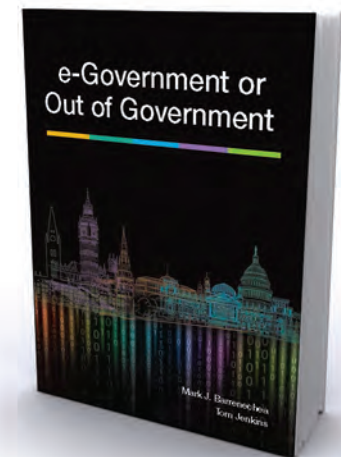# The Opportunities and Challenges of E-Government

Robert Bailey, Ph.D., CRM

Mark J. Barrenechea and Tom Jenkins, the authors of *e-government or Out of Government*, embrace the idea that throughout various federal, state, and local government agencies, e-government can deliver, with an integrated approach, secure, accurate, and integrated information, both internally and to their citizens.

Technology's Transformative Power

The authors give more than 50 worldwide examples of government agencies having transformed traditional public sector communications and organizational roles. But, they contend that e-government can be successful only if the government re-evaluates its mission activities and matches them with new automated and streamlined processes, transactions, and interactions. The goal, according to the authors, is to transform relationships based on new collaborations that empower citizens and help governments transparently improve efficiencies and gain citizen trust.

In the foreword, Ian E. Wilson, former librarian and archivist of Canada, makes special mention of the "records to data" aspect of e-governance and the importance of program managers to manage records as effectively as other government assets. However, the book's focus is on active information. The topic of "records" is mentioned 13 times, but mostly in the examples and seldom as essential to the e-government discussion.

Among the topics given their own chapters are each level of government, from local to international; the need to determine whether government or private enterprise can best deliver public services and the potential for forming public-private partnerships as the most cost-effective and best solution; big data; and cloud computing. Though the last two topics were given full coverage, these chapters cite a lot of information published about big data and cloud computing prior to 2014. Much more is known today, so these chapters already have an historical feel to them.

Two topics the book should have covered more deeply are information security and e-mail management. There is some reference in chapter 3 to secure e-government but not nearly enough discussion about the size of the problems, the threats, and the possible solutions. Despite being only a conveyer of information, e-mail has been at the heart of many recent government agency scandals, proving itself to be a troublesome aspect of e-government.

Because the authors are employed by Open Text, a major enterprise content management (ECM) company, it is surprising that little is said about ECM and its emergence and how it might contribute to e-government solutions.

The Future of E-Government

A chapter titled "e-Government and the Future" is more about how the digital revolution is transforming politics and the nature of government than about the development and application of technology. The authors discuss the challenge of achieving the productivity and service quality that new information technology offers while remaining true to the fundamental values of a professional public service. The book suggests the authors believe there is common agreement and documentation about what the public service standard is. More likely, the agreement is as diverse as the number of people being served by a particular level of government.

While its examples have some value for RIM professionals, *e-government or Out of Government* offers minimal use to them on a day-to-day

basis. The target audience seems to be elected officials, government boards, and top-level government administrators.

The book serves as a good introduction to what e-government is to various levels of government and what evolution must take place before citizens begin to think that government's information services are as responsive as those of private enterprise. It acknowledges that e-government is in a transition stage and very much affected by government leadership and funding. The authors attempt to make the point that if government does not change the electronic administrative process significantly, government, in effect, will be out of business.

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A Guide to the Strategic Use of Big Data

Dawn Garcia Ward, J.D.

Big Data @ Work: Dispelling the Myths, Uncovering the Opportunities *by Thomas H. Davenport aims at and succeeds in setting the record straight regarding: 1) what big data really is; 2) why big data is important across many industries and business functions; and 3) how to capture the value of big data.*

Davenport's writing style, his many real-life examples of the use of big data, and the fact that the target audience could come from just about any industry and business function are key to elevating this book from a technology how-to manual to a strategic business and planning guide. The writing is conversational, lighthearted, and, at times, humorous. He makes every attempt to engage a diverse cross-section of readers, from techies to laypersons.

What Big Data Is

Most readers have heard the term "big data," but many do not know what it really means. It is much more than just a very large amount of data.

According to Davenport, big data is "data that is too big to fit on a single server, too unstructured to fit into a row-and-column database, or too continuously flowing to fit into a static data warehouse." Essentially, this means one thing – a new frontier of data to manage and analyze.

Why Big Data Is Important

Davenport argues that big data has the potential to bring value to a company in the form of cost reductions, better decision-making, and improvements in products and services. Moreover, he says, "[t]he primary value from big data comes not from the data in its raw form (no matter how big it is), but from the processing and analysis of it and the insights, products, and services that emerge from analytics."

Speaking, even theoretically, about the concept of capitalizing on big data is appealing, but what makes it even more appealing here is that Davenport has gone to great lengths to provide real-life examples of what
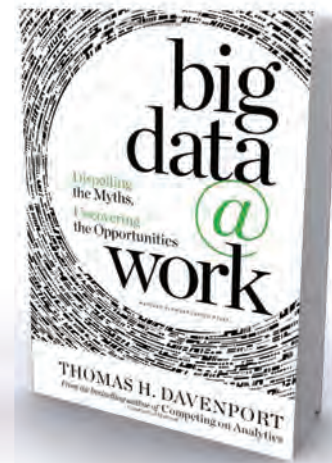
Big Data @ Work: Dispelling the Myths, Uncovering the Opportunities
Author: **Thomas H. Davenport**
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Source: *www.hbr.org/books*

companies are doing and plan to do to capitalize on big data.

For instance, GE plans to use big data to improve the efficiency of the 1,500 gas turbines it monitors. Even "a 1 percent improvement in efficiency of monitored turbines from software and network optimization, better dispatching of service, and improved gas/power system harmonization" could result in fuel savings of $66 billion over the next 15 years, Davenport writes.

How to Succeed with Big Data

Not only does Davenport explain what big data is and why it is important, he explains where to start and what to do with big data in order to succeed. Chapters 3 through 8, as well as the "Big Data Readiness Assessment Survey" appendix make up the "how to" sections of the book. In these chapters, Davenport provides practical guidelines on the use of big data, including, for example, a model for how to build an organization's analytical capabilities. In addition to examples, Davenport includes questions throughout the book for readers to ask themselves in order to take the steps to succeed.

Who Should Be on the Team

Lastly, Davenport argues that the most important component of successfully using big data is the human factor, i.e., having the right team. This team is composed of, for example, data scientists and business leaders. Although Davenport addresses the need for diverse key players, he leaves out an important field – legal. With the retention of big data, or any data at all, comes the risk of having to produce it in litigation and/or government audit. The team, composed of stakeholders that include legal, will need to understand and weigh the potential risk of handing over this data against the benefits of using it for analysis.

Informed Readers Benefit Most

It is important to note that Davenport directs most of the book to a specific audience: those readers in technology or leadership who are familiar with what their company is doing with big data. For readers outside this limited group, the "how to" chapters of the book offer interesting facts and examples, but they are not necessary to them getting a basic understanding of big data.

In fact, Davenport specifically explains in the "Big Data Readiness Assessment Survey" appendix that "whoever replies to the survey questions should be familiar with his or her entire organization's or unit's approaches to big data." This statement holds true for much of the latter part of the book.

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