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Service Automation in the Public Sector

Concepts, Empirical Examples and Challenges

Springer

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Preface

With great satisfaction, we now present this book on service automation in public organizations. This book was written because we experience a strong interest from our partners in the public sector in issues about artificial intelligence (AI), robotic process automation (RPA), and how automation contributes to the digital transformation of their organizations. The first thoughts of a book came when we realized that we worked with the same types of questions and case studies about RPA in different municipalities. A book could be something to gather around and a way to form a community of researchers interested in the use of RPA in the public sector. Therefore, in connection with The Scandinavian Workshop on E-Government (SWEG 2020), researchers in digital government met to discuss the possibilities of collaborating on robotic processes automation issues in public organizations. However, we soon saw a need to expand the scope to deal with service automation in general rather than specifically RPA.

Our partners in the public sector had many questions about the development of new organizational skills, benefits, implementation, and challenges. As usual when an interest turns into a trend, there are great risks of excessive optimism. There is also a cause for concern when technologies that have first emerged in the private sector are uncritically imported into the public sector without considerations of possible differences between the sectors. Against this backdrop, we saw the need to describe, problematize, and analyze what an increase of automation in the public sector can entail. We furthermore wanted to address automation from different perspectives and acknowledge the particularities of the public sector.

The outbreak of COVID-19 unfortunately delayed the start somewhat, but a call for chapters was presented in the autumn of 2020 and a website[1] was set up for communication with interested researchers. The call attracted attention from an international crowd of researchers from multiple fields and contexts. During the winter and spring of 2021, a series of chapter development workshops were held to

[1] https://publicserviceautomation.com

support authors in developing their chapter ideas. During the following summer and autumn, double-blind peer reviews of the submitted chapters were conducted. In total, twenty submissions were examined, which resulted in ten chapters. Additionally, two chapters were written at the invitation of the editors.

We have divided the selected chapters into three main parts: conceptualization, applications, and implementation challenges. Conceptualization aims to clarify the core concepts related to public service automation. Applications presents empirical examples of automation in public organizations. Implementation Challenges includes chapters identifying and discussing challenges that can arise from the implementation of automation technologies in the public sector service. The Editorial in first chapter briefly introduces the chapters in each of these three parts, and based on the lessons learned presents calls for further research on public service automation.

We thank Christian Rauscher at Springer Nature for encouraging and supporting the initial idea for this book, and Ramya Prakash and Jialin Yan for coordinating the work and supporting us during the production of the book. We also wish to thank the researchers who submitted chapters. Finally, we are grateful to our colleagues and friends who supported this book project by serving on its editorial board and who dedicated much of their time in reviewing and providing feedback on the submitted chapters.

We hope that you will enjoy reading the book and invite you to contact us for questions, feedback, and discussions.

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