

# LINKING OBJECTIVE-ORIENTED TRANSPARENCY TO POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Septimiu SZABO  
Marius PROFIROIU  
Gregory PORUMBESCU  
Erica CEKA

## Abstract

Transparency, one of the many tools of the strategic planning concept, is commonly assumed to result in a number of diffuse benefits for government. Yet, empirical research demonstrates that the relationship between transparency and good governance is not as straightforward as often assumed. As a result, many are now debating the role of transparency in fostering effective governance. This study argues that current debates over the benefits of transparency stem from too general conceptualization of what transparency actually is. As such, drawing upon existing literature, we contribute to this debate over the utility of transparency in the following ways. First, we offer a framework that suggests a more nuanced understanding of the different types of information needed to enhance government transparency. Second, we discuss how the different types of information outlined in our framework promise to improve specific aspects of government. Finally, we demonstrate how transparency is dependent on a strong political leadership and how it needs to be integrated into the organizational strategic planning in order to be effective.

**Keywords:** transparency, good governance, political leadership, strategic planning, public information.

## Septimiu SZABO (corresponding author)

PhD candidate, Bucharest University of Economic Studies,  
Bucharest, Romania  
Tel.: 0040-21-335.4653  
E-mail: septimiu.szabo@gmail.com

## Marius PROFIROIU

Professor, Department of Public Administration,  
Faculty of Administration and Public Management, Bucharest  
University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania  
E-mail: profiroiu@gmail.com

## Gregory PORUMBESCU

Assistant professor, School of Public Affairs and  
Administration, Rutgers University- Newark, NJ, USA  
E-mail: gporumbescu@gmail.com

## Erica CEKA

Research Assistant, Department of Public Administration,  
School of Public & Global Affairs, Northern Illinois University,  
DeKalb, IL, USA  
E-mail: erica.ceka@gmail.com



## 1. Introduction

Ostensibly, government cannot go wrong when it comes to enhancing transparency. In the best-case scenario, enhancing transparency can induce a host of tangible benefits – it can impede corruption, improve trust in government, and, more broadly, engender greater accountability and responsive public organizations. On the other hand, even if attempts to enhance transparency do not result in concrete benefits, citizens will still have access to more information about their government than ever before. Perhaps it is for this reason that most see transparency as ‘one of those banal ideas (...) that are taken as unexceptionable in discussions of governance and public management’ (Hood, 2007 pp. 192).

Yet, today many empirical studies are beginning to challenge this long held view of transparency. These studies tend to demonstrate that transparency is not as benign as conventional public administration wisdom suggests. For example, these studies have uncovered scenarios whereby greater transparency can actually lead to lower trust in government, detract from accountability, and foster greater dissatisfaction with public services (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2013; Bauhr and Grimes, 2014; Porumbescu, 2015). To this end, many are now beginning to question just whether investments in transparency are worthwhile (Roberts, 2015).

All told, these studies are helpful in that they speak about a need for scholars and practitioners of public administration to think more carefully and more broadly about the implications stemming from greater transparency. In order to do so, research must make an effort to develop a more systematic approach to thinking about transparency and its relationship to the good governance outcomes commonly assigned to it. In particular, it is necessary to consider in greater detail just what transparency means and to identify the mechanisms responsible for linking transparency to good governance.

With these points in mind, the purpose of this paper is to establish a preliminary framework that provides a more nuanced understanding of just what transparency is and just how it relates to different aspects of government performance. To do so, the intention of this study is to address three key objectives. The first objective is to provide a deeper understanding of just what transparency means and of the forms and features of information that contribute to enhancing transparency. Our second objective is to explore ways in which these various forms of information may contribute to the quality of governance. In closing, we address the third objective of this study, which is to show that transparency is dependent on strong political leadership and needs to be integrated into the organizational strategic planning if it wants to achieve the broad objective of improving the quality of governance.

The arguments outlined in this study are important in that they offer a more systematic perspective on an area of public administration that has historically been of great importance, yet, by many accounts remains poorly understood, not because of a lack of valuable literature on the subject, but rather because of its complexity. In this way, this study contributes to the extant body of transparency literature by

deriving an initial framework that offers preliminary insights into ways of making effective use of this potentially powerful administrative tool.

## 2. Defining transparency

In this study, we define transparency as a routine provision of information to external stakeholders that serves the purpose of improving their understanding of what their government is doing (Meijer, 2013; Porumbescu, 2015b). The OECD (2001) describes it as openness on policy intentions, formulation and implementation while Piotrowski and Bertelli (2010) understand it as the degree to which access to government information is available. De Fine Licht *et al.* (2011) make a distinction between transparency in rationale, which refers to information on the substance of the decision and of the facts and reasons on which it was based, and transparency in process, which refers to information on actions such as deliberations, negotiations and votes that take place among and between the decision-makers.

To this end, the transparency of government is heavily contingent upon the quality and types of information government publicly discloses. The objective of fostering greater transparency is one that requires attention to detail, as simply ensuring that citizens' access to government information will not only do little to contribute to enhancing transparency, but, in some instances, may actually detract from citizens' ability to understand what their government is doing. Moreover, a further challenge is to ensure that the information that government does make public, aside from touching on all of the dimensions needed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of an issue, is also delivered in a way that is not misleading.

When talking about transparency, one can have different understandings. Cucciniello and Nasi (2014) and Grimmelikhuijsen (2012; see also Heald, 2003) provide different dimensions of the process, presented in Table 1. These frameworks, in large part, can be considered complementary in that they offer a picture of the different forms of information that government must make public in order to bolster citizens' understanding of what government is doing.

**Table 1:** Dimensions of transparency

Dimensions of transparency		
Cucciniello and Nasi (2014)	Grimmelikhuijsen (2012)	Grimmelikhuijsen (2012)
institutional transparency	decision-making transparency	transparency completeness
political transparency	policy transparency	transparency color
financial transparency	policy outcome transparency	transparency comprehensibility
public service transparency		

**Source:** authors' compilation

Cucciniello and Nasi's (2014) design and Grimmelikhuijsen's (2012) first framework serve the purpose of fostering a comprehensive understanding of the complex, yet interrelated functions of government. Cucciniello and Nasi (2014)

refer to transparency using four dimensions. The first dimension which deals with institutional transparency is used to describe the extent to which information outlines the structure and responsibilities of public organizations. Political transparency is used to foster greater awareness among citizens of what their elected officials are doing and at what cost. As such, this dimension details information related to items such as elected officials participation in legislative meetings and their salaries. Financial transparency focuses upon explaining how the government is using key resources assigned to it – what is the government spending money on, and how much is it spending based on what criteria? Public service transparency highlights just how government is responding to the needs to citizens through the provision of different public services. Cumulatively, information on each of these dimensions serves the purpose of fostering a comprehensive understanding of the complex, yet interrelated functions of government.

Grimmelikhuijsen's (2012) second framework, on the other hand, focuses upon the qualities of government information. The first quality he mentions, completeness, refers to whether or not all of the relevant information needed to understand a particular issue has been publicly disclosed. However, it is important to note that completeness is not synonymous with exhaustiveness, in the sense that it does not mean that all of the information pertaining to a particular policy has been publicly disclosed. In fact, as some studies have suggested, exhaustiveness can actually be used as a tactic to overload the public with information and, as such, detract from citizens' ability to understand what their government is doing (O'Neill, 2002). The second quality is color, which is used to explain the extent to which the information is objective. The color of the information a government publicly discloses as overly positive portrayals of government actions can result in a biased or incomplete understanding of just what the government is doing. The third quality of information is comprehensibility. This dimension is used to account for the extent to which information being made public is understandable to the general public. Here, the key is to ensure that the information being publicly disclosed is presented in a straightforward and readily accessible way so as to ensure that the information is contributing to enhancing understanding equally across all segments of the population.

### **3. Exploring the link between transparency and quality of government**

The links between transparency and the quality of government, while often assumed to exist, are not readily apparent. As we argue, difficulties in seeing how transparency contributes to the quality of government may be a result of a lack of clarity over just what transparency means. Based upon the understanding of transparency that we have provided in the preceding section, we now offer a general discussion of just how different facets of government transparency may translate into improved governance. In exploring these arguments, we focus upon two broad audiences for the government information being publicly disseminated – public organizations and the general public.

### *3.1. Public organizations as the audience for transparency*

Similar to the results observed almost 100 years ago through the Hawthorne experiments undertaken in the USA, Jung and Lee (2015) notice a tendency for individuals, or groups of individuals to perform better when they know they are being observed. These results confirm Hood's (2007) view that the more closely government is watched, the better it behaves.

This broad assumption translates into practice in two ways. First, governments are frequently pressured to publicly disclose more and more information guided by a belief that doing so would improve monitoring, and thereby engender greater performance. Second, in order to ensure uniform improvements to performance, it is also possible to observe that pressures to enhance transparency are widespread and not concentrated upon a particular area of government. Thus, when taken together, a causal chain is suggested: transparency is thought to contribute to enhanced monitoring, which in turn motivates public sector employees to perform 'better', thereby resulting in aggregate improvements in organizational performance (Porumbescu, 2016).

Yet, while intuitive, others argue that this linear causal logic is inaccurate. Mansbridge (2009) suggests that full transparency can lead decision-makers to avoid explicitly considering certain potentially unpopular courses of action, despite their relevance, for fear of being sanctioned by the public. As a result, full decision-making transparency can detract from the government's ability to thoroughly consider the policy as well as relevant alternatives and, in turn, negatively impact that quality of policies that are adopted. O'Neill (2002) argues that continual attempts to enhance transparency can make public employees care less and less that they are being monitored. Prat (2005) believes that greater emphasis upon decision-making transparency can create an incentive for public officials to discount their expertise and place greater emphasis upon behaving in a way that conforms to baseline expectations, in turn resulting in an aggregate loss in productivity and performance.

These examples suggest that, on the one hand, enhancing transparency, and subsequently limiting autonomy, may serve as a means of motivating public organizations to perform in a way that aligns with the public's interest. Yet, on the other hand enhancing transparency too much may infringe upon the autonomy of public organizations too much and, as a result, lead to goal displacement, whereby public officials no longer see advancing the public's wellbeing as their primary goal, but rather compliance with procedures and rules so as to not irk the public and jeopardize their job (Hood, 2007). Thus, when viewed through a lens of bureaucratic discretion/autonomy, what becomes evident is that the causal chain identified earlier linking greater transparency to performance and, subsequently to the quality of government, is valid to a point. Yet, what also becomes apparent is that at some point, enhancing transparency will actually negatively affect performance. To this end, the question is not entirely one of whether transparency improves the quality of government, but rather how much transparency is needed to improve the quality of government.

### 3.2. *Citizens as the audience for transparency*

With respect to citizens as an audience of public disclosure, the general belief is that transparency empowers citizens to guide the performance of their government in a direction that more closely aligns with their personal preferences. As such, efforts to link transparency to performance and the quality of government centers upon accountability. As in the preceding section, a causal chain can thus be established whereby access to government information yields greater accountability, which in turn results in improved organizational performance (from the perspective of the citizens), and ultimately higher quality government.

Yet, here some urge caution and indicate that such causal logic is overly simplistic and not often calibrated (Porumbescu, 2015) since an increase in transparency does not automatically lead to an increase in accountability, meaning that interactions between citizens and their government, in large part, remain unilateral – from government to citizens (Mergel, 2013). Others suggest that not all citizens possess the same cognitive capacity to interpret the information they are afforded, implying that while transparency may enhance accountability for some it may not for others (Cook, Jacobs and Kim, 2010). As a result, there are inadequate opportunities being granted to citizens to act upon the information they are exposed to. Even in instances where citizens do understand the information being afforded to them and have sufficient opportunity to engage their government, they may not see the evidence as credible to begin with and, instead, base their decisions upon alternative information sources (Van Ryzin and James, 2015). Thus, as presented above, the strength of the link between transparency, accountability and performance is not nearly as strong as it is often assumed.

While there is no straightforward guarantee that greater public disclosure will result in better performance, it is also important to consider the possibility that greater transparency can trigger dysfunctional forms of accountability, which detract from performance and adversely affect the quality of government. This can be the case when information is obtained via a third party such as media outlets, friends or nonprofit organizations which can alter certain information in order to bolster popular support for a particular agenda or policy (Im *et al.*, 2014). As a result, there is a situation where citizens do act on the information and attempt to hold their government accountable, but demand things that may actually conflict with their best interest. Extending this point, Bauhr and Grimes (2014) examine the link between transparency, corruption and accountability and find that, in contexts where corruption is largely under control, transparency positively relates to the different dimensions of accountability. Yet, the authors also find that in contexts where corruption appears to be pervasive, enhanced transparency will actually serve to ‘demobilize’ citizens, and detract from accountability. Thus, transparency can indirectly contribute to cultivating misperceptions of all that the government is actually doing. In turn, guided by such misperceptions, citizens’ attempts to hold their government accountable may actually detract from their personal wellbeing.

### *3.3. Charting an outcome driven approach to transparency*

The discussion in the preceding sections highlighted key challenges that complicate a possible relationship between transparency and the quality of government. The first challenge deals with questions of just how much transparency is enough while the second with ensuring that citizens are able to access government information and using it in a way that serves to advance their best interests fostering a functional accountability. While addressing these broad issues, we argue that an initial strategy that can help address some of these issues relates to thinking more carefully about the particular objectives governments intend to fulfill through the use of transparency. We discuss the broad outcomes commonly ascribed to enhancing transparency – greater trust in government, greater acceptance of government decisions, enhanced responsiveness and reduced corruption – in greater detail below.

#### *3.3.1. Trust in government*

In recent years, a great deal of research has examined the effects of transparency on trust in government. While the link may appear intuitive, this relationship generally finds little support in the empirical literature since the effects of transparency vary tremendously according to the features of information communicated to the public. In their cross-analysis of transparency studies Cuccinello, Porumbescu and Grimmelikhuijsen (2016) observe that the number of studies that found positive effects and the number of studies that found negative or mixed effects between transparency and trust is equally divided. Specifically, effects will vary according to the amount of information and the form of transparency, and because there is wide variety in how citizens view government transparency. When citizens are exposed to greater amounts of information about a particular decision or outcome, there tends to be a negative effect, whereas when citizens are exposed only to some information this relationship actually becomes positive. Moreover, when citizens are exposed to negative information regarding public policy outcomes, they tend to respond negatively. On the other hand, they seem to not respond positively when exposed to positive information regarding policy outcomes, indicating a negativity bias (Porumbescu, 2015; Piotrowski and Van Ryzin, 2007). It should be mentioned, though, that critical information for the public should be made public by the government regardless if that information is positive or negative. Thus, while transparency certainly is important for fostering trust in government, citizens should not be overloaded with detailed explanations, particularly when it comes to negative policy outcomes.

#### *3.3.2. Acceptance of government decisions*

In terms of generating greater understanding of government decisions, transparency also seems to be a logical determinant – by providing citizens with a logical and detailed explanation, they will come to understand why a particular course of action was decided upon. However, similar to the discussion of trust in

government, a detailed presentation of the whole decision-making process of a particular policy (including all the alternative solutions) will reduce citizens' acceptance of government decisions, while providing just a general briefing appears to be conducive to acceptance (Buell and Norton, 2013; De Fine Licht, 2014). In part, this may be due to detailed government information leading to greater scrutiny of the decision by citizens (Porumbescu, 2015). An additional factor also found to affect the relationship between transparency and citizens' acceptance of government decisions is the policy domain the information relates to. Specifically, De Fine Licht (2014), citing work by Tetlock (2003) illustrates that the effects of transparency are contextual in that they depend upon the policy domain. As De Fine Licht finds, information pertaining to policy domains dealing with 'sacred values' such as health or security evokes a much more negative response from citizens. On the other hand, information pertaining to policy domains dealing with 'secular values' such as financial issues, will actually serve to foster greater acceptance of government decisions. As such, the key take-away for acceptance of government decisions is that citizens may not be willing to accept government decisions when it comes to certain sensitive policy domains like health or education, and that brief descriptions are generally better than presenting the whole decision-making process.

### *3.3.3. Enhanced government responsiveness and reduced corruption*

Transparency is thought to enhance government responsiveness. This relationship results from transparency bolstering accountability of government – transparency enables citizens to hold their government accountable, and, in turn, ensure that that government performs in a way that responds to their needs (Grimmelikhuisen, 2012; Halachmi and Greiling, 2013). By ensuring that citizens have access to adequate information, letting them know the extent to which their government is responding to their needs, government transparency also serves to safeguard against the misuse of public resources and corruption. Exposure to more detailed information appears to evoke more critical responses from citizens, which in turn should lead them to exercise voice, and call their government into account (Buell and Norton, 2013; De Fine Licht, 2014; Porumbescu and Im, 2015). Therefore, when dealing with an objective of stimulating participation, citizen involvement, government responsiveness, and mitigating corruption longer and more detailed messages may be more useful than shorter messages. Yet, as Bauhr and Grimes (2014) indicate, government still must be cautious in providing too much information detailing different aspects of government as this information may, due to different reasons, ultimately detract from citizens' involvement in government, and, in turn, reduce responsiveness.

### *3.3.4. Implications for effective practice*

As we have illustrated, there are potential side effects that may reduce the general beneficial outcomes of greater transparency. First, while full transparency may be better than no transparency, some degree of partial transparency appears

to be optimal. Second, the ability of transparency to achieve objectives commonly associated with it like trust, acceptance, reduced corruption, more responsiveness, accountability, is contingent upon the particular form of transparency, as well as the policy domain.

What is evident is that citizens' acceptance of government decisions and trust in government appear to have similar relationships with transparency. Therefore, in terms of obtaining both objectives, the first key is to acknowledge that concise depictions of government may be more effective than detailed explanations. This may be because exposure to greater details regarding a policy triggers a more critical perspective from citizens or because longer messages are more difficult for citizens to understand (Porumbescu and Im, 2015). An additional factor to bear in mind is that transparency is not effective at bolstering citizens' acceptance of government decisions across all policy domains. Nor is it necessarily an appropriate tool for engendering trust in all public organizations. Thus, governments must be more strategic in their use of transparency with respect to bolstering trust and acceptance by targeting specific policy domains with concise yet accurate descriptions of what government is doing, particularly with respect to decision-making. Figure 1 briefly presents these findings.

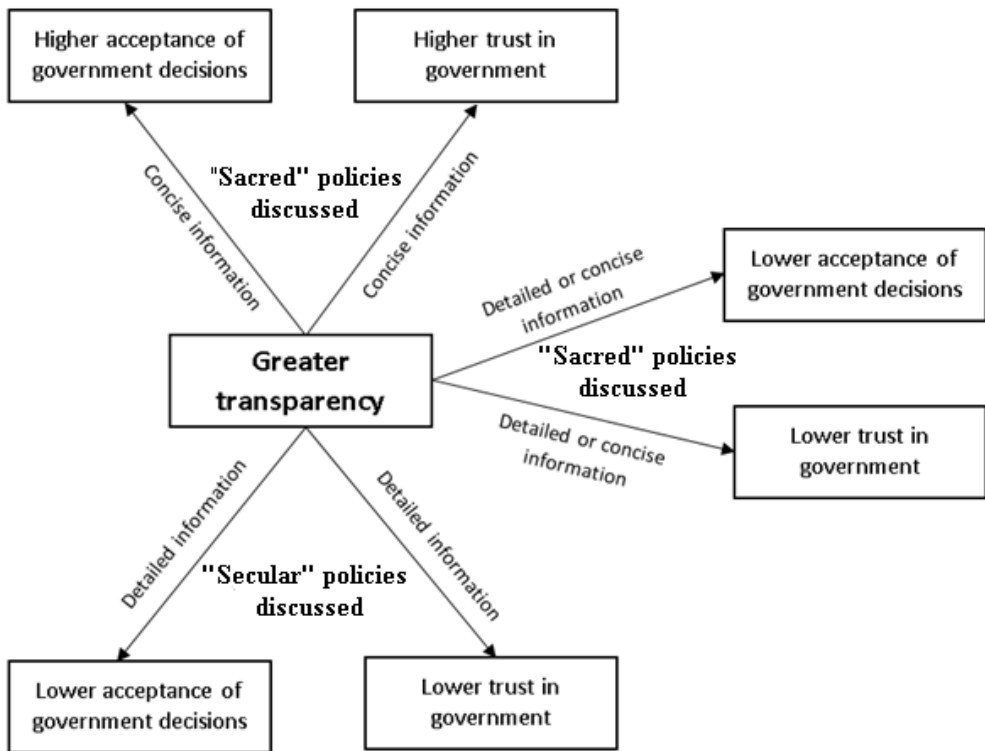
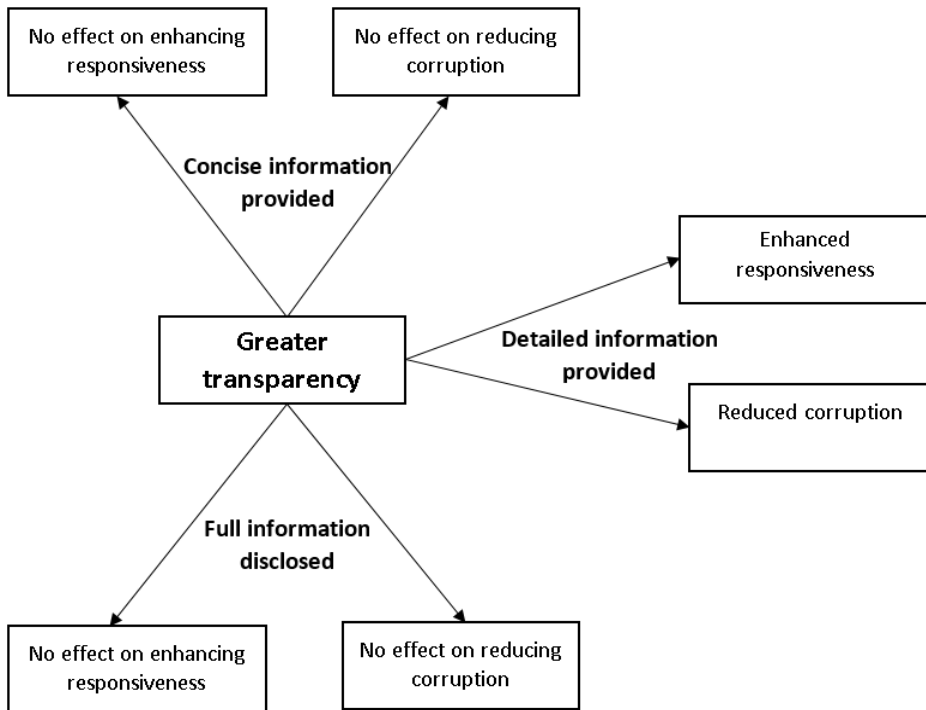


Figure 1: The relationship between transparency and acceptance of government decisions and between transparency and trust in government

Source: developed by the authors

Yet, the strategy for using transparency to enhance responsiveness and reduce corruption will differ from that used to foster acceptance and trust. First, while full transparency will likely be of little use (Bauhr and Grimes, 2014), it also appears likely that messages seeking to bolster responsiveness and limit corruption will need to be more detailed than those used to bolster trust and acceptance. This is because more detailed information has been found on multiple counts to innately encourage individuals to think more critically about a particular issue and, by extension, more carefully about how things that government can do to better respond to their needs. Further, when viewing public organizations as the audience of transparency, more detailed communications (though not overly detailed) can serve as a source of motivation for employees of public organizations as it demonstrates to them that external actors are very interested in the work they are carrying out and that their performance is being monitored (Jung and Lee, 2015). As a result, not only can this relatively detailed information encourage employees to work harder, but it can also act as a disincentive for engaging in acts of corruption. Thus, in order to bolster responsiveness and reduce corruption, governments must make use of longer messages that overview public activities in more precise terms, although like in the case of trust and acceptance, the effects vary across policy domains. Figure 2 briefly describes these findings.



**Figure 2:** The relationship between transparency and enhanced responsiveness and between transparency and reduced corruption

**Source:** developed by the authors

What the discussion until now demonstrates is that the effects of transparency are complex and in large part influenced by the context and qualities of the information. Assuming that enhancing transparency can simultaneously result in across the board improvements to government is inaccurate. Rather, governments must think more strategically about just what they intend to get from their use of transparency and formulate their messages accordingly. In addition, it is also important for the audience to view the information as credible, irrespective of how objective the information actually is. In the following section we outline approaches that government may consider in an effort to ensure that citizens actually believe the information being made public.

#### **4. Linking objective-oriented transparency to political leadership and strategic planning**

Shi (2002) suggests political leadership and strategic planning have a major influence on the implementation of e-government and transparency. While political leadership is crucial where risks and resistance are present, strategic planning provides transparency with insights and future directions. In this final chapter we discuss how these two factors influence transparency initiatives within the public sector.

Some academics suggest that in many places there is a skeptical distrust towards political leaders (Andrain and Smith, 2006; Cleary and Stokes, 2006). Therefore, they need to try and develop an effective and trustful relationship with the citizens and work collaboratively (Kettl, 2000; O'Leary and Bingham, 2008). They also need to develop more opportunities for online and offline citizen participation to enhance trust in the government and in themselves for the next elections (Kim, 2010). As mentioned before, if done correctly, transparency can be an effective tool in this regard. Nonetheless, any state-of-the-art technology is of limited value if there is no vision and leadership to give direction to transparency since its challenges require organizational structures and skills (Heeks, 2001).

As Park (2005) mentions, transparency initiatives need to be championed by a strong, committed political leader, whose vision and ability can build support within government, secure the necessary funding, and manage the implementation from beginning to end. McClure (2001) also suggests that leadership is necessary in all the phases of the transparency planning. Others, on the other hand, suggest that the role of political leaders is crucial at the earliest stages when they need to raise awareness, promote it in the media, make it a priority, build and maintain wide commitment and involvement at public and private levels (Ndou, 2004). In developing countries struggling with resources strong political leadership is critical in order to prioritize and obtain funding for transparency initiatives, since in those places other needs might seem more urgent than information. A strong political leadership is also needed in organizations resistant to change or which have some sort of organizational and cultural inertia. In this regard, the literature suggests that political, organizational and cultural resistance is often more difficult to overcome than the technological chal-

lenges (Furuholt and Wahid, 2008). To overcome these constraints, governments require effective, knowledgeable leaders who can mobilize the bureaucracy, unify different fractions and plan strategically. Furthermore, political leadership that aims for greater transparency requires effective coordination and collaboration among different layers of government in order to provide sufficient resources, avoid duplication, and deliver coherent action in terms of promoting transparent initiatives. Moreover, political leaders must keep in mind that an important dimension of transparency in government is maintaining the integrity of politicians and civil servants (Kim, 2010).

To realize the potential of impact of transparency upon the quality of government, governments must integrate transparency initiatives into their strategic planning efforts. Indeed, as Huang and Bwoma (2003) suggest, a lack of strategic planning is a major barrier to the effective implementation of transparency. In this regard, in order to achieve the organizational vision, governments should think strategically and evaluate their options before developing any transparency initiative. According to Bryson (2011), transparency should be seen as a strategic issue to be dealt with as part of the design of the strategic planning process or of the strategic plan itself. In this regard, he suggests that transparency should become the default mode of operation for most governments by creating a transparency culture that leads to more participative and collaborative strategic planning practices. Similarly, Shi (2002) argues that strategic planning is vitally important for transparency because it provides insights that can inform discussions over future directions for the government. Melkers and Willoughby (2005) find that transparency is intimately related to effective performance measurement, one of the main aspects of strategic planning within governments. Finally, Chan *et al.* (1997) note that transparency offers the potential to foster innovation, which can only be achieved when the process of enhancing transparency is connected with organizational strategic orientations. Nonetheless, as Meijer and Thaens (2010) observe, there seems to be a gap between the potential of transparency and the operational realities of governments. As a result, organizations need to connect the potential of transparency to the specific strategic orientations of the governments. Still, a 'one-size-fits-all' strategy, often implicitly suggested by many supporters of enhanced information technology, seems unrealistic. In this regard, Meijer and Thaens (2010) find that even different directorates within the same ministry or federal agency have different strategic orientations in terms of transparency. Therefore, the application of transparency instruments might need to fit more than one organizational strategic orientation.

After undertaking an inventory of current IT capabilities and a forecast of emerging technologies and trends, governments can start the strategic planning process. During the development phase of the process governments need to assess carefully what tools to use. As mentioned above, it is critically important to understand just how much information should be made available but other criteria are also important. In their study, Holzer *et al.* (2014) propose five criteria for assessing the quality of a governmental website: privacy, usability, content, services and citizen engagement.

A low score in any or more of these criteria might question the credibility of government efforts to enhance transparency. Social media should also be handled with care. Due to the specificities of this type of communication, some citizens might not take the information posted there as reliable, which, as stated earlier, can negatively influence perceptions towards the government. Furthermore, most users of such networks are youth and urban people, thus pointing on the digital divide problem that creates obstacles for public participation and communication (Norris, 2001). After the implementation phase, some governments may also be interested in seeing a post-transformation stage in order to create new services, new dynamics and forms of transformation and new ways of involving citizen participation (Davison and Wagner, 2005). Feedback could be collected from the citizens and used in order to understand future needs and expectations in terms of transparency.

## **5. Conclusions**

This paper aims to provide an initial framework that offers an insight into how to effectively use transparency through strong political leadership and by applying a strategic planning approach. First, it tries to give a better understanding of what transparency really is, and how it can be enhanced. Secondly, it reviews how transparency can enhance good governance. Finally, it describes how transparency is dependent on political leadership and the organizational strategic planning.

While full transparency may be better than no transparency, some degree of partial transparency appears to be optimal since its effects are complex and in large part influenced by the context and qualities of the information. Assuming that enhancing transparency can automatically result in across the board improvements to governments is not realistic. As discussed by Cuccinello, Porumbescu and Grimmelikhuijsen (2016), transparency, like other tools, is subject to limitations, and if it is not applied correctly, it cannot work properly. Thus, governments must think more strategically about just what they intend to get from their use of transparency and formulate their messages accordingly, particularly with respect to decision-making. They should not ask themselves whether transparency improves the quality of government, but rather how much transparency is needed to improve their governance.

Fostering greater transparency requires great attention to detail, as citizens need to understand what their government is doing in a way that is not misleading. Furthermore, citizens should not be overloaded with detailed explanations, particularly when it comes to negative policy outcomes. While the general rule should be that shorter messages are better, in some specific cases more detailed (but not extensive) messages may be more useful. In either case, however, governments must understand that citizens may not be willing to accept government decisions when it comes to certain sensitive policy domains.

In the design of transparency initiatives, political leadership and strategic planning play a major role. Therefore, there is a need for a strong political leader, who can

understand the real costs and benefits, motivate the people involved, influence the process, and get support from other institutions. In addition, most governments should use a strategic approach when planning to enhance transparency. As each transparency initiative has advantages and disadvantages, governments should combine them in order to maximize the number of citizens they can reach, match the supply with the demand, address errors in attribution and assessment, and increase the quality of the information they provide. This strategic approach to disseminate information, if tailored by each government, can significantly contribute to increased quality of governance and more trust in government. Further studies could focus on the application of our proposed approach to test its practical implications.

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