Chapter 5
E-Government Implementation Perspective: Setting Objective and Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Though many countries are still just beginning to grasp the potential uses and impacts of Electronic-government (EG), advances in technologies and their applications continue. Observing the proliferation of EG, countries are increasingly turning to the Internet to market their EG system to gain a competitive advantage. However, the effectiveness and efficiency of such online government systems largely depends on the mission of implementing EG. For successful adoption and implementation of EG, it is essential that a country first identify an explicit objective and a specific strategy. We have examined implementation strategies of EG of seven diverse countries whose objectives and mission for implementing EG differ significantly. However, they have the following strategies in common: i) extensive application of information and communication technology (ICT) in the public sector; ii) overall reformation of the public sector; iii) development of a better quality service structure; and iv) more cohesive integration of citizens with government.

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INTRODUCTION

Public organizations across the world have become increasingly aware of the pragmatic uses of Electronic-government (EG) and have been supporting its establishment. Governments are importing technology, developing fundamental capabilities and infrastructure, and using information and communication technology (ICT) – especially the Internet or web-based network—to provide higher quality services to citizens, businesses, employees, and nongovernmental agencies. Across the world, governments are publishing information on websites and establishing an online presence to achieve better efficiency, effectiveness, and organizational performance and to make the government system available to its citizens across the world (Melitski, 2001).

In the early stages of EG development, the gap between the government’s target and the actual country context is often very high. Governments in different countries may adopt an overly ambitious vision with little consideration of the complexity involved in bringing that vision to life (Heeks, 2003). Initially, the effort to implement EG is an articulation of a vision largely driven by a political agenda without an understanding of the practical and complex barriers involved in implementing that strategic mission. As the complexity of these issues becomes apparent at different phases of implementation, policy makers have attempted to revise both the objectives and the implementation strategy. Especially after the first phase of implementation, most developed countries realize that the potential of EG requires more changes in the public administration system than simply an agency-based web presence. EG, therefore, not only transforms the physical public administration system into web structures by using ICT, but it also brings a revolutionary change in the vision of governments and in the relationships between governments and citizens and between governments and the businesses that they serve (Heeks, 2003). EG is related to good governance, democracy, transparency, collaboration with the private sector, accountability, and increased citizen participation in public decision making (Norriss and Moon, 2005). Therefore, because of the significant and far-reaching changes to the way governments deliver services in EG, successful implementation of EG must begin with an explicit vision, mission, and objectives.

Many countries have begun to realize the benefits of launching EG. Different countries have adopted different strategies to solve the problems associated with implementing EG. Consequently, the vision, mission, objectives, and strategy for developing EG and reforming public administration differ significantly among countries. However, advanced technical, financial, political, social, and individual ability are essential in achieving the fundamental mission of EG implementation. Numerous studies (Basu, 2004; Ndou, 2004; Dada, 2006) have shown that when the application of EG fails in different countries, there is also a failure of ICT in general in these countries. The literature has cited some success stories, but failures occur more frequently (Krishna et al., 2005). Heeks (2003) studied the application of EG and found that 35 percent of the EG projects were classified as total failures at the outset of the application or soon afterwards, and 50 percent were termed as partial failures, i.e., the major goals were not attained or there were unspecified outcomes. After examining several cases of ICT and EG failure, Heeks (2002, 2003) states that a major reason for these failures is the mismatch between the actual capability and the resources required for the new system (ICT). Therefore, it is important to conceptualize the objective issues of implementing EG instead of simply emulating and attempting to copy the successful experience of another country. If a country cannot identify and agree upon an explicit objective and strategy for adopting and implementing EG, a success story is rarely possible. It is essential for the policy makers, practitioners, and academicians of a country to conceptualize the vision, mission, objectives, and
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