Influential Factors for E-Government Success in the Middle East: Case Study Evidence from Saudi Arabia

Roland Franke, Goethe University Frankfurt, Frankfurt, Germany
Julia Kroenung, University of Mannheim, Mannheim, Germany
Friedrich Born, Goethe University Frankfurt, Frankfurt, Germany
Andreas Eckhardt, Goethe University Frankfurt, Frankfurt, Germany

ABSTRACT

Due to strong budgetary restrictions on the one hand, and increasing citizens’ demands on the other, e-government initiatives often represent a combination of prestige projects and financial necessity. However, to transform e-government initiatives from ambitious ideas into fruitful outcomes, several success factors have to be considered that vary from case to case, depending on the structural characteristics of the social, cultural, and political environment. Based on the e-government implementation success framework of El-Haddadeh et al. (2010) and a case study of e-government implementation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, this research extends the view of e-government implementations by focusing on the themes culture and demography and develops critical success factors subordinated to these themes. These include five factors determining the cultural component and four factors determining the demographic component, each of which influence the respective success or failure of large e-government projects.

Keywords: Culture, Demography, E-Government Implementation, Success Factors

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1. INTRODUCTION

As national economies around the globe fall on hard times, governments are forced to turn to leaner and more efficient administrations (Kreuzer, Eckhardt, Bernius, & Kroenung, 2013). While governmental structures in some countries often hardly change subsequently, citizens experience several new and convenient ways to support and structure their daily life and needs, in the first instance with the help of information technology (IT) (Weerakkody, Irani, Lee, Osman, & Hindi, 2013). Increasing operational and cost inefficiency together with the growing demands from citizens and businesses to access public service provisions that are as efficient and convenient as economic practices allow, have changed electronic government (e-government) from being an option to a necessity for national administrations aiming to meet these formidable challenges (Tan, Benbasat, & Cenfetelli, 2013). Hence, functional and effective e-governmental structures are mandatory for every nation that wants to be competitive in the future world economy. As a consequence, a majority of developed and emergent countries across the globe now run e-government projects to support their endeavors and consequentially enjoy the related benefits (UN E-Government Survey 2012).

The most frequently mentioned benefits of e-government include time and cost savings for administrative processes with citizens and/or businesses (see for example Moon, 2002; Huang & Bwoma, 2003; Carter & Belanger, 2005; Tung & Rieck, 2005; Hackney, Jones, & Losch, 2007; Hassan, Shehab, & Peppard, 2010; Noor, Kasimin, Aman, & Sahari, 2011; Carter, Schaupp, Hobbs, & Campbell, 2012). Due to e-government initiatives, national administrations also facilitate their inter- and intra-organizational interactions (Tseng, Yen, Hung, & Wang, 2008), as the flow of information and the sharing of data is both faster and smoother (Benyon-Davies, 2007; Kaliannan & Awang, 2010). Furthermore, governments are better able to reduce errors (Kamal, Weerakkody, & Jones, 2009; Carter et al., 2012) as a result of higher data consistency (Benyon-Davies, 2007) in the administrative processing with both citizens and businesses. In addition to the benefits gained from better straight-through processing, e-government has the potential to reduce corruption (Tung & Rieck, 2005; Hassan & Bartram, 2010; Noor et al., 2011), and to combat identity fraud and other forms of criminal behavior (Benyon-Davies, 2007). From a political perspective, e-government supports democratic participation, leading to a higher level of citizen involvement (Tung & Rieck, 2005; Noor et al., 2011; Luna-Reyes, Gil-Garcia, & Romero, 2012) in local and national affairs (Spirakis, Spiraki, & Nikolopoulos, 2010) and therewith to a better understanding of citizens’ needs and wants (Chu, Yeh, & Chuang, 2008).

Researchers in the e-government field have done a tremendous job identifying the risks and benefits of major e-government implementation projects for more than two decades now. Within their scientometric and content-related literature review, Weerakkody et al. (2013) showed that 132 research articles related to the e-government topic have been published since 1992. An overwhelming majority of these approaches analyzed the opportunities and benefits provided by e-government as well as analyzing its risks and costs. Despite discussing content-specific aspects related to these four factors, the authors analyzed the underlying theory, research methodologies, and directions for future research of these approaches (Weerakkody et al. 2013). While discussing directions for future research, researchers emphasized the need to conduct studies in different settings (Tung & Rieck, 2005; Kamal et al., 2009).

However, research in e-government due to its strong relation to politics and government is often highly case-specific and dependent on national, socio-cultural, and governmental structures (Azad & Faraj, 2008, Belanger & Carter, 2009). To draw out the success factors of e-government initiatives on a more abstract and transferrable level, it is thus highly recommended that these aspects be incorporated (see for example: Koh, Ryan, & Prybutok, 2005; Wang & Liao, 2008; Akkaya, Wolf, & Krcmar,
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