. 1)." This means there is a need for the integration of multiple sectoral functions, and citizen perspectives into the scope of digital governance structures.

Along with the triumphs of the book, there are three weaknesses found in the author's arguments. To begin with, the author stresses the new strategy for digital transformation considering new intelligent information technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things, and big data.

To be prepared for the smart intelligent information society, the author maintains that governments should actively engage with these new technologies in all sectors, such as "administrative organization, administrative behavior, policy process, manpower management, office efficiency, administrative service, and information-related systems and policy (p. 240)." However, the author does not consider potential issues and concerns about the changing human-technology relations in the context of the public sector, such as public trust and public accountability, while blindly underscoring the benefits that such new technologies may bring to governance. To be specific, the author discusses the change of agency in public decision-making using AI in government from humans to algorithms merely on a factual basis without an appropriate extent of caution; "In the information society, human beings are still the subjects of judgment and execution, but in the intelligent information society, it is not necessarily people who make such judgments and executions due to the ability of artificial intelligence to do so (p. 240)." However, AI-applied decision-making is an algorithmic process that is unable to be interpreted easily and to spot biases in the decision-making (Busuioc, 2021). Without addressing the issue of public accountability about AI applications in government, the author's logic about digital transformation strategies actively using such technologies in government is partially established.

Additionally, the author posits that the new digital transformation model should consider sustainable development, noting "there is a need for a future-oriented digital government model that creates sustainable development at the social, economic and environmental levels (p. 78)," in line with the emerging voices in the field (Castro & Lopes, 2022; Estevez & Janowski, 2013; Othman et al., 2020). Following the argument, major policy documents of the Swedish government and the UN report, which present the ample prospect of digital transformation for sustainable development are referenced in the sense it leverages opportunities to promote growth, equity, and environmental sustainability (impact-focused). However, the remaining chapters do not further engage with the link between digital transformation and sustainable development. Instead, the author seems to rely on the narrow definition of sustainability concerning the continuality or consistent improvement of ICT management in government (project-focused). The ambiguous definition of 'sustainable development' or 'sustainability' not only leads to a blurred view of the blueprint, but also limits the purview of the new digital transformation model in the book.

The use of different definitions of sustainability interchangeably is related to limited implications for developing countries, which is stated as the purpose of this book (p. 4). Although the detailed policy and legal actions that Korea has taken to become a digital government leader can answer practical inquiries, overlooking the contextual link between South Korea and developing countries leaves policy practitioners with incomplete lessons. The main concern for developing countries about promoting digital government is less about the possibility of continuing the policy per se, but more about the applicability of the models used in the advanced countries, concerning the different contexts. Over the past decades, we have realized the problems of the 'one-size-fits-all' approach to international development in the form of policy reform as it neglects historic, geographical, political, socio-economic, and cultural specificities in underdeveloped countries (Ika, 2012; Ramalingam et al., 2014; Tödtling & Trippl, 2005). Introducing South Korea's change of status from a recipient country to a donor country does not adequately build logical appeals. Consequently, I suggest that readers concerned about digital government strategies in the context of developing countries exercise appropriate caution and judgment to evaluate the relevance of the presented cases and examples in relation to their own jurisdictions.

The central thesis of the book is the need for a new digital government model as the early e-government development model is no longer appropriate with the arrival of new intelligent information technologies and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The book is easy to read, and yet highly informative and useful for researchers, instructors, and policy practitioners in the field of digital government. Meanwhile, major

logical flaws appear in the arguments regarding the prospect of new technologies overlooking relevant public issues, the mixed concepts of sustainable development and sustainability used to suggest the orientation for the new model, and the lack of contextual considerations, which eventually limit the purpose of the book to provide policy guidance for developing countries. While some of the aspects in the book may not be viable for some countries with different circumstances, the insights from extensive policy reviews at the global and national levels can be applied to a variety of situations. I suggest that policy practitioners exercise appropriate judgment when reading the book and adopting the suggested policy strategies. Researchers who connect with the book's main thesis and are concerned about the flaws discussed in this article can carry out future studies to improve the premise of the book.

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