

ELECTRONIC MANAGEMENT OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, A PROCESS THAT INFLUENCES ITS EFFECTIVENESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

Electronic governance of the administration affects the increase of the effectiveness, efficiency, responsibility and motivation of the administration. Hence, the subject of the research is to consider all issues related to the electronic governance system, as well as to analyze the state of the field of electronic governance in the Republic of North Macedonia. The methodology of the work is based on the use of a quantitative method, interviews with administrative officials in 30 state bodies at the central and local levels. In addition, a content analysis of all legal, regulatory acts, research results and other documents relevant to the research was made. The questionnaire contains three groups of questions: the first group of questions refers to the regulatory framework and its applicability, the second group of questions refers to the financial, technical and personnel capacities necessary for the implementation of the electronic governance system, the third category of questions refers to the implementation and acceptance of the electronic governance system by all relevant factors. The results indicate partiality in the establishment of electronic governance systems, lack of financial resources and professional capacities for the establishment and applicability of such systems, as well as resistance to changes at all levels of governance. The final conclusion is the necessity to establish a unified public sector management software in all state bodies that will cover all segments of efficient administration management at the central and local levels.

Keywords: efficiency, electronic governance, state and local bodies, administration.

INTRODUCTION

The new era has imposed a need for changes in the approach to managing public administration. Hence, the approach to managing public administration is in continuous growth and development, which is reflected in new trends in managing it. One of the new approaches to managing public administration is the New Public Management, which favors independence in the process of realizing the functions of public administration on the one hand, and at the expense of this, the responsibility of the administration is strengthened on the other hand. (Gruening 2001).

The new public management is aimed at decentralizing the process of managing public administration, which means transferring administrative responsibilities from the central to the local government. This model imposes the transfer of public powers of the state to private entities that provide public services with their own investments. In return, the state strengthens control mechanisms by introducing new ways and approaches to controlling and managing public activities. In order to implement the new management model, it is necessary that it be supported by the establishment of an electronic management system. The Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) has decided to implement an Electronic Management System in all previous strategies that have been continuously adopted by the Governments of the Republic of North Macedonia in the last 10 years. Hence, this paper focuses on electronic management of public administration in order to understand all the factors necessary for its efficient implementation. The basic condition for starting the implementation of this management system is the support of appropriate normative

Denkova, J., & Ananiev, J. (2025). Electronic management of the public administration, a process that influences its effectiveness and responsibility. *STED Conference 14(2)*, 47-53.

acts, then financial capacities for the implementation and maintenance of technical means as an indispensable condition for efficient implementation and of course the most important condition is the human resources capacities, appropriately trained personnel who will maintain and manage these technical means. These basic factors impose certain rules of conduct between employees within state and local authorities, as well as between all state and local authorities in the country, and ultimately a way of dealing with citizens to effectively meet their needs. When analyzing e-governance, we need to distinguish between electronic communication and electronic management, which does not mean that both internal and external electronic communication is an important segment for efficient management. An electronic management system is reflected in fast and transparent internal communication, between supervisors and employees, clear assignment of work tasks from supervisors to employees, which allows for control over the completion of work tasks by the administration. Furthermore, this system influences clear communication between employees, when exchanging information in the process of performing work tasks, whether they receive the information in a timely manner, which imposes easy determination of responsibility towards those who are late or are unprofessional in their domain of work. Hence, we point to the conclusion that electronic administration management affects the increase in effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and influences the motivation of employees in the administration, if those who are efficient in their work are appropriately rewarded. In order to implement an e-governance system for state bodies, the following steps are necessary: The e-governance and management system should be based on an appropriate and mandatory normative framework of a state that emerges as a policy from a single strategy of a country and that the state should strive towards its implementation. Then this government policy should be established within the strategies of each individual state body. To ensure the necessary financial resources are provided, they need to be reliable and long-term, and appropriate technical means and personnel must be provided to manage this complex system and ensure its full implementation and sustainability. Appropriate training of the administration and management staff, as an indispensable part of the efficient implementation and functioning of the electronic administration management system, so-called E-Government. The management system should be linked to a program for motivating the administration. The system should be subject to continuous evaluation by citizens, service users, regarding the manner and efficiency of the administration's provision of services.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of the research is to identify all issues that indicate the need and possibility of establishing an electronic governance system, as well as to analyze all factors related to electronic governance in the Republic of North Macedonia. Thus, the purpose of the paper requires examining all relevant indicators related to the process of e-governance in state bodies, normative, technical and personnel capacities. Also, the aim of the paper is to determine the manner in which the administration is managed, whether an electronic system of management and communication has been established in state bodies. Then, if such a system has been established, is it applicable? It is important to examine whether procedures and rules for internal communication between employees have been established, how work tasks are assigned by the superior to the employee, how external communication with service users and partner institutions is achieved, and whether the established electronic systems are functional according to the needs of citizens.

The methodology of the paper is based on the use of a quantitative method of interviews with administrative officials in 30 state bodies at the central and local levels. The questionnaire contains three groups of questions: the first group of questions refers to the regulatory framework and its applicability; the second group of questions refers to the implementation of the electronic management system in state bodies, real capacities, financial, technical, trained staff; the third category of questions refers to the implementation and how changes to the already introduced electronic management system are accepted by the administration, managers and service users - citizens. In addition, the methodology of the paper is based on an analysis of the normative acts relevant to the subject of the research, analyzing previous research and indicators at the European and global level related to the subject of the research.

Denkova, J., & Ananiev, J. (2025). Electronic management of the public administration, a process that influences its effectiveness and responsibility. *STED Conference 14(2)*, 47-53

Normative acts relevant to the research are the Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification and Confidential Services: Law on Electronic Governance and Electronic Services; Law on Electronic Communications ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" 13/05, 14/07, 55/07 and 98/08); Law on Data in Electronic Form and Electronic Signature ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 34/01, 6/02 and 98/08); Law on Electronic Governance ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 105/09); Law on Personal Data Protection ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 7/05 and 103/08); Law on Classified Information ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 9/04 and 113/07); Law on Free Access to Information ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 13/06 and 86/08); Rulebook on technical and organizational measures for ensuring confidentiality and protection of personal data processing ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 38/09); Law on Electronic Commerce ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 133/2007); Law on Archival Materials ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 36/90 and 36/95); Decree on Office and Archival Operations ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 58/96).

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH RESULTS

As we mentioned, the research methodology was based on a qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with over 30 respondents in the state administration and local self-government employed in various job categories. The first group of questions related to the effect of the applicability of normative acts. Thus, 80% of the respondents answered that they have adjusted the laws relating to electronic operations, so that all by-laws arising from the laws have been developed. If we compare this with the research conducted in local self-government units and the monitoring of public administration, the conclusion that there is an effect of the new legal solutions and strategies related to information technology coincides. The applicability of these legal solutions encounters problems and difficulties due to financial, technical and personnel capacities that should serve electronic operations in state bodies. So far, electronic systems have been established in state bodies in the Republic of North Macedonia that relate to electronic communication of state bodies with citizens, as well as electronic communication between state bodies, which enable faster exchange of information and greater transparency of state bodies. Also, electronic archiving in state, public and local government bodies allows for clear records, storage and archiving of archival material. State bodies have computers for employees and sectors that lack staff for software operation and computer maintenance. State bodies are not connected in a single E-Government system, which causes difficulties in the communication process. All municipalities have servers, but in a small number of municipalities the computers are connected to a domain, in some there is partial implementation, and in some there is none at all. Awareness among local government units about the use of licensed software has increased. When it comes to communication with citizens and companies and openness, a high percentage of 90 percent of state and local authorities have their own website where they publish information about their work. In terms of electronic administration management, there is no such management system. Work tasks are assigned manually in paper form, there is no monitoring of work nor an electronic hierarchy of responsibilities system through which responsibility can be easily located. The one-stop shop systems that have already been established do not aim to control the work of the administration; they serve exclusively for the electronic delivery of information to citizens, but not to control whether they have responded to the service efficiently and in a timely manner. A one-stop shop system has been established in 50% of state bodies. It is important to emphasize that state and local bodies do not have software for electronic recording of human resources for obtaining the benefits we previously mentioned. It is necessary to establish a unified public sector management software in all state bodies that will cover all segments of efficient management and achievement of results in the administration. Regarding the third group of questions, there is still resistance among the administration to accepting the new way of electronic working, especially among the older category of workers, the same applies to older clients who use services. The findings regarding dissatisfaction and resistance to the new way of working coincide. It is believed that even

Denkova, J., & Ananiev, J. (2025). Electronic management of the public administration, a process that influences its effectiveness and responsibility. *STED Conference 14(2)*, 47-53.

management staff who are supposed to assign tasks electronically avoid this way of working, because it requires transparency in both their work and the evaluation of the administration. Until electronic software is introduced for monitoring the work of the administration, i.e. electronic management of work tasks, we cannot talk about an efficient administration that will be motivated and responsible and will respond to the needs of citizens in a fast and efficient manner. When analyzing e-governance, we need to distinguish between electronic communication and electronic management, which does not mean that electronic communication, both internal and external, is not an important segment of effective management. The regulatory framework in the Republic of North Macedonia is focused on electronic communication between state bodies, certain state bodies have developed software for obtaining feedback from citizens for certain services. Electronic archiving of documents is a mandatory tool and is applied in all state and local authorities, and the introduction of standardization of work processes through ISO standards is partially represented since it is not a mandatory legal obligation. From previous research, it can be seen that in the Republic of North Macedonia, e-government projects are being partially implemented. In terms of cooperation between state bodies in the Republic of North Macedonia, a one-stop shop system has been established in the domains of real estate cadastre, healthcare system, public procurement, treasury system, ecology, judiciary, documents of the personal status of citizens (birth certificate, citizenship, death certificate, etc.), judiciary, company registration, etc. Although the Law on General Administrative Procedure (Article 57, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 124 of 23.07.2015). requires the official conducting the procedure to independently obtain the evidence, data and facts for which official records are kept in his public body or in another public body, ex officio and electronically, practice shows minimal applicability of this provision. With the amendments to the Law on Electronic Governance adopted in 2016, and in order to implement the provisions of the Law on Electronic Governance, a service for electronic registered delivery of documents with and between institutions was introduced, which should ensure fast, reliable and secure delivery of documents. The delivery enables efficiency of the procedure and its cost-effectiveness, while fully respecting the highest security standards. So far, two commercial systems have been certified to provide this service. (Public Administration Reform Strategy 2018-2022).

The Ministry of Finance has established software for citizen services related to privatization, so that citizens can track the progress of cases and act in accordance with the requests of officials. The current electronic systems established in state and local authorities in the Republic of North Macedonia are aimed only at providing information between state authorities and citizens, but do not represent e-governance in the administration. The electronic administration management system involves monitoring the way the administration works, electronically assigning work tasks until their implementation, the deadline for performing the work, the quality of the work completion and measuring the work, as a basis for measuring the efficiency of employees, which can be further upgraded with measures for motivation, reward or responsibility, punishment. The perception of Macedonian civil society organizations is quite negative when it comes to service delivery. Many civil society organizations believe that one-stop shops and administrative service providers are not easily accessible to all citizens due to their geographical distribution. Service providers also have all necessary forms available online and inform citizens about their rights and obligations. On the other hand, the concerns of citizens and civil society organizations are confirmed by the situation of the sample of service providers analyzed, as e-services are rare and websites do not offer guidelines for citizen participation. (Related publications of ZG - Center for Change Management: "Evaluation of Policies for Improving Public Services" (2020)

From the latest analyses of citizen satisfaction with public administration conducted in recent years, the general perception of citizens in Macedonia regarding the quality and accessibility of administrative services is divided. Almost the same percentage of citizens believe and disagree that dealing with the administration has become easier in the past two years. This leads us to the conclusion that their experiences in obtaining services depend on the institution providing the service and the type of services provided. However, research has also shown that digitalization has contributed to the positive opinion of citizens, as well as the general tendency and commitment of

Denkova, J., & Ananiev, J. (2025). Electronic management of the public administration, a process that influences its effectiveness and responsibility. *STED Conference 14(2)*, 47-53

service providers to provide broader e-services. However, although citizens consider e-services to be a step forward and believe they are easy to use, they rarely use them. On the other hand, it is evident that the Government needs to improve communication and consultations with citizens, as the perception is completely negative. Half of citizens believe that the administration has not asked for their opinion on how to improve administrative services. (UNDP Public Opinion Survey Reports on Citizen Satisfaction with Local Self-Government in the Republic of North Macedonia 2021, 2022,2023,2024).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RESEARCH

Given the above analysis, we can conclude that the Republic of North Macedonia has adopted a large number of laws and bylaws related to electronic business, but there are legal gaps that prevent their implementation. The current acts only refer to electronic communication, between state and local authorities and with citizens for the exchange of information and the issuance of certain electronic personal documents, only in certain areas. It is necessary to establish a single unified management and communication system for all state and local authorities, to be supported by the Laws as a mandatory obligation. To determine the ways in which financial resources, technical means and trained personnel will be provided to manage this complex system and ensure its full implementation and sustainability. Appropriate training of the administration and management staff is an indispensable part of the efficient implementation and functioning of the electronic administration management system, called E-Government. The management system should be necessarily linked to a program for motivating the administration. The system should be subject to continuous evaluation by citizens, service users, on the manner and efficiency of service provision by the administration. State bodies should be electronically connected so that they can quickly respond to citizens' questions, problems and needs, when collecting information, giving opinions, providing documents, etc. The administration should have a clear goal for its role in the state body and in the system in general, which means being focused on personal development of knowledge and skills, as well as having a clear position for citizens in the system. As a significant segment in the process of efficient e-governance, the necessity of establishing the Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS) aims to improve the efficiency of human resources management, and thus the quality of the work of public sector institutions.

Already established information systems should be supplemented, upgraded and replaced with new technologies, and this should be supported by continuous control and supervision by appropriate oversight institutions. The overall e-governance system should be based on sustainable electronic communication networks and systems. It is necessary to conduct campaigns about the advantages and benefits of building and developing electronic communication networks and electronic governance systems as the basis for the information society. Institutions need to proactively and systematically increase the level of awareness and information on e-services to encourage the use of e-services. All institutions should have functional public feedback channels on their websites, giving citizens a network in which to evaluate service delivery. The one-stop shop system should be easily accessible to all citizens and appropriately distributed throughout the country, so that all citizens can have easy access.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest to declare in relation to the research presented in this paper.

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