

Chapter 14

Opening the Black Box of Leadership in the Successful Development of Local E-Government Initiative in a Developing Country

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ABSTRACT

Leadership has been identified as one of the critical factors in the successful development of e-government projects especially so in developing countries. Unfortunately, empirical studies linking the outcome of e-government projects and the role of leadership are very limited. Moreover, these studies did not comprehensively discuss the role of leadership in implementing e-government projects involving social, political, and technological transformation. Using the four moments of Actor Network Theory (ANT) translation framework, this paper presents detailed actions taken by leaders in the development of a local e-government project. The paper argues that ANT translation provides an appropriate framework to trace and monitor how leadership has been practiced effectively in an e-government project in a developing country.

INTRODUCTION

Implementation and development of e-government projects have never been an easy task. In many developed countries, e-government failed to meet the initial promise to promote better

public participation and improve administrative efficiency (Bolgherini, 2007). But in developing countries, e-government development faced more fundamental problems that include the lack of appropriate technological infrastructure, limited financial and human resources, and the incompatibility to their political, social and cultural

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environments (Nguyen & Schauder, 2007; Imran & Gregor, 2007). These might explain why 85% of e-government initiative in developing countries failed (Heeks, 2003). Ciborra (2005) argues that e-government thus might not yet be suitable for developing countries and Fife and Hosman (2007) even suggested instead to spend money for “bread” rather than for “broad-band.”

However, there are some reports of successful e-government initiatives in developing countries. Gudea (2007) reported a successful cooperative approach and innovative strategy to develop home grown internet in Romania. In Ecuador, Karanasios (2007) gave evidence how small tourism enterprise successfully copes with digital divide. In Asia, two studies were documented. In India, Misra (2007) described how a self-reliance approach contributed to successful e-government implementation, while in Indonesia the success of e-government project at municipal level was reported by Furuho and Wahid (2008).

Because of the differences in technological readiness and other factors, the implementation and development of e-government in developing countries need to adapt the strategies and approaches that have been applied in developed countries, or even develop totally new ones (Chen et al., 2006). Some researchers (Stanforth, 2006; Akhter et al., 2007; Imran & Gregor, 2007) proposed that focus should be given more to the social and political factors surrounding the e-government projects (rather than the technological factors) as these are not only dominant but are also quite diverse. Amongst these, leadership seems to be very important and crucial as reported in several occasions. Accenture (2001) reported that leadership was the more important factor (such as political will, commitment, and accountability) than others. Studies supporting such stand were also reported by Ebrahim and Irani (2005), as they found that strong government leadership to support the organizational and procedural changes during the development of e-government was needed. Torres et al. (2005) and Kim et al. (2009)

also found that strong leadership was considered as the most outstanding drivers to e-government success. Imran and Gregor (2007) further observed that leaders’ vision and their willingness to initiate changes within the government sector as significant strategies to succeed in implementing an e-government project.

Although it has been convinced that leadership does play important roles in e-government development but the number of empirical studies are rather limited (Prybutok et al., 2008). Moreover, the few that could be traced focused only on outlining some important features of an effective leadership that are related to the vision, commitment assurance or political will. They failed to describe how such features were exercised in government work setting that was much influenced by political negotiation and constrained by rules and regulations. Such has been the environment that the more static notion of leadership such as characteristics and traits are probably simpler compared to exploring the process of enacting, organizing, explaining, and managing collective actions (Pye, 2005). Therefore, the research question should be on how to explore and analyze the various leadership practices that result in the success of the e-government projects in a developing country. Answering this question will offer some valuable insights and guide for leaders involved in such projects that has to deal with many political, technical and social challenges.

Exploring and analyzing such practices require the use of an established research framework and this paper opted for the use of the Actor Network Theory (ANT). ANT was chosen mainly for its capability to capture the complexity of the interaction between the socio-cultural components as well as the involvement and the need to align the technical and political factors. Consequently, the paper also aims to expose that ANT is a useful framework to explore leadership in action in e-government projects. The focus will be on ANT’s four moments of translation for it provides detailed and step-by-step framework to trace the various

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