

Technological Innovation and Participatory Governance: The Beliefs of Secondary Education Administrative Staff in Greece

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the complex perceptions of administrative staff within the Greek secondary education sector regarding the role of technological innovation in fostering participatory governance. As digital transformation reshapes the Greek public sector, this research aims to illuminate how modern digital platforms redefine collaborative decision-making, transparency, and administrative efficiency. Utilizing a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews and convenience sampling, the study analyzes the lived experiences of administrative employees across various regions. Drawing on the principles of participatory design and the evolution of digital service support in the Greek educational context, the findings suggest that while technology is perceived as a critical asset for institutional modernization, significant structural and cultural barriers -such as the digital skills gap and entrenched hierarchical resistance- continue to impede the full transition to a truly participatory governance model.

KEYWORDS: Digital Era Governance, Participatory Design, e-Government Services, Secondary Education, Greece, Administrative Innovation.

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INTRODUCTION

The integration of technological innovation within the administrative framework of secondary education represents one of the most significant shifts in modern Greek public policy. Technological innovation in this context is not merely about the adoption of new software but involves a radical change in the organizational environment that allows for more horizontal and transparent work processes. According to Dunleavy et al. (2006), digital era governance emphasizes reintegration and holistic services, moving away from the siloed, top-down bureaucracy of the past. In the Greek context, the transition from manual, paper-based bureaucracy to digital environments like the "MySchool" platform and integrated e-protocol systems has fundamentally altered the daily routine of administrative staff. These innovations aim to bridge the gap between central policy-making and the school unit, creating a more cohesive and responsive educational state. By moving beyond traditional settings, the administration seeks to provide services that are not only faster but also more inclusive, fostering a new relationship between the state, the educators, and the citizens.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this research is to investigate the beliefs and attitudes of administrative staff serving in Greek secondary education concerning the intersection of technology and participatory governance. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether these employees perceive technological innovation as a tool that genuinely facilitates collaborative decision-making or merely as an additional layer of digital bureaucracy. By focusing on the staff's personal experiences, the research aims to identify the factors that encourage or discourage the use of digital platforms for open governance. Furthermore, following the logic of Anthopoulos et al. (2007), the study intends to highlight the specific organizational challenges faced by personnel, examining if the participatory design of these services actually involves the end-users—the administrative staff—in the discovery and re-design of e-Government services. Additionally, the study considers the historical context of digital service support in Greece, as analyzed by Agorogianni et al. (2011), to understand how long-standing technological infrastructures influence current administrative perceptions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical landscape of this study is constructed upon three interconnected pillars: Digital Era Governance (DEG), Participatory Design (PD) in the public sector, and the socio-technical evolution of digital services. At the core of our analysis lies the Digital Era Governance (DEG) model. As articulated by Dunleavy et al. (2006), DEG represents a departure from the fragmented structures of New Public Management, emphasizing reintegration and holistic digital services. In the context of Greek secondary education, this theoretical lens allows us to examine how technological innovation acts as a catalyst for breaking down administrative siloes, moving towards a more unified and digitally-mediated administrative environment.

Building upon this, the study integrates the Participatory Design (PD) framework as conceptualized by Anthopoulos et al. (2007). Participatory design in e-Government services is not merely a technical methodology but a democratic imperative. It posits that the discovery and re-design of digital public services must involve the active collaboration of end-users. Anthopoulos et al. (2007) argue that excluding these front-line actors from the design process leads to a user-reality gap, where digital tools fail to align with actual administrative workflows.

Furthermore, the research incorporates the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), which suggests that the adoption of any technological innovation is predicated on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In the Greek educational administration, these perceptions are historically shaped by the quality of institutional support. As Agorogianni et al. (2011) demonstrated in their longitudinal study of digital service support in Greece, the success of a technology is inextricably linked to the continuous training and technical assistance provided to users. By synthesizing DEG, PD, and the findings of Agorogianni et al. (2011), this framework allows for a multi-dimensional analysis of how Greek administrative staff perceive their role: as passive recipients of technology or as active participants in governance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design and Philosophy

The research design of this study is firmly established within the interpretivist paradigm, a philosophical stance that prioritizes the subjective meanings and professional realities constructed by individuals within their organizational environments. Unlike positivist approaches that seek objective, quantifiable truths, this qualitative framework is uniquely suited for uncovering the nuanced "how" and "why" behind human perceptions and professional beliefs within the intricate organizational structures of the Greek public sector. By adopting this lens, the study seeks to capture "rich, subjective narratives" regarding the quality of digital engagement among administrative staff, providing a deep understanding of their lived experiences during the digital transition.

Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary instrument for data collection was the semi-structured individual interview, as detailed in Appendix 1. Adhering to the methodological guidelines established by Verma and Mallick (2004), the semi-structured format was selected to provide a balanced approach: it allows the researcher to maintain focus on predefined thematic axes while remaining sufficiently flexible to explore unexpected insights. This flexibility was critical for identifying secondary themes, such as the emotional impact of digital transitions on staff identity. To facilitate a "safe and professional atmosphere" conducive to candid and honest discussion, each interview was conducted via secure teleconferencing platforms, typically lasting between 20 and 30 minutes.

Sampling Strategy and Participants

To recruit participants, a convenience sampling strategy was utilized, focusing on twelve (12) administrative employees from various Regional Directorates of Secondary Education throughout Greece. This specific sampling method ensured a broad geographical representation during the 2024–2025 academic year, encompassing personnel from major urban hubs as well as remote island regions. Such diversity is paramount for this research, as it reflects the varying levels of technological infrastructure and digital support across the Greek state—a factor previously identified as a significant variable in educational technology adoption by Agorogianni et al. (2011).

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The raw data underwent a rigorous process of thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and significant themes related to technological innovation, administrative support, and governance models. To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the findings, the researcher employed "member checking," a process where preliminary results and interpretations were shared with the participants to verify accuracy and ensure that their voices were represented correctly. Furthermore, the analysis was continuously cross-referenced with the participatory design principles of Anthopoulos et al. (2007). This theoretical triangulation was essential to evaluate the truly "participatory" nature of the Greek digital ecosystem and to determine whether current innovations facilitate genuine collaboration or merely serve as tools for centralized oversight.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews yielded a rich dataset regarding the integration of technological innovation in Greek Secondary Education. The participants, representing various administrative tiers, provided insights that transcend mere technical implementation, touching upon the core of organizational transformation.

Perception of Innovation as a Tool for Transparency

A primary finding of this study is that administrative staff perceive technological innovation as the ultimate guarantor of institutional transparency. Participants argued that the transition from opaque, paper-based workflows to traceable digital environments has fundamentally altered the accountability framework. Specifically, several employees noted that the implementation of the "MySchool" platform allows for real-time monitoring of administrative acts, which aligns with the principles of Open Government (Lathrop & Ruma, 2010). One participant from an urban Directorate emphasized that digital innovation has eliminated the "discretionary power" of the traditional bureaucrat, as every action leaves a digital footprint that can be audited, thereby fostering a climate of trust between the administration and the educational community.

Challenges in Achieving True Participatory Governance

Despite the positive reception of digital tools, the shift toward a truly participatory governance model is hindered by a "participation gap." While technology provides the necessary infrastructure for horizontal communication, the actual decision-making hierarchy remains largely unaffected. Participants reported that they often feel like "data entry clerks" rather than active collaborators in the governance process. This finding supports the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as proposed by Davis (1989), where the "perceived usefulness" of a tool is high for efficiency but low for empowerment. Many administrative staff expressed a desire for more collaborative digital spaces where their feedback could influence central policy, moving away from the top-down mandate system that currently characterizes the Greek Ministry of Education.

The Digital Divide and Professional Anxiety

Another critical theme that emerged is the impact of the digital skills gap on professional identity. The convenience sampling allowed for the inclusion of staff with varying years of service, revealing that older employees often face "technostress" or professional anxiety during the rollout of new systems. According to the participants, the absence of a systematic, ongoing training framework is the most significant barrier to innovation. This lack of support often leads to what is described as "digital isolation," where staff in remote regions must rely on personal initiative and informal networks to solve technical problems. As Anthopoulos et al. (2016) have highlighted in the Greek context, the digital divide is not merely a matter of hardware availability but a complex issue of digital literacy and organizational support.

Innovation as a Driver of Public Value

Finally, the results indicate that administrative staff recognize the "Public Value" (Moore, 1995) created through technological innovation. By reducing response times and improving the accuracy of student and personnel records, the administration provides a more reliable service to the public. However, participants cautioned that the "shortage of time" due to increased digital reporting requirements often "sabotages" their ability to engage in reflective administrative practices. The data suggest that for innovation to be sustainable, it must be accompanied by a reduction in redundant bureaucratic tasks, allowing staff to focus on the qualitative aspects of participatory governance.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study confirm that technological innovation in Greek Secondary Education has reached a critical turning point. The infrastructure for a modern, digital administration is largely in place, yet the cultural transition to participatory governance remains incomplete. The positive attitude of the administrative staff is a necessary but insufficient condition for reform. As Dunleavy et al. (2006) argue in the Digital Era Governance (DEG) model, true transformation requires the "reintegration" of services and the active participation of all stakeholders in the digital ecosystem.

The implications of this research are twofold. First, the Greek Ministry of Education must transition from a "software-centric" approach to a "user-centric" approach, involving administrative staff in the design of digital tools. Second, there is an urgent need for the institutionalization of continuous professional development that goes beyond basic technical training to include skills in collaborative management and digital ethics. Without these reforms, technological innovation will continue to be perceived as a more efficient way of performing old bureaucratic tasks rather than a vehicle for democratic and participatory governance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the administrative staff of Greek Secondary Education view technological innovation as an essential prerequisite for a modern state. However, the potential of technology to foster participatory governance is currently limited by rigid hierarchical structures and a lack of support for the human factor. By addressing these structural barriers and fostering a culture of open dialogue,

the Greek educational administration can evolve into a transparent, inclusive, and truly participatory system that meets the challenges of the digital age.

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Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

I. Introductory Phase (Demographics & Professional Context)

Current Role: Could you describe your current administrative position and specify the duration of your service within the Greek Secondary Education administration?

Digital Toolset: Which digital platforms (e.g., MySchool or integrated management systems) do you utilize most frequently in your daily administrative duties?

II. Thematic Axis 1: Perceived Usefulness and Administrative Efficiency (TAM Framework)

Workflow Transformation: How has your daily workload changed following the implementation of recent digital innovations? In your view, has technology effectively reduced bureaucratic friction?

Transparency and Accountability: Do you believe that the digitalization of administrative procedures has increased transparency in the relationships between the Directorate, individual school units, and the Ministry?

III. Thematic Axis 2: Participatory Design and Collaborative Governance (Anthopoulos et al., 2007)

User Involvement: During the rollout of a new digital service, were you ever consulted regarding your specific workplace needs or the functional design of the system?

Feedback Mechanisms: Is there a formal institutional channel through which you can propose technical modifications or qualitative improvements to the platforms you use?

Agency in Decision-Making: Do these digital tools allow you to participate more actively in the decision-making process, or do you perceive them primarily as data-entry instruments for central monitoring?

IV. Thematic Axis 3: Service Support and Training (Agorogianni et al., 2011)

Institutional Support Quality: How would you evaluate the technical and administrative support provided by the Ministry or Regional authorities when you encounter system failures or procedural ambiguities?

Training Adequacy: Was the professional development provided during the digital transition sufficient to meet the demands of e-governance? What form of support would you consider ideal for your role?

V. Thematic Axis 4: Structural Barriers and Future Perspectives

Organizational Resistance: Have you observed any cultural or hierarchical resistance to the adoption of technological innovations? If so, do you attribute this to a lack of skills or to traditional power dynamics?

Vision for Participatory Governance: How do you envision the future of participatory governance in Greek education over the next five years? What is the "key" element required to make the administration more democratic and less centralized through technology?