

Chapter 4

A Framework for E-Service Implementation in the Developing Countries

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a conceptual framework for explaining the main barriers and drivers of public e-service development and the relationships among them, especially in developing countries. This framework increases the chance of success of e-service projects in the governments of developing countries and provides a basic context within which the process and practice of e-service can be implemented successfully. This paper accomplishes this task by flowing from the traditional rigid context, which occurs in many developing countries, to full public e-service environment, emphasizing citizen-centric focus and digitalisation. The proposed framework builds on prior literature in the area of e-service development in public organisations and from the efforts undertaken in developing countries, considering e-government lessons learned in developing countries. The framework is flexible enough to be adopted by governments at different levels in developing countries around the world.

INTRODUCTION

Changing technology and increased constituent demand for government services derive the need for governmental responsiveness. The government organisations in the developing countries

will be under increased pressure to change their bureaucratic systems to be able to respond rapidly to changing and increasing requirements and rapid technology advancements. Governments today are fighting a strong battle to provide efficient and cost-effective services and solutions to their respective constituents. Some improvements in

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governments' processes can be made simply by swapping out old technology for the newer web-based versions. But, to do so without critically reviewing and challenging current processes would not lead to full potential. Many public sector organisations are struggling to implement and construct e-government despite the relative difficulty compared to the developed regions enjoying reliable telecommunications infrastructure.

The current electronic government initiatives in some developing countries are still in its infancy with projects suffering a number of failures (Beynon-Davies, 2005). In some cases, there is total failure of an initiative never implemented, or in which a new system is implemented but immediately abandoned. Alternatively, there is partial failure of an initiative in which major goals are unattained, or in which there are significant undesirable outcomes. One type of partial failure that particularly affects e-service initiatives in the public sector is the sustainability failure of an initiative that succeeds initially, but then fails after a year or so (Heeks, 2001).

E-government development remains a distant hope for many of the least developed countries due to the cost of technology, lack of infrastructure, limited human capital and a weak private sector. A scarcity of public sector resources clearly imposes a drag on government innovation. Small unplanned and stand-alone projects are the norm in least developed countries, which often lack a well-thought e-strategy within their national development plans. Once initial funding for these projects ends, they are usually at high risk of simply shutting down (UN, 2010).

Layne and Lee (2001) have divided the stages of e-government in terms of their degree of technological and organizational sophistication into four stages, namely: cataloguing, transaction, vertical integration and horizontal integration. According to this division, the result of classifying the 236 countries by the UN global survey (UN, 2010), has revealed that 98 percent of countries have some presence on the Web (*the first stage:*

cataloguing), either by having a national portal or ministry website. Most government websites have a section for archived information and a section called 'What's New'. These features enable users to find information on past activities that are no longer highlighted on the website and encourage users to browse updated information. In contrast, only 44 percent of countries have a section that provides ready answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ).

The use of FAQs can reduce the amount of time and human resources devoted to public inquiry functions, and improve public perception that the government is responsive to citizens' concerns. Links to other public sector services are provided on 67 percent of national portals, which makes them a one-stop shop for information and services (*the second stage: transaction*), but the level of transaction sophistication varies greatly among countries. Only 20 countries (only 8% of all countries included in the global survey) are in the third or fourth stage of online services development. These countries have been integrating back-office operations and providing e-services to citizens in a seamless manner. Information is efficiently transferred between agencies and departments. In addition, these countries have a proven track-record of using Web 2.0 tools to communicate with citizens and regularly receive inputs from them. These inputs are used to shape public policy and law. The level of public trust in government is higher among advanced e-government countries than in many other places (Hamner & Al-Qahtani, 2009).

The remainder of this paper is divided into three main sections: the next section explores the previous frameworks with regard to e-service challenges and success factors. After that, the authors explain the methodology used to build the proposed framework. Some recommendations for successful transformation to e-service environment are then identified, and the final conclusions and implications are presented in the final section.

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