Chapter 21

An Approach to Assessing Quality of Electronic Government Services: The Case of an Urban Municipal Authority from India

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of e-Government in developing countries has led to the discovery of many innovative ways of public service delivery to citizens and businesses. India has chosen the common service center based service delivery model, where multiple services from single or multiple government agencies can be obtained in one location. However, the assessment quality of service at these centers, especially in comparison to the quality of service delivery under manually run operations has not been addressed in literature. In this paper, the authors propose and demonstrate a method to evaluate the quality of service at common service centers by exploring the case of an urban local body in India. Specifically, the paper uses the Analytic Hierarchy Method to assess quality improvements and discusses the implications for public managers.

INTRODUCTION

The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has ushered in radical changes in the behaviour of individuals and organizations across the globe. One such manifestation of ICT use in government is electronic government (e-Government). At an operational level e-Government is the use of information and communication technology in the delivery of government service to citizens, business partners and employees (Deloitte Research, 2000). However, the delivery model of government service to citizens is not the same for all countries; primarily because of difference...
in connectivity infrastructure, across developed and developing countries like India (Chen et al., 2007). India has chosen a delivery model for e-Government which entails service delivery through manned common service delivery centre. The National eGovernance Plan of India aims to setup 100,000 such service delivery centers in partnership with private entrepreneurs. Also, there are government agencies in India that have adopted a service center based delivery approach with full ownership of such service centers. Some of the examples are land records computerization project from Karnataka, and Ahmedabad municipal corporation from the state of Gujarat. As improving the quality of public service is the overarching objective of e-government programme it becomes imperative to assess the level of change in service quality after launching any e-Government initiative. While the concepts of public administration reform are not new (Light, 2006), the ideas such as public service quality and government responsiveness to the public (Teicher et al., 2002) are relatively new. The research on IT-enabled public service reform is relatively new and emerging in government policy and multi-disciplinary research (Chatfield, 2009). Even in developed countries there is a lack of standard or guidelines for service quality for development of websites (Scott, 2005). Also differences in objectives of the assessment, the indicators and criteria used vary between developed and developing countries. In an assessment study of websites of large municipalities, differences in the digital capability of governments between developed and developing countries were observed (Melitski et al., 2005). The difficulties in assessment of service quality are far more in the case of developing countries. Several challenges are faced in trying to assess e-government applications especially in developing countries e.g. lack of baseline data, absence of standards and guidelines, and the over reliance on subjective rating among others (Gupta, 2007). In fact, no official standards or guidelines of service quality are available to guide the development of U.S. municipal government websites Consequently there is little clear guidance for public managers regarding how well their projects are being perceived and have they made a difference to the citizens. This paper addresses this gap by discussing the concept of service quality in the context of public services in India and proposes a newer method of assessing change in service quality in switching over from a manual service delivery to electronic service delivery. In view of the common citizen service centers based model of service delivery being chosen in India, this paper focuses on understanding and measuring service quality at the level of common service centre.

LITERATURE REVIEW– SERVICE QUALITY

The literature review is divided into two subsections namely e-government service quality and measurement of service quality.

E-Government Service Quality

Given the increasing focus on efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector (Bertot & Jaeger, 2008; Eyob, 2004; McLaughlin, Osborne, & Ferlie, 2002), it is not surprising that the study of performance measurement in government is increasing. As one of the objectives of E-Government is to provide citizens with quicker and better access to public services in a more personal and cost-effective manner (Bekkers & Zouridis, 1999; Heeks, 2003; Prins, 2001) there is a focus on measuring satisfaction with e-Government services within an overall framework of performance measurement. Griffin and Halpin (2005) report that the evaluation of eGovernment tends to focus on, evaluating eGovernment stages of growth, evaluating electronic service delivery via the internet, evaluating stakeholders involvement and evaluating the costs and benefits of eGovernment. For example Reddick (2005) finds increase