e-Government Adoptions in Developing Countries: A Sri Lankan Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a set of lessons learned from the adoption of an e-Government initiative in Sri Lanka. The case study presented in the paper is the e-Pensions project of the e-government initiative of the Government of Sri Lanka called “e-SriLanka”. This is one of the first World Bank projects designed to bring Information Communication Technology (ICT) to every village, citizen, and business, and transform the way the government thinks and works. A set of lessons related to leadership, hidden cost, BPR, group dynamics, data migration, language issues, bureaucracy, training, change management, project governance, staff turnover and transitional projects were identified. While some of these lessons have been identified in the previous literature five such lessons have not been discussed previously. Those are transitional projects, language issues relating to software development processes, group dynamics, planning for data migration and staff turnover. Moreover, the study further revealed some interrelationship among these factors eg., how transitional projects can positively impact training and change management. Thus, these new insights relating to e-Government adoptions will shed some light into new e-government initiatives in developing countries with similar environments to Sri Lanka. Additionally, these new factors will contribute to enhancing e-Government adoption models.

Keywords: Case Study, Developing Countries, e-Government, Information Communication Technology (ICT), Public Sector

INTRODUCTION

It is argued that e-Government initiatives can provide the benefits from the global knowledge-based economy for citizens and businesses around the globe. Benefits include better connections between various groups, new forms of cooperation, collaboration, linkage and partnerships, and increased operational efficiencies and effectiveness (Tan et al., 2005). Today while e-Government is a reality in most of the developed countries, developing countries are also promoting e-Government initiatives, assisted by international organizations for development, to address a wide range of economic, social, technological, infrastructural, legal and educational issues (Ndou, 2004; Rajapakse, 2012). However, some research studies (e.g., Heeks, 2008) found that more than one-third of e-Government initiatives in developing and transitional countries are total failures and half can be considered to be partial failures. Thus, it

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is clear from the literature that e-Government initiatives in developing countries are still in their infancy and struggling to catch up with their counterparts in the developed world. The above statistics especially serves as a warning for the developing countries who are adopting e-Government initiatives where funding is scarce. When an e-Government project in a developing country fails, it might well be a lost opportunity because the same funding could have been used for another project which could have immediate impact on the society such as health or education. Therefore, it is essential to make sure such projects are able to achieve their goals. Invariably, more research activities in this area could help to increase the success rate of e-Government projects. However, the extant literature reveals that most of the e-Government research studies focus on developed countries (Chen et al., 2006).

Therefore, more research studies are necessary to provide new insights into the different issues with e-Government initiatives in developing countries. Furthermore, since the potential for e-Government in developing countries is still in its infancy, explorative case studies to understand critical issues relating adoptions from such cases can be vital to help new e-government initiatives in those countries. Hence, the objective of this research study is to identify some lessons learned from a case study in Sri Lanka with a view to advance the theoretical and practical insights of e-Government initiatives. Thus, an ongoing e-Government adoption in Sri Lanka, a developing country, was explored in some depth. During the case study semi-structured interviews were conducted with the key stakeholders of the project. The following broad areas were used as the framework for the questions asked during the interviews: stakeholder issues, management issues, product issues, and cost issues. However, interviewees were encouraged to talk freely about their experience with project allowing the interview to unfold as the interviewee wished. The framework of issues is discussed in the next section.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section discusses the framework of four broad categories of e-Government adaptation issues related to stakeholders, management, cost and product. Methodology section discusses the research method. The next section describes the details of the case background. Thereafter, the case findings are presented. The next section presents the analysis of the case. A reflective analysis of the findings with existing literature follows. In conclusion section, case study findings are discussed in terms of practical and research angles along with limitations and future research directions.

RELATED WORK

With the e-Government becoming main stream ICT initiative all over the world, the number of research studies in this area also has grown significantly. Several researchers have identified a number of critical issues relating to adoption of e-Government projects. From the extant literature, 4 main broad categories of issues related to stakeholders, management, cost and product are included in the framework of the study.

Stakeholder Issues

Porter (1985) defines a stakeholder as any entity that can affect or is affected by the organization’s execution of its objectives. e-Government projects are required to provide fully integrated electronic services to the diverse set of stakeholders. Esteves et al. (2008) identify the following entities as the primary e-Government stakeholders.

- **Citizens**: Citizens in contact with public administration, using public services exercising their civil rights, and participating in democratic processes.
- **Employees**: All categories of public employees, including politicians and various other public administrators.
- **Businesses**: Both for-profit and non-profit companies interact with government.
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