

Strategies for Navigating Ethical Challenges in Digital Government Implementation

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Abstract. The core of government digital governance lies in leveraging modern digital technologies to enhance governmental capabilities and deliver more effective public services to citizens. It necessitates not only the optimal use of digital technology but also a conscientious consideration of the ethical challenges inherent in the governance process. This dual focus requires governments to scrutinize the methods, means, and outcomes of digital governance, alongside fostering a culture of pragmatism and responsibility among administrative personnel, ensuring accountability for their actions. Currently, digital governance in our country is confronted with ethical dilemmas at the policy level, within organizational structures, amongst personnel and digital security. Addressing these ethical concerns entails refining policy design, cultivating ethical standards within administrative organizations, enhancing the ethical awareness of administrative staff, protecting data security and facilitating the efficient progress of digital government development.

Keywords: Digital Government, Digital Governance, Ethical Dilemma

1 Introduction

Digital governance within governmental frameworks is orchestrated by leveraging advanced digital and information technologies. This approach facilitates the handling of related affairs, optimizing operational processes in the public sector through the analysis, integration of digital resources, and the systemic linkage of various departments. It aims at fostering the sustainability of the government's responsibility system through a new governance model that enhances the efficiency of public services and governance^[1]. Patrick Dunleavy was among the first to systematically explore the concept of digital governance in his 2006 publication, "Digital Era Governance: IT Corporations, The State, and E-Government." This seminal work prompted the academic community to incorporate digital governance theories into new public management paradigms, sparking a surge in both theoretical research and practical applications in digital government. The evolution of digital government has increasingly focused on the systematic optimization and reengineering of government mechanisms and systems, alongside a comprehensive digital overhaul of government services. Within our nation, the centrality of digital governance in national governance is unequivocal. In 2023, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council unveiled the "Overall Layout Plan for the Construction of Digital China," emphasizing the development of a collaborative and efficient e-government framework. This plan aims to elevate the level of digital services and the precision of social governance^[2]. Currently, the nation is actively enhancing digital governmental

governance, accruing substantial success in digital government development and governance improvement. Nonetheless, prevalent research predominantly emphasizes the technical implementation and empowerment of digital governance, often overlooking the importance of value rationality and ethical consciousness. This oversight introduces significant moral risks^[3]. The essence of governmental digital governance lies in utilizing modern digital technology to bolster governmental governance capabilities and deliver more effective public services to citizens. Consequently, it necessitates not only harnessing the benefits of digital technology but also addressing moral and ethical considerations in governance to ensure equity and justice within government operations.

2 Current state of digital government development in china

Research from the Internet Data Center illustrates a projected increase in China's data volume from 23.88ZB in 2022 to an estimated 76.6ZB by 2027, representing an average annual growth rate of 26.3%, positioning China as the global leader in data volume growth (Fig. 1). Data, recognized as a new factor of production, forms the cornerstone of digitalization, networking, and intelligent technologies^[4]. Its rapid incorporation across production, circulation, consumption, and social service management sectors is significantly transforming production methods, lifestyles, and social governance approaches, facilitating an intelligent evolution in governance methodologies.

Amidst the burgeoning expansion of digitalization and the exponential surge in data volume within governmental frameworks, digital transformation emerges as an indispensable strategy in the contemporary era. Consequently, China's digital government initiatives are harnessing these technologies across various domains, including education, healthcare, eldercare, credit systems, and targeted poverty alleviation programs. These initiatives aim to furnish the public with more intelligent, convenient, and superior-quality public services^[5].

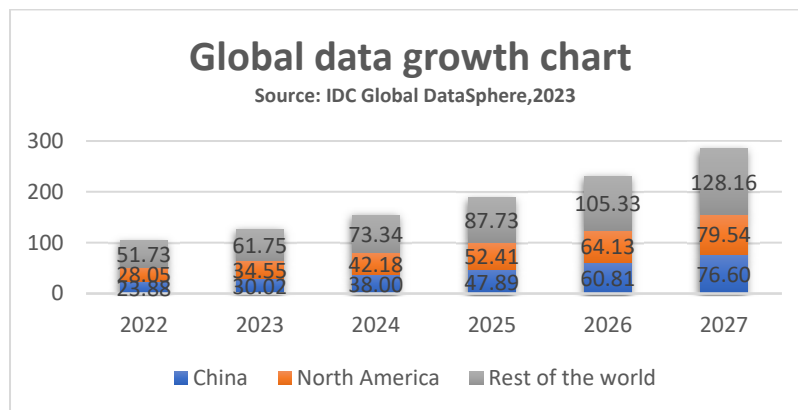


Fig. 1. Global data growth chart.

3 Ethical dilemmas in digital government development

3.1 Policy-related ethical dilemmas

Public policy encompasses a set of behavioral norms and action guidelines developed by the government to address public issues and achieve management objectives within a certain timeframe. The ethical framework guiding digital government initiatives should prioritize principles of people-centricity and objectivity to avoid ethical dilemmas stemming from conflicts between roles and values in decision-making processes.

The ethical dilemma in policy formulation arises when individual governments fail to align digital technology with the operations of various administrative departments and staff. This misalignment can lead to a lack of service awareness among administrative personnel and difficulties in resource integration^[6].

In policy implementation, an ethical dilemma surfaces when some administrative personnel prioritize efficiency over humanity. By adopting a mechanistic technological approach and overlooking the fundamental needs of the populace, these actions can lead to formalism, thus ethically compromising the implementation of policies.

3.2 Organizational ethical dilemmas

Organizational ethics refer to the ethical and moral standards within administrative entities. Due to the bureaucratic nature of China's government system, which combines a top-down vertical power structure with horizontal segments of power among different governmental departments and local governments at the same level, certain ethical dilemmas emerge^[7].

This structure intensifies information control in digital government development between different levels, limiting cross-level and cross-departmental data and information sharing. Such constraints lead to inefficiencies within government organizations, resulting in organizational ethical dilemmas.

Modern organizational structures often witness one-directional and ineffective communication. Instances where grassroots organizations manipulate data or withhold information for self-benefit contribute to flawed decision-making processes and compromise national and collective interests. The lack of clear delineation of powers and responsibilities in digital governance exacerbates these issues, leading to avoidance of accountability and unresolved conflicts of interest and responsibility disputes.

3.3 Personnel ethical dilemmas

Personnel ethical dilemmas refer to the moral conflicts faced by administrative staff in their professional roles, where value choices clash with public duties. Public values demand that staff maintain objectivity and fairness in their duties. However, the absence of adequate systems and constraints has led some individuals to misuse technological means for personal gain, thereby deviating from basic social ethics and undermining the integrity of administrative ethics^[8]. Furthermore, instances of negligence, duty abandonment, and unethical practices such as data leakage and resale by administrative personnel not only breach professional ethics but also severely harm public trust and governance efficacy.

3.4 Data security and privacy dilemmas

Society is currently in the digital age, and individuals are also facing the risk of being fully digitized. Therefore, while the government uses digital technology to provide management services, it should also pay attention to the negative impacts brought about by the application of digital technology.

On the one hand, the construction of digital government cannot be separated from the support of data. Using technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence, the government can collect and utilize more personal data and public information, but this will inevitably involve the issue of personal privacy leakage and protection. On the other hand, the application of digital technology may also trigger a crisis of trust. Different from artificial intelligence technology, human decision-making requires not only the processing and analysis of data, but more importantly, the balance and judgment of emotions, values, ethics and other factors.

Therefore, although human computing speed and data collection capabilities are far lower than those of advanced Digital technology, but due to the lack of complete autonomous consciousness, digital technology can only be used as an assistant for human management and decision-making. With the development of information technology, technologies such as big data will become more and more deeply involved in government decision-making and social governance. The will of machines will be increasingly reflected, and the credibility and authority of the government will be increasingly challenged.

4 Strategies for Optimizing Digital Government Development

4.1 Enhancing policy design to foster comprehensive development of digital governance

The creation and execution of policies often encounter ethical dilemmas due to a primary focus on instrumental rationality and efficiency. To navigate these challenges and promote the evolution of digital governance, a holistic approach to policy design is crucial. This entails:

Adhering to principles of people-centricity, fairness, and justice.

Employing big data, artificial intelligence, and other technologies to gather social information and conduct citizen satisfaction surveys, thus improving the precision and efficiency of governmental decision-making^[9].

Continually refining the policy evaluation system to ensure policies are equitable, objective, and scientifically grounded, minimizing the influence of subjective biases. Furthermore, leveraging outsourcing can significantly reduce the costs associated with building a digital government, enhance the efficiency of its governance, and alleviate operational pressures. An integrated approach involving "government leadership, societal participation, and market-driven operations" can attract social capital towards digital government projects.

4.2 Cultivating an ethical framework within administrative organizations to bolster governmental unity

Key measures include:

Reinforcing ethical awareness to prevent value-based and role conflict dilemmas. This involves

establishing robust ethical standards for administrative personnel and prioritizing the common good and public needs as central objectives.

Dismantling barriers to data and information flow between different government levels and departments, thereby fostering a cohesive data ecosystem. This would enable seamless data sharing and improve administrative collaboration and efficiency.

Enhancing both internal and external oversight mechanisms. The establishment of a dedicated administrative ethics supervisory body can clarify responsibilities, while expanded public oversight and participation avenues can heighten the effectiveness of digital governance.

4.3 Elevating ethical awareness among administrative personnel for efficient digital governance

Administrative personnel's ethical consciousness is pivotal in addressing ethical decisions with integrity and responsibility. As digital governance emphasizes responsiveness and public service, it is imperative to align closely with public needs and enhance citizen satisfaction. This involves:

Administrative staff developing a robust understanding of justice and the common good, prioritizing national over personal interests in cases of conflict^[10].

Departments intensifying professional ethics training and improving oversight mechanisms. Proactive disclosure of data and administrative outcomes, welcoming public scrutiny, will bolster transparency and openness. Such measures not only foster public trust but also deepen citizens' comprehension of and support for government policies^[11].

4.4 Protect data security and promote the healthy development of social trust

Citizens' data security and personal privacy are not only a reflection of individual rights, but also related to national interests. Only by regulating data processing activities and protecting data security and personal privacy can the rational use of data and the effective protection of personal rights and interests be achieved.

First of all, the government should strictly abide by relevant laws and regulations, increase penalties for illegal and illegal use of data, and strictly control data applications related to national development security and citizens' interests. At the same time, laws and regulations regarding data protection are constantly being improved. On the one hand, local governments should formulate and implement targeted regulations based on actual local conditions; on the other hand, central ministries and commissions should promulgate departmental regulations related to data security protection in their own departments to provide legal support for data security protection in our country.

Secondly, the government must strengthen the protection of citizens' information and prevent the leakage of citizens' information. Finally, by establishing a scientific talent introduction mechanism to absorb more skilled talents, we can provide strong talent support for government data security and promote the development and improvement of digital government.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the advancement of digital governance embodies a pivotal opportunity for

enhancing governmental efficiency and enriching public service delivery. Yet, this transition is fraught with significant ethical challenges that span the spectrum of policy formulation, organizational conduct, and individual accountability. Tackling these issues demands a concerted effort that extends beyond technological adoption, requiring a steadfast commitment to ethical principles, comprehensive policy oversight, and a profound cultivation of ethical consciousness among administrative personnel.

It is imperative that future research and practice in digital governance not only address these ethical dilemmas with the gravity they deserve but also strive to harmonize the integration of digital technologies with the core values of fairness, transparency, and accountability. By doing so, we can ensure that the evolution of digital government genuinely serves the public interest, fostering a more responsive, equitable, and trustful governance landscape. This endeavor necessitates a dynamic and ongoing commitment to ethical vigilance and innovation in policy-making, thereby securing the integrity and sustainability of digital governance initiatives.

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