Can e-Government Applications Contribute to Performance Improvement in Public Administration?

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ABSTRACT

Electronic Government applications have been the focus of hundreds of local and national government administrations all over the world during the past decade. The emphasis of most of these applications lies in their effort to improve the experience of the user in interacting with public administration services and to minimise waiting times in completing transactions public services and citizens. Early applications were relying mainly on the speed and simplicity of submitting a request by the user while most of the work beyond the web based interaction was carried out as in the era before the introduction of the web based applications. The benefits from such endeavours have been short lived as citizens are looking for real enhancements in the way public administration serves their needs and responds to their requests. The authors argue that for e-government applications to succeed, considerable changes in the way public administration organizes itself and how it utilizes information management systems to respond to user / citizen requirements including and addressing the goals of all stakeholders involved are required. Currently the number of successful applications to that end is quite low when compared to the projects implemented and the resources invested in such systems so far. The authors propose steps that would maintain the focus of future implementations in doing so. They also identify the next steps for research in addressing this complex and ever evolving issue.

Keywords: E-Government Evaluation, Electronic Government, Performance Enhancement, Public Administration, Stakeholder Goals

INTRODUCTION

Electronic Government applications have been the focus of hundreds of local and national government administrations all over the world during the past two decades. The emphasis of most of these applications lies in their effort to improve the experience of the user in interacting with public administration services and to minimise waiting times in completing transactions public services and citizens.

E-government can be described as an interdisciplinary domain mainly based on Information Communication Technology (ICT)
and Public Administration management theory and practice. Electronic government initiatives incorporate Technologies to improve the way government serves citizens and businesses. As such technology, processes and people have to be integrated in its applications.

Early applications were relying mainly on the speed and simplicity of submitting a request by the user while most of the work beyond the web based interaction was carried out manually or more precisely in a human/clerk intensive manner, as in the era before the introduction of the web based applications. The benefits from such endeavours have been short lived as citizens are looking for real enhancements in the way public administration serves their needs and responds to their requests (Athif & Pimenidis, 2009).

Public Administrations even in the most technologically advanced and developed countries have been traditionally conservative in the way they handled citizen transactions. In the current era of the digital information society, the public is becoming increasingly more aware of its rights and its obligations towards public administration and consequently the government. Citizens increasingly demand better value for money from the services they receive and the government in turn is seeking better ways of serving the citizens, knowing well that government accountability is very high in the public’s agenda nowadays (Millard, 2010; Kolsaker & Lee-Kelley, 2009).

Information systems often automate tasks, previously undertaken by humans in an organization, while at the same time removing tasks that are found to be redundant from the organizational point of view or creating new simpler ones. Consequently, in most cases, information systems development and business process reengineering are considered as two views of the same activity that need to be reconciled (Grau, Franch, & Maiden, 2008). The above is particularly true in electronic government development where implementations should aim at reducing wasteful activities by automating fully structured jobs that can be fully described and specified.

The authors argue that for e-government applications to succeed changes would have to be effected in the way public administration organizes itself and how it utilizes information management systems to respond to user/citizen requirements. This paper reviews case studies where e-government has contributed in changing the way public administration serves citizens, while it discusses the approaches followed in building successful e-government systems that embrace the above philosophy.

**E-GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENTATIONS AND EFFICIENCY GAINS**

Most organizations that have implemented or are currently implementing e-government systems are following models that propose starting off with the user/citizen interaction part of the implementation. In doing so, public organizations aim at making the applications attractive to the public expecting to induce users in using the systems frequently (Mousavi, Pimenidis, & Jahankhani, 2007a; Mousavi, Pimenidis, & Jahankhani 2007b). This might make the applications appear successful initially, but the authors question the long term value of such systems. Research of e-government applications across the European Union alone shows that a large number of such applications fail quite early. This is usually due to the fact that the organizations that have developed them lose interest in continuing to support them utilizing resources without getting any real value in return. Most of such applications end-up being semi-abandoned information posting spots with sometimes dated information on them (European Commission, 2011). The authors argue the case of every e-government application needing not only to address the interaction with the user/citizen, but to ensure that the systems developed improve the functions, efficiency and performance of the organization that offers the services. In short the organizations need to focus on developing both the front-end as well as the back-office applications if they aim at
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