Chapter IX

Electronic Government in Japan: IT Utilization Status of Local Governments

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ABSTRACT

This paper reveals the actual status of local governments’ digital readiness in Japan, and describes the stage of achievement in digitalization and related issues. Items requiring analysis are plans for digitalization of governmental administration, organizations, services for residents, information disclosure, and a driving body, as well as impediments to the realization of electronic local governments. The present IT infrastructure in local governments is not yet sufficient, in that the major uses are limited to local area networks (LANs) and e-mail. Prefectures and large cities have relatively advanced governments; however, they are facing financial difficulties. Therefore, it is essential to reduce legacy systems and redirect funds for new IT systems. Security, privacy protection, and organizational conservatism are more important problems to address than equipment shortages.
INTRODUCTION

Information Technology is ubiquitous in many public and nonprofit organizations. Nearly all public and nonprofit organizations have computers that are routinely used by administrative staff, managers, and others. IT enables managers and employees to accomplish more and increase their effectiveness by using more—and frequently better—information (Berman, 1998). In 1992, David and Ted argued for a customer-driven government in their book, Reinventing Government. In their book they hardly gave IT a mention, but governments now are shifting away from traditional bureaucratic functions to include interactive services that encourage active involvement on the part of the citizens (Stratford and Stratford, 2000; Holmes, 2001).

Electronic government is usually presented as using IT:

- To provide easy access to government information and services to citizens and business.
- To increase the quality of services, by increased speed, completeness, process efficiency and other.
- To give citizens opportunities to participate in democratic processes of different kinds.
- Focus is typically on external services, but one important idea is to use these to make internal operations more efficient, for instance by relying on self-service (Åke, 2002).

In Japan, various measures to introduce digital technology to public administration, citizens, and businesses are being implemented in the early part of this century to create an evolution towards an “electronic government.”

This paper reveals the actual status of local governments’ digital readiness in Japan, and describes the stage of achievement in digitalization and related issues. Local governments in Japan consist of two layers: 47 prefectures and 3,250 other municipalities under the central government. Under the two-layer system, all districts of the country belong to one of the 3,250 municipalities and at the same time fall within the boundaries of one of the 47 prefectures. In addition, within the prefectures and municipalities, there exist many special local authorities, such as special wards and designated cities. Tokyo is the only prefecture called a metropolis and differs from the rest of the prefectures in that it has a system of special wards. Designated cities having populations exceeding 500,000 are designated by cabinet order, and are authorized to administrate with the same level of governmental jurisdiction as prefectures in many policy areas.

Items requiring analysis are plans for digitalization of governmental administration, organizations, services for residents, information disclosure, and a driving body, as well as impediments to the realization of electronic local governments.
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