The Role of Partnership in E-Government Readiness:
The Knowledge Stations (KSs) Initiative in Jordan

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ABSTRACT

The Initiative of establishing Information Technology (IT) and Community Service Centers, later renamed Knowledge Stations (KSs) was launched in 2001. The KSs initiative is intended to implement IT in local communities (LCs) and remote areas in preparation for the E-Government process. This study develops a model that explores KSs' role as a partnership in E-Government readiness in Jordan through answering the following two questions: why is a clearly comprehensive role of KSs needed for the readiness of E-Government in Jordan? How does this role take place practically? The research methodology is the case study that was applied to six KSs as a purposive sample in Amman, the capital of Jordan. Nine semi-structured interviews have been conducted with the director of KSs project, trainers, trainees and volunteers in the KSs project. The findings of the study showed that the role of KSs in E-Government readiness has four pillars: enhancement of community awareness in social and economic fields, development of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) capabilities, lessening computer illiteracy fulfillment of comprehensive development.

Keywords: E-Government, Jordan, Knowledge Stations (KSs), Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MOICT), Local Communities (LCs), Partnership

INTRODUCTION

The partnership concept is still unclear, because most collaborative activities in social and economic areas between the public and private sector are located under the heading of partnerships (Lund-Thomsen, 2007). The partnership concept is not the only issue that has been debated between researchers, but also the advantages and disadvantages of partnership have undergone extensive debate too. Osborne (2000) explores two perspectives about this debate: The first perspective believes the advantages will not be achieved without partnership, while the second believes the advantages or positive results will happen despite the partnership (collaborative) rather than because of it.

Partnership is more than outsourcing joint capital investment and project financing. It also means implementing policies that create the demand of services and conditions, a suit-

able return of investment in implementing and deploying government processes (Bassanini, 2002). Also, it does not mean limitation in the government's role, it means the creation of different governmental roles, since the position of the private partner is strong and this needs more skilled government participation (Jamali & Olayan, 2004). The concept of partnership is used broadly by researchers according to their perspectives about the discussed issues and the nature of the collaboration initiatives between public and private sectors in addition to the collaborative areas. Partnership has re-shaped the government's role to be able to obtain a suitable position in managing, controlling and evaluating partnership projects with private partners to accomplish its needs of financial resources and qualified people.

Osborne and Plastrik (2000), Executive Privatization Commission (2000, pp. 4-5), Campbell and Fuhr (2004), Ferlie et al. (2005), and Sharma (2007) mentioned different forms of partnership that include:

1. Build, Operate and Own (BOO) projects that means: building government projects through the private sector and subsequently operating them through the private sector for a limited time, where the private sector can own such projects by agreement with the government.
2. Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) projects that means: the government builds the projects through the private companies and after a limited time the government retrieves the projects to transfer them to another company.
3. Build, Transfer and Operate (BTO) projects that means: building government projects through the private sector, and after that transferring them to other private sectors in order to operate them for a limited time.
4. Build, Operate, Own and Transfer (BOOT) projects that means: the private sector builds the enterprise, owns, exploits and operates it then transfers it and its ownership to the public sector.

E-Government initiatives benefited from partnership projects by following the accelerated development of E-Government implementation, since the formal relations between the government and the private sector enhances the efficiency and transparency of E-Government projects and contributes in E-Government maturity through the contribution of development social integration (Song, 2006). Therefore, the E-Government approach re-shaped the government's role and moved it from being a direct service provider to enabler and intermediary for service provision. Furthermore, with this new role, governments emphasized the importance of partnership arrangements with other sectors such as the private and voluntary sectors (Griffin & Halpin, 2002).

LITERATURE REVIEW

E-Government Initiatives

E-Government became an opportunity to rethink how the government provides services, and how it links them in a way that is convenient for a user's needs not only to put forms and services online (Davison et al., 2005). E-Government also was seen as a mean of empowering people, changing the way people access public services, by promoting transparency and accountability in governmental action of acquiring knowledge (Bassanini, 2002). Thus, E-Government is defined as creating and applying a strategy that enables a rethinking of the governments' role, its institutional structures, processes, functions and also its commitment to provide services (Al-Shqairat, 2009).

This strategy seeks to enhance participation and interaction with stakeholders (citizens, employees, clients, suppliers and donors) through developing several sub-strategies such as political initiatives, adopting different instruments, for instance e-democracy and using available ICTs tools such as the internet and media. In the 1990s, E-Government became a strategy for reform and development in public sector agencies through the rethinking of the govern-

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