

Chapter 8

Competence Development of E-Government: A Study Circle Approach

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ABSTRACT

Effective implementation of e-Government demands the likelihood of appropriately incorporating all the multi-dimensional socio-technical factors in its design strategy. These socio-technical factors may involve, apart from the technological penetration and adoption, the different attitudes and competencies that may influence e-Government uptake. In this chapter, an interview study of a Web-based course for issues related to the implementation of e-Government is described and analysed. The design of the course was inspired by a study circle pedagogical approach. The respondents were especially positive to the group discussions of the studied course. Group-discussions and follow-up activities contributed to integrate learning outcomes into work practice. This study opines that there is a need to combine both development-oriented approaches with adaptive-oriented approaches in order to link different theoretical and practical aspects of the changed work-situation in the community of practice. There is also a need for pedagogical learning of producers and organisers of Web-based education in public organisations, in order to make them to be conscious about the importance of different pedagogical approaches, and the importance of making a thorough problem analysis before the design of the course.

INTRODUCTION

Implementation of e-Government involves changes of work processes (exacerbated by business process re-engineering) and work organisations which are re-organized according to the new or-

ganizational and management ideas in the context of transformation of public administration. On the onslaught, it is important to have competent personnel with requisite ICT skills and other organisation management attributes to run back-end e-Government applications for it to succeed. Also, there is need to have citizens and businesses who

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have the requisite ICT skills and understand the benefits of engaging in e-Government for them to continue consuming e-Government services. In order to have the aforementioned attributes, this may entail cultural changes for all personnel involved, as well as for the citizens in their new roles of public e-Services users. This further entails that there is utmost need for efficient and effective forms of training that motivate and contribute to the skills of both employees and citizens. The transformation of citizens and businesses from traditional government approaches to utilising e-Government demands carefully-designed e-Government strategies and change management plans.

Successful implementation of e-Government comes with a plethora of opportunities both on saving government expenditure on public service delivery and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery to the delight of the citizens (Bwalya & Healy, 2010). Unfortunately, most developing countries have not taken advantage of the many advantages that are on offer at the disposal of effective and successful e-Government implementation. The ability of developing countries to reap the full benefits of e-Government is often limited and hampered by the existence of many political, social and economic hindrances (Ndou, 2004). The success of e-Government depends largely on human skills. Accordingly, education and training must be considered as priority actions (ibid.)

There is a need for good examples to inspire competence development of e-Government. According to an international study by Accenture (2007), the most successful leaders of e-Government did not imitate external solutions in their development work. Instead, they were inspired by good examples, but they then developed their own solutions based on the local context. The objective of this chapter is to contribute to the development of local solutions through a study circle approach for competence development for implementing e-Government.

Governments have hitherto focussed too much on the technical implementation of front-end services Grönlund & Ranerup (2001) in their ambition to offer new e-Services to citizens in the so-called first development phase of e-Government implementation. However, this has culminated into huge challenges regarding the integration of front-end services with back-end systems and routines during the second development phase (Accenture, 2007). The traditional bureaucratic organizational structure is more and more questioned, and new organizational ideas inspired by the 'New Public Management' paradigm influence the redesign of organization and information systems within public organizations (Homburg, 2008). According to the new organizational ideas, the importance of the use of lean and highly process-orientated decentralized and vertical structures is stressed and this culminates into the breaking down of former hierarchical bureaucratic structures. In this New Public Management paradigm, parts of the traditional bureaucratic structure are heremarked for replacement with customer and process-orientated organisation. The authorities become more of network authorities with increased horizontal co-operation and integration between different authorities and less bureaucratic barriers. The citizens' role as consumers is stressed. When the citizens use public e-Services, they also do some of the work tasks which were earlier mostly completed by civil servants. Much of the traditional bureaucratic control could be replaced by control embedded in information infrastructures. When electronic forms are used, more controls of input data are possible compared with traditional paper routines. Forms could be completed online which means reduction of costs compared with traditional manual handling by civil servants. The amount of supplementary information will then be reduced. The time needed for manual dealing with e-Service matters will be reduced.

Research on e-Government has identified issues such as resistance to change, territory battles and lack of skills and competence hin-

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