e-Governance as a Public Policy Framework

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1. IN SEARCH OF COHERENT POLICY MAKING MODELS

Public action in order to be effective and efficient has to be conceived and developed as a coherent and integrated system.

In practice although a dichotomy concerning policymaking occurs affecting all dimensions of public policy: collective and individual actors, designing and implementing processes, etc.

The reasons of this dichotomy, termed "policy breach" [1], reside in the fact that design and implementation are two quasi- independent and loosely linked sub-processes.

More specifically the policy analysis and design stage constitutes a top-down process involving political -or highly politicized- personnel. It is outcome oriented and operated on the basis of general criteria such as mission and vision concepts, organizational and environmental values and strategies, political priorities etc.

On the other hand, policy implementation is mainly a bottom-up process involving P.A. professionals: middle management and low-level personnel. Therefore implementation activities are guided by intra-organizational priorities and day-to-day management requirements and restrictions. They are short-term output oriented with only vague references to the "big picture" and loose links to the organization's long-term objectives and strategic priorities and goals.

The unsuitable connection and mismatching of two complementary steps of a process supposed to be linear, leads to the disintegration of the overall rational policy making framework and produces incoherent, ineffective and inefficient applied policies.

Public policies become even less effective insofar as the vertical breach couples with a horizontal one, as is usually the case. Policy outcomes, are mostly the conjunction of distinctive processes in different policy fields. Full employment, for example, can only be ensured through the joint efforts of economic, industrial, educational, vocational training, regional development, social and labor market regulation policies.

The inability of full communication and cooperation between all these distinctive policy constituencies and networks often results in poor policy outcomes. Loose and ineffective horizontal communications is a very common and widespread defect of contemporary policymaking and administrative systems. Public agencies entrench themselves with institutional, procedural and communicational fortifications, erected throughout their historical development.

Therefore, a bi-dimensional isolation occurs in the public policy sphere (fig 1): not only a vertical, intra-organizational, "breach" impedes field integration but also a horizontal – trans-organizational- gap jeopardizes field connection and completion
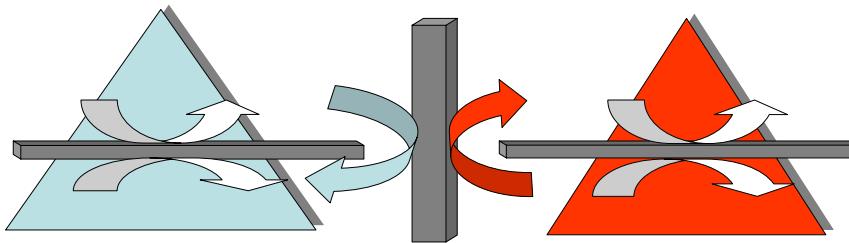

Figure 1 The Policy Breach

The problematic situation described above creates an urgent need for a bi-dimensional integrative interface bridging both the vertical and the horizontal policy gaps and linking all policy field actors to a cooperating "policy community". This kind of interface can be built through extensive use of modern informational and communication technologies applied at each and every stage of the overall policy making process.

One facet of this process must be associated with the transcription of current policy making procedures in ICT applications, in order to standardize, simplify and accelerate vertical coordination and horizontal networking and, thus, facilitate policy integration.

Generic process and data structures, a high level model for strategic planning to provide common definitions, vocabulary and conceptual framework for policy making within broader policy field-based sub-categories of public agencies and a unifying "enterprise architecture" on which all public administration processing and information systems should be based in order to become interoperable are some critical prerequisites for integrated public policies

Currently, the public administration (PA) domain lacks commonly agreed generic policy making models linked to content standards, definitions and vocabularies, not only at the global level among the administrative systems worldwide, but even inside each country[2].

2. PROPOSING A MODEL

In this paper we are proposing a generic model of the policy making process. In order to design this model we first sketch a general delineation of the overall governance system focusing on the main actors and the primary interactions amongst them. Based on this outline we then present a more detailed diagrammatic representation of the policy making stages, as a complex transformation process of the society needs (input) to services and regulations (output) through the governance system.

2.1. The Governance System.

The purpose of this schema (fig.2) is to outline the domain of the Governance System in broad terms, presenting the main **actors** and **relationships** that exist amongst them. There are three main actors inside the Governance System: the Political System, Public Administration (or Administrative System) [3]and Society divided into two sub-categories (businesses and citizens).

The Governance System is defined as the composition of these three sub-systems.
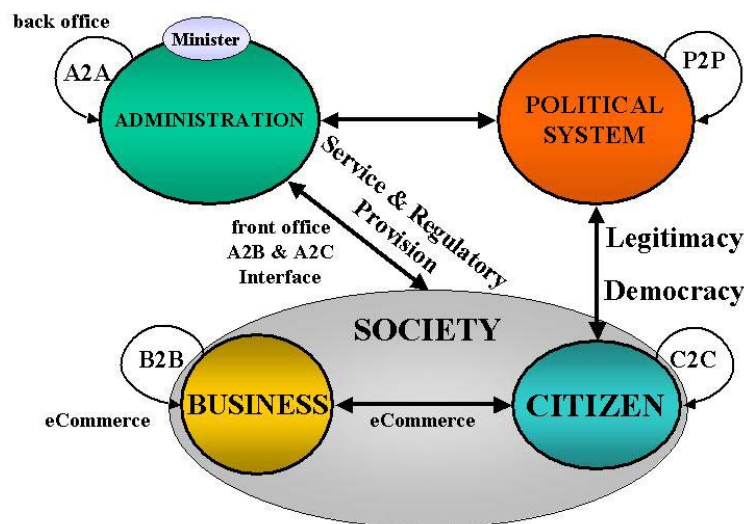

Figure 2: Governance System

Although the separation between the political and administrative systems has been fiercely criticized by PA scholars for the "technical" separation it introduces, its analytical power should not be underestimated.

Additionally, this schema depicts the primary **relationships** among the various actors. Some of these are considered out of scope with regard to our work (eg business-to-citizens).

A very interesting relationship exists between **citizens and the political system**. In democratic regimes citizens enjoy the privilege of electing their representatives and formulating in this way the political system. The relationship and information flow between the citizen and the political system in this area has been usually addressed by the IT industry using the term "e-democracy". In addition to this, citizens can directly address their needs to the political system. More details on the later process will be discussed below.

Looking at the relationship between the **administrative system and society** (A2S) we could mention that this area has been loosely specified as that of "public service provision". It is important to mention that the majority of the so-called e-government initiatives address this area. This has been done at an initial stage through the development of Administration to Citizens (A2C) and Administration to Business (A2B) front office applications. Though, e-government system designers soon realized the limitations of such approaches that left the back-office of the administrative production intact. Recently, developing Administration to Administration (A2A) (or back-office) systems and applications, has became a prerequisite for realizing electronic services for citizens and businesses. The common use of the term e-government just for "public service provision" may be misleading, as the other two relationships (political-administrative and political system-society) are left out of the e-government scope. For clarifying the term we have two alternatives: either to generalize the e-government notion to include all the existing relationships (political-administrative, society-political system and service & regulation provision), or to leave the term with its usual connotation (just electronic service provision) and coin a new word for expressing a super-class to which e-government, e-democracy and politico-administrative IT support are sub-classes.

In the figure, the following relationships can also be found:

- Citizen to Citizen (C2C): These relations constitutes the basis of what has been called "Civil Society"[4] and although they belong to the governance system will not be addressed here.

- Business to Business (B2B) and Business to Citizens (B2C): As already mentioned, these relationships are out-of-scope in our work.

- Political System to Administrative System: At this point, some very interesting relationships exist and a critical flow of information takes place. At this paper we will address later in the presentation

of the *policy making* model, only the part of these flows that are connected with the service & regulation provision.

- Political to Political (P2P). In these category, we could include various "interior" political system relationships (eg between the parliament and the government, the president and the prime minister, amongst the various political parties, etc). Although these relationships are crucial for the function of the governance system, they have attracted only marginally the interest of IT community. These relationships interests us a lot but they are left out for the purpose of this paper.

2.2. The Policy Making Process.

The two representations that follow below model the process that describes a generic policy making process.

2.2.1 Administration to Society interaction schema.

The first representation, (Fig. 3), is quite simple as it presents a macroscopic, high-level and generic representation:
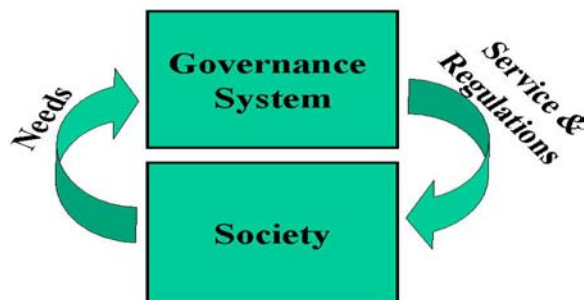
The governance system (political and administrative system plus interaction interface with the society, including collective representative bodies, consultation institutions and processes as well as formal and informal communication channels) receives as input, society needs, and after processing them produces services and regulations to address these needs.

Figure 3: A2S interaction black-box

This black-box view is useful for better understanding a system's purpose and telos.

2.2.2 The Integrated Policymaking Model

The second schema goes into more details and decomposes the previous black-box approach into various phases (fig. 4). The generic description upon which *this* model is based, secures the applicability of the latter to all different public policy fields (eg urban planning, security, public health, education, development, etc).
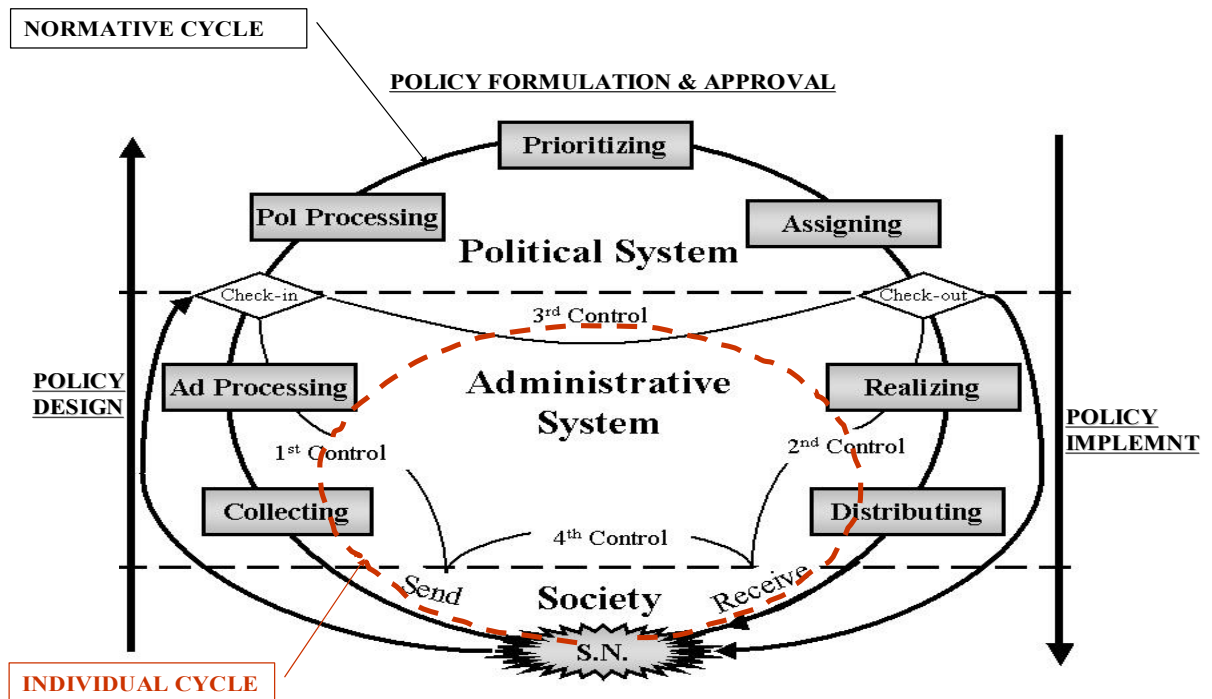
Figure 4: The Integrated Policymaking Model

As already mentioned, the *Integrated Policymaking Model* represents in more details the transformation process of social needs to service & regulatory provision. There are three main sub-systems participating in the *Integrated Policymaking* Model: Society (from where everything starts and ends), the administrative and the political sub-systems.

Actually, society is the ultimate "client" that must be served. For this reason, society has delegated power to the political sub-system, acknowledging to the latter functions of a primary "server" towards the society. In democratic regimes, through the election process, society decides whether a specific server (political party) has successfully offered its services or if there is a need to test another type of server claiming to offer either something different or the same but more efficiently.

In between the primary client and the primary server though lies the administrative system. How does this system gain its legitimacy? Who assigned executive powers to it? Its role, presumed by its position, is that of a broker. Its specific functions as a broker are analyzed separately in the two different parts of the model it participates.

During the service & regulation provision process the political-administrative interactions are getting activated. More specifically the following interaction and information flows occur between the three sub-systems:

- From political to administrative, decisions made by the first and imposed through a legitimated dominance afterwards to the latter. This dominance in democracy gains its legitimacy through the electorate and is practically implemented with the physical presence and the executive power of the ministers inside the administrative structure they head.

- From administrative to political, at the first stage (upwards movement of information) the information gathered by the administrative system describing the society needs and at a later stage (downwards movement of information), expertise and administrative knowledge regarding how to realize political decisions.

The model is presented as a circle starting from its bottom, where the social need for collective action triggers and activates the whole system. In fact, it is this need that legitimates the necessity of building the governance system and entrusts it with the monopoly of exercising physical violence [5]. The schema is divided in three broader *activity phases* : a bottom-up *Policy Design* input phase, a horizontal *Policy Formulation & Approval* phase and a *Policy Implementation* output top down phase.

Before starting the detailed description of the model, it is interesting to map the upper part of it as presented in fig.3, (political system zone) with the "formulate public policy" major public administration process [6] . Accordingly, the middle part (administrative system zone) where the service provision occurs corresponds with the "provide service" major process.

2.2.2.1 The Policymaking Steps

Let's take a closer look at what happens during each phase:

Everything starts, as already mentioned, with a societal need for collective action. Generally, the society has two ways for communicating a need to the political system: the formal, bureaucratic channel through the administration, and a number of alternative channels which bypass bureaucracy in order to reach the political system. These channels may vary from a formal political party or NGO to an informal drinking of coffee of the political appointee downtown together with "ordinary citizens".

Returning to the formal administrative channel which is of interest in this paper, the first role of the administrative system becomes apparent: it has to develop methods for collecting societal needs. Unlike the flexibility inherited by the non-administrative channels, administration has to set up a system capable of gathering information from the general public. For

having this system operating effectively, the capacity of not only collecting the declaratively expressed societal needs but also "sensing" needs, thus acting in a proactive way, must be included in this system.

After this first step, "administrative processing" follows. This processing is a first attempt by the administrative system to organize the unstructured information that comes in, from the "collection" phase. Categorizing, translating to administrative language and summarizing are some aspects of this processing.

However at this stage there is always a controversial point. The administrative system has no right to choose or evaluate the upward coming needs. Bureaucracy has to be completely neutral, a blind instrument that acts only with logic and professional expertise. Evaluation means judgment and judgment requires a set of values different from the set of values upon which bureaucracy has built its legitimacy (neutrality and professionalism). Though a political question arises: Is it possible for the administrative system to process the addressed or forwarded demands neutrally? Or is there always an indirect intervention of the latter to the flow of information from the primary client to the primary server, acting as a filter based on values and criteria non-explicitly expressed? Of course, these questions will not be addressed in this paper.

Keeping in mind the controversial legitimacy that characterizes the administrative processing step, we reach the "check-in" point as can be seen in the figure. This is the point where the administrative flow meets the alternative root mentioned previously. From the organizational point of view it is here that we usually find the offices of the political personnel. They are doing the hard job of trying to balance and transfer to the key person all the information they feel critical. The overflow at this point is very usual. The office is bombarded by controversial pressures and additional processing becomes indispensable before the information reaches its target in the political system. Processing by the political layer though is something completely different than the previous type of processing. At this point neutrality is not accepted. Since we have entered the realm of the political sub-system, political choice based on a set of political criteria has to be realized. Society has delegated to them the power to exercise this privilege. So the office excludes some of the needs as inappropriate (e.g. as not compatible with the supported political agenda) and presents a final list of issues to be addressed by the political system.

At this step we have reached the phase of prioritizing. This phase is perhaps the central function of the political system in all regimes. In democracy more specifically, different political approaches are evaluated by the electorate depending on how political personnel prioritize the society needs that address them, after the afore-described phases. For a citizen being a member of a specific party means acceptance of a one proposed prioritization and rejection of another. The positioning of "Prioritizing" at the head of the model emphasizes the prominent

importance that this operation has over the whole system. Being a political leader and having a clear political position practically means having explicitly presented your set of values and criteria upon which you (as political leader) will judge all emerging issues and accordingly place them, hierarchically ordered, in your political agenda. The main output of this step should be an hierarchically ranked list of political To-Dos, or in other words a political plan.

With the political decision occurring at the prioritizing phase, we start moving downwards in the model. The upward movement was the flow of the society needs towards the decision-makers (or primary servers), the downward movement is the flow of the political decisions (or orders) to the ultimate client.

The prioritizing phase is followed by the "assigning" phase. If the former clearly expresses political ideology, the second deals with political organization and practicality. At this step the political subsystem delegates its legitimacy to the administrative actor to realize the political system's ideas and priorities. Though, as can be seen in the Fig.3&4, there exists an alternative channel for realizing political ideas: the private sector can act as an alternative provider of public services to society. Through its legislative power, the parliament assigns duties to organizational entities (either public or private) to realize the agreed - or imposed by the majority - political agenda. The ideas and visions become concrete political plans, with actors, budgets, accountability and management. Amongst others, the specific administrative level (eg central, regional or local administration) for the realization phase is decided.

The "check-out" point that follows is where the decision leaves the political sub-system and through the ministers (acting as the main actors) returns to the administrative subsystem (or the private sector). What PA people usually receive from this stage is a law, that has to be enforced by them. Enforcement of course can mean numerous different things: impose and check for compliance, provide a new service to the society, build a new organization, etc. Now the administrative system, with the help of the political appointee (minister) has to organize and execute practically what was asked. What is the role of the minister now? Is the minister acting still as a political personnel during this realization phase? Basically no! The political decisions have been made in the previous steps (eg when the minister/government /parliament prioritized the needs of the society to be covered by the ministry). But now the minister plays the role of the trustee agent appointed by the political system to manage the realization operation that will be executed by the administrative system. The minister becomes a manager, responsible for the practical realization of a political agenda. And as the political system wants a politically dedicated manager, the minister is preferred to a technocrat. Together with the experts of realization (public administration professionals) the minister tries to realize the political decisions and to produce concrete results.

So the "realization" phase constitutes the main area for administrative action. The framework and rules have been decided and implementation starts. All activities related to the administrative production of services are linked to the "realization" phase. Building or operating a hospital, safeguarding security in the cities, providing services to entrepreneurs, preventing or reimbursing victims of natural disasters, the production of all services these clearly belong to this "realization" stage.

What follows next is the distribution. We have intentionally separated the production phase (realization) from the distribution phase, proposing a technical but useful separation between what has been called front- and back-office. This separation although very common in other industries (eg food, banking & insurance, etc) only recently has started to attract interest in public administration, where production and distribution was supposed to be an integrated part of a unique function. Since the end of nineties, there are several initiatives from administrations worldwide to exploit the apparent advantages of dealing separately with production and distribution in public administration. The interesting "shopping mall" concept for public services or the idea of establishing citizens' centers and kiosks to integrate at the front-end complex administrative processes and provide services from a single point according to the one-stop-shop administrative paradigm, are examples of this trend. Of course here once again the area pertains to the administrative actor.

Obviously, with the "distribution" phase the whole governance system hands its output to the society. The circle started from this same point and ends again in society. Society asked for collective action to solve emerged inconsistencies, and finally society gets an output conceptualized by the political system and realized by the administrative system. This output is supposed to constitute the "solution" to the initial societal need. But is it really so? What type of controls and feedback mechanisms are needed to secure compliance between what was asked and what was received?

2.2.2.2 Normative and individual policymaking cycles

The above described steps, placed on the outer cycle of figure 4, (**normative cycle**) and constitute the *normative stage* of the overall process. During this stage output, outcome and process standards are set, generating a *policy making system.*

The internal **individual cycle** represents the treatment of individual applications and demands throughout the administrative machinery producing and distributing concrete deliverables to communities, citizens and businesses, within the normative framework produced and installed through the external, normative, policy making cycle.

2.2.2.3 Controls and Feedbacks

In addition to the system's input-output descriptions, we propose four **feedback loops** in order to control several systems characteristics that could be perceived as being critical success factors (CSFs) for the overall system's operation. We envisioned four types of primary controls to be applied upon the system. Each control aims at providing feedback and checks the internal system's (and sub-systems) capacity in different stages. A short description follows:

1st Control – **Political Awareness**: Checks the divergence between what *society needs* and what the *political system thinks society needs* (effectiveness of the communication between political system and society).

2nd Control – **Administrative Accountability**: Checks the divergence between what the *political system wants to provide* to society and what *society finally gets* out of the administrative system (quality of communication between political-administrative system, administrative capacity, etc)

3rd Control – **Political Accountability**: Checks the divergence between the *received demand* from the society by the political system and the *final political plan* which is communicated by the former to the administrative system for addressing this demand (political liability, capacity for policy making)

4th Control – **Governance Responsiveness**: Checks the divergence between what *society has asked for* and *what society receives* by the governance system (system capacity, entropy, effectiveness, efficiency, etc).

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