Electronic Government:
Assimilation Gaps and Implications

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ABSTRACT

This research is interested in unveiling the hype surrounding the Electronic Government (eGov) phenomenon and in shedding more light into the different issues surrounding its multifaceted perspectives. Unlike electronic commerce and the private sector, eGov sets at the heart of governmental services and represents a unique paradigm on its own with different constituents and objectives. The stakeholders involved in eGov are both diverse and heterogeneous—which makes the issue of eGov adoption and diffusion a challenging task for many countries. This research disentangles the issues impacting eGov highlighting different determinants and success factors. The research then depicts an agenda for eGov success at the national level.

Keywords: Citizen Access, Critical Success Factors, Electronic Government, Integration, IT in Public Administration,

INTRODUCTION

The witnessed increase in global Internet penetration and technological development, electronic commerce (EC), miniaturization, and ubiquity have revolutionized systems integration and interconnectedness in unprecedented way. In addition, increased competition amongst nations and technology vendors and growing global trends ignited a race where electronic government (eGov) development is seen as an enabler for the envisioned transformation of governmental services.

E-Gov is widely perceived to fundamentally reform, modernize and improve government activities (Foley, 2005). The strategic growth of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in government has the potential to cause a paradigm shift in the concept of service delivery where, for example, the online environment could empower the citizens and this holds the power to alter both the authority and the governance structures of many countries (Tseng et al., 2007). On the one hand, eGov is seen as a tool to promote social cohesion and involvement. On the other, meeting citizens’ expectations should transcend personal satisfaction to the fulfillment of broader socio-economic and sociopolitical goals that characterize so many eGov projects (i.e., quality of healthcare and education (Grimsley & Meehan, 2007). This move from agency-oriented to citizen-centric meant that eGov projects should improve access to service delivery and the quality of information, enhance the experience of interacting with government, reduce wait times, and assist consumers and business (Esteves & Joseph, 2007).
In 2003, OECD defined eGov as “the use of ICT, and particularly the Internet, as a tool to achieve better government” (Foley, 2005: p.4). Other researchers prefer to use the “one-stop” government concept which refers to the integration of public services from a citizen’s point of view where a user could access all governmental services through a single government access point (i.e., eGov portal) (Trochidis et al., 2006) — The drive for such use stems from:

a. the complexity of the Government structure.
b. the functional fragmentation in public service delivery.
c. lack of coordination between the different Government agencies.
d. divide between service delivery and citizens.
e. ICT solutions provided by vendors are EC-based applications transformed and parameterized to public administration methodologies.

In providing a comprehensive definition, eGov refers to the government use of ICT (i.e., Wide Area Networks (WAN), the Internet, and mobile computing) to increase the flow of information and to enhance the access and delivery of government services to different stakeholders [citizens (G2C), businesses (G2B), other governmental entities (G2G), and employees (G2E)] leading to the full transformation. We add to those other stakeholders including G2NGO (Government to Non-Governmental Organizations) and G2NPO (Government to Non-Profit Organizations) (Montagna, 2005). Esteves and Joseph (2007) added ICT vendors and interest groups. E-Gov also aims to build a two way relationships between the government and the above stakeholders. E-Gov projects involve a wide range of services, products, people, and procedures which need to be scoped carefully in order not to grow in complexity and to overshoot the planned budget (Esteves & Joseph, 2007) and duration. Such scope may involve an overlapping interrelationships between three important constituents namely, administration; citizens and services; and society.

Thus, eGov could be a solution to problems identified by public managers (Gil-Garcia & Martinez-Moyano, 2006) and hence, public managers are viewed as suppliers and the stakeholders as demanders. Ideally, public managers are expected to design an eGov solution that fulfills stakeholders’ requirements. This entails having a small gap between those managers and the different stakeholders. However, those public managers are expected to be more accountable to those stakeholders and hence, a shift in power is expected to take place from those managers to the stakeholders. This is a very complex process. Such interrelationships and expectations reveal the complexity of the eGov design. One way to bridge this gap is going beyond the existing measurement tools (i.e., Web content analysis) and developing clear dynamic indicators (Gil-Garcia & Martinez-Moyano, 2006).

The main objective of eGov is to enhance the productivity of government services through efficient and effective operations (Tseng et al., 2007). The notion of eGov is supposed to go beyond developing service delivery projects and target higher governmental objectives involving taking political decisions and a government strategy to achieve such objectives (Montagna, 2005). Thus, eGov projects are expected to integrate policy goals, organizational processes, and technology in order to achieve such public goals.

E-Gov has become so strategically important that some European Countries, Canada, and the United States are competing to have the most advanced eGov capabilities (Gil-Garcia & Martinez-Moyano, 2006). European Union (EU) countries made the adoption of eGov a major administrative and political priority since the 1990s where the European Commission used competition, benchmarking and awards to accelerate the adoption of eGov by member-nations. (Lee et al., 2005) – Therefore, it is not surprising that most developed eGov initiatives and best practices are concentrated
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