

Chapter 92

Toward a Roadmap to E-Government for a Better Governance

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ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have a tremendous potential to improve the quality of people's livelihood in general and especially in the developing countries. They can boost business, support education and health systems and also enhance the governance that is a major and vital factor in the development process. It is commonly agreed that e-Government systems enhance governance, but, unfortunately, there is a lack of empirical evidence to build upon this hypothesis, which, legitimately, creates reluctance among key decision makers, slows down the dissemination of technology as a decision support tool and as development enabler/infrastructure and contribute to the very dangerous phenomena known as the digital divide. In the context of Fez e-Government Project, that is being led in Morocco, in a close collaboration with the municipality of the Moroccan city of Fez, authors have developed a pilot e-Government system that facilitates citizens' access to governmental information and services. From the outset of this 30 months project, the goal was to collect and analyze experimental data in order to see how the development/deployment of e-government systems impacted the governance process. This research has set up a methodology that emphasizes good governance at each step of an e-Government project and enables the researchers to continuously assess the outcomes of the resulting e-Gov system on governance. The ultimate goal is to reduce, as much as possible, the reluctance of politicians and decision makers and to contribute in the dissemination of technology for development purposes thru a scientific and proven methodology that systematically links e-Government outcomes to good governance attributes. In this chapter, authors present the main phases of this methodology and lessons learned during the e-Fez Project. This approach may benefit similar projects, especially in developing countries that are willing to create and deploy e-Government systems for the benefit of their citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization growing in an accelerated speed has been changing facets of our modern life. Globalization and post modernity have been altering “the way things are done” and fueling state transformations increasingly reworking governments’ structures, institutions and related processes (Christensen and Laegreid, 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000). For the last 2 decades, State transformations rested on making the shift from the classical bureaucracy model of the public administration towards “New Public Management” (NPM) model (Heeks, 1999; Felts and Jos, 2000; Peters, 2003; Denthardt and Grubbs, 2003). NPM urges public administrations to reorganize themselves via adopting private sector thinking and the business values associated with it, such as responsiveness, efficiency, and flexibility (Bislev, 2004). NPM practices first appeared in “the Westminster-system countries (Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Canada) and the United States, which may rightly be considered as the foremost exponents of NPM” (UN, 2001:pp#33). Then NPM philosophy and practices were spreading worldwide including developing countries through International donors’ aid packages, such as Structural adjustments programs. The failure of these development initiatives proved NPM were not universally applicable; rather, international donors realized the need for “good governance” as a conditionality to transform public administrations and facilitate successful implementation and delivery of development initiatives (Hyden, 1995; Olsen and Peters, 1996).

Accordingly, several studies have promoted E-government systems as producing a number of benefits that foster good governance (Norris, 2001; Nute, 2002; O’Connell, 2003). E-Government is presented as promoting the responsiveness of government institutions to growing citizens’ demands to obtain improved access to public services, as well as to concerns about fostering public institutional efficiency and improving security

measures (O’Connell, 2003). This research has noticed that most studies address the link between e-Government systems (e-Gov systems for short) and governance on a fragmentary, contextual and, in many cases, theoretical basis. Moreover, there seems to be an implicit agreement that e-Gov systems enhance governance, but there is flagrant lack of empirical/experimental evidences to build upon such a hypothesis (Fountain, 2001; Abramson & Morin, 2003). Confirming (scientifically) whether e-Gov systems effectively enhance governance is an issue that takes an increased importance in developing countries in their quest to finding appropriate way to bridge the gap of development thru technology. However, observing the ground reality in such countries, it appears that e-technologies fall short of fulfilling these hopes (see next section). In this chapter, authors claim that these failures result, among other causes, from the lack of a roadmap which effectively emphasizes good governance at every stage of e-Gov projects. They ground this claim on their 4 years experience of developing several e-Gov systems in Morocco, and especially the e-Fez Project. This project aimed to develop a pilot e-Gov system in order to provide the municipal government of the city of Fez with an advanced ICT system (ICT stands for Information and Communication Technologies) that supports the operations carried out by city employees and enables online delivery of citizen-oriented services to the local community. These projects offered the researchers the opportunity to elaborate and refine a Roadmap to e-Government that emphasizes Good Governance at all stages of an e-Gov project (specifications, development, deployment and actual use): the ReGoGoGo Method.

In the next section authors discuss the issue of good governance and the need to ground the development of e-Gov systems on it from the onset of e-Gov projects. Later on, they present, as a case study, the e-Fez Project which won 2 international awards in 2007 for its outstanding results. Afterwards, this chapter describes the

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