

Chapter 7

Sustainability of E-Government Success: An Integrated Research Agenda

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ABSTRACT

The long-term success of e-government initiatives is of paramount importance, especially for developing countries, which face challenges such as limited budget, donor dependence, transfer of technology, short-term involvement of non-local agents, and relatively unstable political and economic environment. Although e-government success and sustainability are both relevant concepts to assess IT-enabled administrative processes in practice, e-government research has not yet elaborated the two concepts in an integrated fashion. Depending on review of the extant literature, this chapter (1) clarifies the concepts of e-government success and sustainability, (2) provides a conceptualization, which unfolds for both concepts the most used sub-concepts and constructs in terms of enablers and evaluation criteria, and (3) proposes an integrated research agenda for studying the interrelation of both concepts in detail.

INTRODUCTION

E-government initiatives across the world aim at raising the level of government performance. The proper implementation of these initiatives is expected to lead to upgrade the governmental services provided to citizens and the private sector as well as to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of internal government work, in addition

to broadening the participation of citizens in decision-making processes. E-government initiatives receive huge investment and their long-term success is of paramount importance, especially for developing countries, which are facing challenges such as limited budget, donor dependence, technology transfer, non-local agents leaving after project closure, relatively unstable political and economic environment.

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As governments aspire to reach positive impacts, interest has emerged to evaluate the impact of such initiatives on public services in order to justify the costs. Evaluation of Information Systems (IS) in general has been a popular research area over the past years, calling for appropriate evaluation measures. As Wang and Liao (2008) point out, the measurement of IS success or effectiveness has been widely investigated throughout the IS research community. It has been argued (e.g. Delone & McLean, 2003) that if information systems research is to make a contribution to the world of practice, well-defined outcome measures are essential. Meanwhile various IS evaluation models and techniques featuring different indicators have been developed and also applied to the e-government domain.

However, most of the measures to date focus on evaluating the immediate success of those initiatives while sustainability is an often ignored indicator of e-government even though project stakeholders usually expect the success to last after the project is deployed. Therefore, we argue that the relation of the two concepts needs to be explored as they both are related to same organizational reality, i.e. IT-enabled administrative processes. Depending on review of the extant literature we seek to (1) clarify the concepts of e-government success and sustainability, (2) provide a conceptualization which unfolds for both concepts the most used sub-concepts and constructs in terms of enablers and evaluation criteria, and (3) propose a research agenda for studying the interrelation of both concepts in detail.

Accordingly the remainder of this chapter is organized as follows: in the next section, the concept of success and its enablers and indicators are discussed with its implication for IS in general and e-government in particular. The subsequent section presents different views on the sustainability concept together with its dimensions and enablers. Finally, the integrated research agenda is outlined, along with the conclusion.

E-GOVERNMENT SUCCESS

The concept of success has been used by numerous stakeholders to represent different issues. It has been defined in multiple ways based on context it is used (cf. Sharma, 2006). The Oxford Dictionary, for instance, defines success broadly as “the accomplishment of an aim or purpose.” This section reviews the different perspectives on success, its evaluation and enablers in the IS and e-government literature.

E-government enables and is affected by organizational business process change. In this regard, e-government increasingly impacts business processes and workflows in the public sector and at the same time is a special case of business process change enabled by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) (Scholl, 2003). Administrative processes driven by Information Technology (IT) are conceptualized as a set of interconnected activities in which diverse interactions with technology may both shape and be shaped by new forms of organizing (which has been theorized in terms of a mutual interaction between human agents and technology, the latter being both structural and socially constructed; cf. Orlikowski, 1992). Accordingly, the following discussion of e-government success and sustainability is related to the enabling and evaluation of IT-driven administrative processes.

Most of the new technologies enter administrations through projects. From a project management perspective, an IS project is considered successful when the scope is delivered with the quality agreed and within the set limits of time and cost. Focusing on the project deliverable, the success concept has been considered as crucial element in the evaluation of performance of information systems. According to Delone & McLean (2003), organizations use efficiency, effectiveness, and success interchangeably that in turn created ambiguity in the field regarding evaluation of IS impact.

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