Chapter V
Instigating Transformational Government at a Municipality Level: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This empirical research chapter focuses on the findings and the potential value of instigating a transformational government (t-government) at a municipality level. The emerging literature indicates that there is a strong desire amongst governments worldwide to provide an efficient, cost effective, and sustainable electronic service delivery environment, and Dubai Municipality in the UAE is no exception. This research aims to investigate the motivations behind this instigated change towards t-government systems. In order to achieve this transformation in services, there is a need for a radical change and an innovative approach to provide quality services. In this paper the authors report some of the findings from an in-depth case study of transformational effort in the municipality of Dubai. The study seeks to offer insights into organisational and managerial aspects surrounding the complex phenomenon of t-government evolution. The chapter concludes that successful t-government implementation requires
senior executive participation and active engagement of stakeholders for benefit realisation; whereby t-government adoption is surrounded by political, cultural, organisational, technological, and social issues which must be considered and treated carefully to enable this transformation.

INTRODUCTION

The recent United Nations e-government Survey (UN, 2008) results indicate that governments are moving and progressing forward in e-government development around the world. However, given the high demands placed by e-government on a multitude of foundational pillars which include prerequisites of infrastructure, appropriate policies, capacity development, Information Communications and Technology (ICT) applications and relevant content that need to be in place to fully implement e-government services, the progress is very slow. Only a few governments have made the necessary investment to move from e-government applications per se to a more integrated connected government transformed stage (Devados et al., 2002; Irani et al., 2007; Weerakkody et al., 2008). Transformational government (t-government) is defined as radically changing the way government conducts its business internally and externally (Murphy, 2005; Montagna, 2005). In essence therefore, t-government is about the transformation of internal and external processes of government using information and communication technologies to provide efficient and user focused services to citizens, businesses and other stakeholders (Basu, 2004; Evans, 2003; Gupta and Jana, 2003; Gandhi and Cross, 2001; Stoltzfus, 2005).

In an opening address to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2006) Forum Secretary-General Donald Johnston States:

Globalisation, propelled by trade and investment liberalisation, and rapid technological change, is believed to have delivered prosperity and reduced poverty for millions of people in recent decades. We have learned, however, that reaping the full benefits of globalisation requires many elements including good public and corporate governance; policies that promote structural adjustment and social cohesion; greater access to education; efficient financial markets; and sound policies for research, innovation and development. Balancing all these elements while promoting globalisation and delivering prosperity require an open inclusive dialogue involving businesses, government agencies, and working groups.

In addition, e-government strategy change to enable government departments and agencies to interact with private sectors sharing a common concern of security and cost reductions in transactions and speed of delivery (Heeks, 2001; McClure, 2000). Therefore, the complexity surrounding transformational government requires at times drastic measures in order to achieve its desired output. This has lead Dubai Municipality senior executive management to take an innovative approach, and make a serious decision to initiate the Online Week. Whereby, six main departments were each completely shut for a week for any manual transactions over a period of three months (September-December 2007). This was conducted while the online system was still live and running.

Therefore, the research questions guiding this chapter are:

1. what does t-government mean to Dubai Municipality; and
2. what process related challenges do they need to overcome in order to successfully implement a one-stop shop t-government.