Chapter 55

An Investigation of the Critical Factors for Evaluating the Public Value of e-Government:
A Thematic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to investigate the critical factors for evaluating the public value of e-government in Sri Lanka. A comprehensive review of the relevant literature on the scope of e-government, the sources of public value creation, and the kinds of public value is conducted for developing the theoretical framework of the study. Using the qualitative data collected from Sri Lanka, a thematic analysis is performed for identifying the critical factors for evaluating the public value of e-government. The analysis reveals that the quality of public information online, functionalities of electronic services, provision of information and services through e-enabled counters, user orientation of public service delivery, improving organisational efficiency, openness and responsiveness, enhancing trust, ensuring confidentiality of citizens' information, achieving social equity, and environmental sustainability are critical for evaluating the public value of e-government.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic government (e-government) generally refers to as the delivery of government information and services through the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Akman, Yazici, Mishra, & Arifoglu, 2005; Horan & Abhichandani, 2006). It has developed rapidly around the world over the past decade (Stojanovic, Stojannovic, & Apostolou, 2006; Nasim & Sushil, 2010; Hassan, Shehab, & Peppard, 2011; Zhao, 2011). This can be demonstrated by more than

98% of the United Nations' member countries with some kinds of e-government presence online (United Nations, 2010). Such a rapid development worldwide in e-government is due to the capacity of e-government for creating public values such as efficiency, accountability, responsiveness, democracy, and equity for citizens (Nour, AbdelRahman, & Fadlalla, 2008; Karunasena & Deng, 2012a).

With the rapid development of e-government worldwide, evaluating the performance of e-government becomes necessary (Bend, 2004; Karunasena, Deng, & Singh, 2011). Such a study not only helps individual governments to understand the value for their e-government investments but also to improve their e-government performance by formulating appropriate policies and strategies for continuous development of e-government (Karunasena et al., 2011). There are various methodologies for evaluating the performance of e-government from different perspectives. Wangpipatwong, Chutimaskul, and Papasratorn (2009), for example, propose a methodology for evaluating the quality of e-services provided by government websites in Thailand. Gauld, Gray and McComb (2009) propose a methodology for evaluating the responsiveness of e-government in Australia and New Zealand. Deng (2008) carries out a benchmarking study on e-government performance using an objective multicriteria analysis approach. There is, however, a lack of studies on evaluating the performance of e-government from the perspective of the value that e-government creates for citizens (Karunasena & Deng, 2012b).

The concept of public value is becoming increasingly popular as an inclusive framework for assessing the performance of public services in the public sector (Moore, 1995; Kelly, Mulgan, & Muers, 2002). The popularity of this concept is due to its capacity for assessing the benefits of public services from the perspective of citizens (Kelly et al., 2002). E-government is an innovative way of delivering public services through the use of ICTs (United Nations, 2003; Meynhardt, 2009). As a result, public value can be used as an effective means for evaluating the performance of e-government (Heeks, 2008). Several frameworks are developed for evaluating the public value of e-government in developed countries. Existing frameworks, however, are inappropriate for effectively identifying the critical factors for evaluating the public value of e-government in developing countries (Karunasena & Deng, 2012a).

This study aims to identify the critical factors for evaluating the public value of e-government in Sri Lanka. A theory-driven thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) is performed on the qualitative data collected in Sri Lanka for identifying the critical factors. The identification of the critical factors would be greatly helpful to e-government stakeholders to understand the effectiveness of e-government in Sri Lanka. This helps the Sri Lankan government to formulate appropriate policies and strategies for the development of e-government. Furthermore, this study is helpful to Sri Lankan government for demonstrating its accountability for the investment in e-government made by international donor agencies.

In what follows, a review of the related literature on e-government developments in Sri Lanka and the concept of public value are presented. This is followed by the discussion of the research design and the data analysis technique used in this study. Finally the research findings and their implications to the continuous development of e-government in Sri Lanka are presented.

DEVELOPMENTS OF E-GOVERNMENT IN SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka has used computing in government for nearly 48 years, even before the notion 'e-government' came into play (Karunasena, Deng, & Karunasena, 2012). Using computers in the Sri Lankan public sector was initiated in 1962, with the introduction of IBM accounting machines to the Insurance Corporation, followed by the introduction of computers to some other public

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