

Chapter I

A Framework for E–Government Portal Development

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ABSTRACT

Electronic government (E-government) portals are considered one of the most popular conduits for offering government services online. Successful e-government portal development projects have been lauded in several academic and practitioner papers. These projects have concentrated on integrating government agencies by working to break the traditional silo-based view of the government and providing seamless integrated online services to citizens. However, the rate of adoption for e-government portals by citizens has been much lower than expected. A major reason identified in the literature for this is a lack of understanding of managerial considerations that affect portal development and subsequent adoption. In this chapter, we present a framework of managerial considerations for the development of e-government portals. The framework builds upon available literature in the field of e-government and public administration. It consists of eight key front-office and back-office considerations that contribute to successful development of an e-government portal. It provides an excellent platform for future research on e-government portals. The framework can also be extended to managers as a useful tool for ascertaining the effectiveness of their government portal development.

INTRODUCTION

Governments in both developed and developing countries continue to make massive financial and political commitments towards change initiatives that are enabled by advanced information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Fountain, 2001). Broadly, these initiatives that lead to the adoption and use of advanced ICTs in public administration by government organizations at all jurisdictional levels are grouped under the umbrella term “electronic government” (e-government) (OECD, 2003). The significant increase in the availability and use of government information and services online is a testament to the importance of e-government. However, several analyst reports point out that the return on e-government investments is very low or negative in many jurisdictions because these projects often fail to improve service quality (Accenture, 2005; Bhatnagar, 2002). Apparently, while the exponential surge in e-government initiatives promises widespread access, it also poses significant challenges for managers who are responsible for those initiatives in their respective jurisdictions. In this chapter, we focus on developing a framework of managerial considerations for the effective design and development of e-government portals.

Similar to majestic gateways of large buildings, in a literal sense, portals are anchor Websites. E-government portals provide a single jurisdictional window for offering services and information for all of a government’s departments to the citizens/customers, government employees, and other stakeholders (Tatnall, 2005; Breen, 2000) and signify a move beyond information-only government Websites. E-government portals let governments reach out to the citizen/customer around the globe – inexpensively and around the clock as an integrated and single entity (Stauffacher, 2002; Heeks, 2001; McClure, 2000). A number of e-government portal development and implementation projects are being undertaken to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government

internal operations, communication with citizens, and online service delivery while cutting costs (Dittrich, Ekelin, Elovaara, & Hansson, 2003; Warkentin, Gefen, Pavlou, & Rose, 2002).

These initiatives require the managers in the public sector to consider issues of shared information resources and back-office integration (Weerakkody & Currie, 2003). However, the research on e-government development and implementation is meagre (Jaeger, 2003) and also quite diverse. A majority of the academic papers consider front-office and back-office attributes in isolation. Some academics consider measures such as navigability and aesthetics (Reichheld, Markey Jr, & Hopton, 2000; Chen & Stanney, 1999) and users’ perspectives (Ghinea & Thomas, 1998). Others consider back-office integration (Ebrahim & Irani, 2005), content management (Dholakia & Rego, 1998), and branding and promotion (Kendrick, 1998). Considering this situation, this research is motivated by a need to develop a comprehensive framework of e-government portal development. This framework is an amalgamation of existing front-office frameworks and back-office frameworks. It consists of eight key e-government portal development attributes: segmentation, services, navigation, content management, implementation approach, governance, user adoption strategy, and IT architecture. The identification of key attributes was based on the review of e-government and portal development literature as well as our review of several e-government portals.

We contribute to the e-government literature by synthesizing the managerial considerations that affect e-government portal effectiveness. The proposed framework expands on the literature by incorporating both front-office and back-office considerations for the design and development of e-government portals and provides a platform for further research and practice. The next section provides a brief background and a discussion on the evolution of e-government portals. Section 3 discusses the conceptual framework proposed in this research. Section 4 provides a discussion

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