Chapter XVII

Local E-Governments in Japan: IT Utilization Status and Directions

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Abstract

This chapter explains the actual state of digital readiness of the local governments in Japan, and describes the stages of achievement in digitalization and the direction of digitalization. The items being analyzed are the digitalization of governmental administration, services to residents, and information security. Further, in order to clarify the direction of digitalization, we propose stages of progress of the digitalization of the local governments.

Introduction

In November 2000, the Basic Law on the Formation of an Advanced Information and Telecommunications Network Society was passed in accordance with the “Basic IT Strategy.” Since then, there has been an increase in the emphasis placed on digitalization, under the guidance of the government, with the aim of establishing Japan as an IT nation. An IT nation
comprises the construction of an e-government (Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunication, 2005).

After self-evaluation, Japan came to the realization that it had not kept pace with the other developed nations with respect to its development into an IT nation. Therefore, the formulation of the concept of an e-government merits praise, considering that it was formulated as a national strategy and overcame the lack of a comprehensive IT approach by the government until that time. However, there are still several issues concerning e-government. In Japan, the government formulated a strategy to set up local e-governments, as well as to develop IT and communication infrastructure. The regional administrative bodies are making progress in the establishment of local e-governments through their own refinements within the IT strategy and communication infrastructure framework, while collaborating with the national government.

This chapter explains the actual state of digital readiness of the local governments in Japan, and describes the stages of achievement in digitalization and the direction of digitalization. The items being analyzed are the digitalization of governmental administration, services to residents, and information security.

In this chapter, we address the following three issues. First, digitalization can be classified into digitalization of organizations in order to improve their internal efficiency, and digitalization to improve services to residents. What is the current state of progress on each? Second, what is the current state of progress on information disclosure for the purpose of improving resident democracy and facilitating resident participation? Third, what is the current state of progress on information security for the purpose of satisfying residents’ requirements?

Further, in order to clarify the direction of digitalization, we propose stages of progress of the digitalization of the local governments.

Framework of the Analysis and Recognition of Issues

Several studies have examined the digitalization of local governments. They analyzed the effects of the digitalization of local governments on information and cost, the changing nature of public-private partnership, and the improvement of efficiency (Chen & Perry, 2003; Stamoulis, Gouscos, Georgiadis, & Martakos, 2001). Further, these studies also analyzed the increase in the provision of information services to the residents (Siau & Long, 2005), the increase in the autonomy of the residents as well as the improvement in the service provided to them (Marchionini, Samet, & Brandt, 2003). In many cases, the effects were studied only after the digitalization of local governments. However, since information technology (IT) is constantly developing, the effects and the process of digitalization should be studied simultaneously.

The digitalization of the local governments does not only imply the purchase of a personal computer, server, and network facility (Shimada & Ushida, 2003). Some examples of additional requirements are organized activity to increase the efficiency of the business process,
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