E-Government Initiative in the Sultanate of Oman: The Case of Ubar

Khamis Al-Gharbi, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman
Ahmed Al-Kindi, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

ABSTRACT

There are many interesting initiatives regarding the use of internet technologies in e-government that are taking place in developing countries. A number of studies have been conducted in recent years regarding the adoption and use of internet technologies in e-government. However, most of these studies focused on the developed countries. There are many interesting initiatives regarding the use of internet technologies in e-government that are taking place in the developing countries and yet have received very little research attention. The Sultanate of Oman is currently working on a project called e-Oman to provide e-government, e-commerce, e-learning and other e-services. The hope is to enhance the quality of services offered by the government to its citizens. The purpose of this article is to highlight e-government Initiatives in Oman.

Keywords: E-Government, Internet Technologies, Oman Ubar

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies have suggested many benefits from using Internet technologies in e-government. These benefits include improved quality customer service, increase number of customers, improve business processes, better relationship with customers, efficiency, time savings, and cost effectiveness (Dearstyn, 2001). Furthermore, Khalid and Affisco (2002) cited the need for more efficiency in public sectors as the most driving force behind e-government initiatives. However, a number of studies have reported many challenges that might face e-government initiatives in developing countries. One of the main challenges is poor infrastructure in telecommunication, e-business, financial, and legal system. In addition, the lack of organizational culture, awareness, education, language, social and psychological factors might add more barriers to the e-government initiatives (El-Nawawy & Ismail, 1999; Schmid et al, 2001; Sharma et al., 2002). Carter and Belanger (2004) argue that the success of e-government initiatives is not only depending on the government support but also on citizen willingness to accept and use the services. The purpose of this article is to highlight e-government Initiatives in Oman.
E-GOVERNMENT DEFINITION AND IMPLEMENTATION

E-government is defined by (Luling, 2001, p. 43) as “online government services, that is, any interaction one might have with any government body or agency, using the Internet or the World Wide Web”. Basically e-government represents the use of modern information technology (MIT) and telecommunication technology (TT) to exchange information and process across computer networks, especially the Internet. Silcock (2001). The purpose of e-government in Oman is to:

- Improve the relationship with the citizen
- Provide round the clock services
- Cut departmental hierarchies
- Reduce queuing in many ministries’ offices
- Provide a single point contact to speed up services

Studies describe e-government initiatives that serve a range of constituencies including:

1) Government-to-Citizen (G2C) applications such as the provision of online information and services,
2) Government-to-Business (G2B) applications such as electronic procurement,
3) Government-to-Employee (G2E) applications such as human resource internet, and
4) Government-to-Government (G2G) applications that provide integration between government agencies (e.g., between ministries).

The Omani government vision is as follows: “The leveraging of information technology and communications in providing collaborative services to public and private sectors and citizens through electronic means has been the driving force to move forward the Sultanate to the knowledge-based economy and achieve sustainable development” (Digital Society Strategy, 2002, p. 2).

The government has followed the following strategy in order to implement the above vision:

The strategy included the implementation of:

- E-Government Architecture, Applications and Service Delivery Model
- Security, Audit and Continuity Planning
- E-Legislation (Trust and Confidence)
- National Telecommunications and E-Payments Infrastructure
- E-Government Initiatives
- Flagship Projects (Quick Wins)
- Environment
- Resourcing
- Marketing and Awareness (Oman IT Executive Committee (2002-2003))

Balutis (2001) identified the following phases for e-government implementation:

- **Phase 1**: Dissemination of information.
- **Phase 2**: Provision of forms.
- **Phase 3**: Ability to perform transactions.
- **Phase 4**: Government transformation (e.g., resulting in processes that cross organizational boundaries in order to provide citizens with information and “seamless service”).

The Omani experience in implementing e-government initiatives based their methodology on the above phases but with local emphasis where the following phases were used:

- **Phase 1**: Availability of information (one way direction: to the user).
- **Phase 2**: Providing interaction mechanisms (i.e. email) for all users.
- **Phase 3**: Electronic Transaction through the Ubar portal as discussed below.
- **Phase 4**: Final transformation where Ubar becomes the gateway for all government services provided electronically to the users.

Figure 1 shows the architecture of the initiative as designed by the Omani Ministry of Economy. The figure illustrates
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