Management Aspects of e-Government Projects:
Contextual and Empirical Findings

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ABSTRACT

On the basis of existing literature and benchmarking efforts for various facets of e-Government (expected benefits, existing barriers, methodological guidelines) the paper identifies a number of factors that affect e-Government projects (broader environment, political, funding, public management and service delivery frameworks, customer engagement, technology and effort supply, core processes) and proposes a holistic model for e-Government projects. On the basis of this holistic model, it is argued that realization of the e-Government process and operation of e-Government services exhibit complexity, emergent behaviour, and a number of characteristics of open and complex systems. These arguments, applied on a real example where empirical e-Government good practice is verified ex post via laws and principles governing the behaviour of general open systems, are considered to legitimise systems thinking about e-Government. It is proposed that further pursuing a systemic approach to e-Government projects represents, together with the deeper understanding of user needs, a major direction of further work for e-Government project management.

Keywords: Best Practice, Complex Systems, Electronic Government, Electronic Service Delivery, Holistic Approach, Open Systems, Project Management, Systemic Approach

1. INTRODUCTION

Electronic Government (e-Government) is internationally defined as the application to public administrations of Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs) that, combined with appropriate organisational changes and development of new skills, have the potential to transform the relations of government with citizens, businesses and its different branches and thus lead to improvement of public services, public policies as well as democratic processes.¹

From this point of view it is clear that the success of e-Government projects is essentially identified with the transformation of relations and the improvement of services and procedures that these projects bring about. What is more, the levels at which the latter results are achieved
constitute particularly reliable indicators for assessing the benefits actually derived from e-Government initiatives and investments.

Currently in the European Union (EU) according the 2010 edition of the “EU e-Government Benchmark Report” the availability of online public services is less and less an issue: a wide range of basic services is available in almost all EU27 countries. The use by enterprises has shown an increasing trend. However, the use by citizens remains low and this poses questions and challenges to European policy-makers who want to make the best use of the considerable budget invested until now in digitizing their public administrations. These questions need answers more than ever in the current time when budgetary pressure due to the ongoing crisis demands best use of available resources as austerity measures and population dynamics require innovative ways of delivering public services in the EU. ICT allows for them to be more efficient and effective, as well as more citizen- and business centric. Effective use of interoperable digital technologies enabling the exchange and processing of real time data is an important enabler. E-procurement alone can save EUR 100 billion per year25 and e-Government can reduce the costs of administration by 15-20%. The reuse of public sector data will empower people, drive business development and create €140 billion in economic value. The Commission highlighted in its “Annual Growth Survey 2013” that modernization of public administration is one of the five priorities for the Member States in the next 12-18 months, and, in this context, calls for widespread, interoperable digitization of public administration.

On the basis of existing literature for various facets of e-Government (expected benefits, existing barriers, methodological guidelines, evaluation results) and the current status of e-Government in the EU countries as documented by a series of international studies, statistics and benchmarking reports such as the Digital Agenda Scoreboard 2012, the 2010 and 2012 EU e-Government Benchmark Report, the 2012 UN E-Government Development Index, the OECD e-Government for Better Government Report, important differences in the level and maturity of e-Government implementation are presented in the different EU countries. This can be justified by the different socio-political and economical environments in the EU countries, (gap between policy and practice, in the coordination and the integration of e-Government policies and programmes, as well as the scaling up of successful high impact initiatives) but also by the fact that in most countries a wealth of independent e-Government projects has been implemented, yet they have limited coherence and remain largely uncoordinated.

Taking into consideration the current status of e-Government in the EU countries as mapped by the Digital Agenda Scoreboard 2012 the proposed paper will identify a number of factors that affect e-Government projects (broader environment, political, funding, public management and service delivery frameworks, customer engagement, technology and effort supply, core processes) and need to be considered so as to develop a holistic model for the e-Government domain in the sense of effectiveness and efficiency.

2. e-GOVERNMENT: BENEFITS AND BARRIERS

e-Government can help to make public services more efficient and easier to access for citizens, businesses and governments. The potential cost savings are massive. In Denmark, for example, electronic invoicing saves taxpayers €150 million and businesses €50 million a year. If introduced across the EU, annual savings could exceed €50 billion. In Italy alone, e-procurement systems cut over €3 billion in costs. Effective e-Government will also improve governance and enable citizens to become more involved in the activities of their governments. Moreover, the freedoms of the Union’s internal market mean more and more citizens and businesses dealing with public bodies outside their home countries.
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