

# Chapter IX

## Developing an E-Government Roadmap for Developing Countries

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### ABSTRACT

*Developing countries, opting to pursue services-oriented economies, have invested in information and communication technologies (ICT) to enhance their competitiveness in the global environment. This has called for improved management in both public and private sectors and as a consequence governments, some of which have undertaken public sector reform, now seem ready to embrace e-Government. However, experience even in developed countries has shown that incorporating e-Government practices is not a sure means of attaining desired goals. This paper examines the position of Vietnam, as it becomes a member of WTO in implementing E-Government. Some E-Government initiatives taken are identified and an IT roadmap is recommended as a means of achieving a successful transformation. This roadmap emphasizes a holistic approach to analyze existing performance gaps and identify E-Government opportunities for Vietnam.*

## INTRODUCTION

Over three decades ago the potential of information and communication technology to enhance the socioeconomic development of developing countries (DCs) was recognized by some international institutions. Since then DCs all over the world have been increasing their investment in ICT and extending its application into all sectors of their economies. In the private sector there is the issue of the 'productivity paradox' in the utilization of ICT in enterprises with apparently little measurable productivity gains being attained after considerable ICT investment. Many governments have also not been noticing the expected improvements after their considerable investments (Ciborra, 2005). This has been a difficult pill to swallow for some DCs which are least able to afford such unprofitable investment when their populations sometimes lack basic necessities in their social systems. The reality gap between the hype about ICT and the actual performance must therefore be confronted by governments in DCs (Heeks, 2003).

To narrow the gap on how government should plan and implement e-Government, we drew upon the literature on strategic information systems (SIS) and strategic information systems planning (SISP). SIS refers to the use of information systems to change the way a firm competes in the industry or change the structure of the industry (Neumann, 1994). Extensive research was conducted on the nature, driving forces, critical success factors, problems and barriers of SIS. However, most of these studies were conducted in the context of the private sector, where firms compete with each other in an open free market. Alternatively, public organizations like governments do not operate on the same principles as the private counterparts. In the absence of competitive forces of the market, one may question the relevance and applicability of the concept of SIS to the public sector. We believe that today governments are under increasing pressure to

operate more like private firms. Internally, they are challenged to improve efficiency by legislative mandates or budget constraints (Fountain, 2001). Externally, the public – citizens and business – exerts increased pressure on government to improve the way it delivers services. Having witnessed and gotten used to the convenience and power of electronic commerce in the private sector, the public has become less tolerant with the level of services provided by governments. All these forces – by making government more efficient, responsive, and accountable – have the potential to change the way government operates and alter the political structure. We believe that information technologies have much to offer in the process, just like the way SIS has the power to modify the market structure. We therefore conjecture that e-Government is a strategic IS issue because it has the potential to change the way government operates and its political structure.

This paper addresses one aspect of a larger project undertaken by two of the authors on ICT, governance and modernization, reviews some initiatives towards e-Government taken by the Government of Vietnam and proposes an IT roadmap that can be used to enhance our understanding of how many of the failures experienced elsewhere might be avoided. Note is taken of the literature concerning models on ICT application and, more recently on e-Government adoption. Unfortunately these have tended to be about developed countries such as Canada, emerging economies like Singapore and large DCs like South Africa and India. The situation in Vietnam has special characteristics and requires specific consideration.

Hunter and Long (2002) in examining the challenges faced in the application of IT to small businesses utilized the Entrepreneurial Process and that work has been closely studied in preparing this paper. Likewise the contributions of Heeks (2001(a), 2001(b)) have been useful in the study of efforts to re-engineer administrative processes within government and to seek to implement such

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