Chapter 12
Citizens’ Readiness for E-Government in Developing Countries (CREG)

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ABSTRACT

Many developing countries are facing difficulties in applying successful electronic government (e-government) projects. A major part of these difficulties that they are not used by citizens due to the lack of appropriate ICT infrastructure that support e-government services; in addition to the existence of a small percentage of citizens who are able to deal with such technology. This chapter introduces an empirical research that closely investigates the e-government weaknesses in developing countries from two major perspectives: e-readiness and trust. The research proposes a model based on e-readiness assessments and relevant literature that investigates the impact of citizens’ readiness for e-government (CREG) on e-government success within developing countries. The model was tested on the Egyptian e-government project as a sample of developing countries. The research findings confirmed the importance of the CREG model to achieve successful e-government projects in developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

E-government could simply defined as “the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in improving the activities and services of government” (Heeks, 2004). Its remarkable benefits encouraged most governments in both developed and developing countries to launch e-government projects (Liikanen, 2003). However, few of them have succeeded in achieving their set targets. In developing countries, Heeks (2003a) reports in his survey on 40 e-government projects that 35% totally failed as they were terminated or never used by users, 50% partially failed to achieve their goals and only 15% succeeded. Furthermore, the failure rate of e-government projects worldwide is identified by Gartner Group (2002) as 60%. The cost of failed e-government projects is high, including not only tangible costs such as wasted project expenditure and employee time,
but also intangible costs such as loss of citizen trust (Heeks, 2003c).

In many cases, countries which achieved their set targets for e-government projects (Accenture, 2004; Blakemore & Lloyd, 2007) had high levels of e-readiness. Examples are Canada, USA and UK which got the highest ratings for e-readiness (DAI, 2003; EIU, 2006). Conversely, developing countries are typically reported as having low levels of success in e-government and low e-readiness ratings (DAI, 2003; UNDESA, 2005). This is because they were not electronically ready ‘e-ready’ in terms of ICT and had major problems with regard to their ICT fundamentals.

Many developing countries have accordingly launched strategic plans to enhance their e-readiness. These plans usually start with an essential step, undertaken in 188 countries (Bridges, 2005b), to measure their current e-readiness and decide how it could be improved. This was followed by developing action plans (Brown, 2002) to enhance their citizens’ capabilities in ICT as well as enabling their businesses and governments to take the opportunities offered by ICT. Nevertheless, these plans did not lead to more successful e-government projects used by citizens. That is because the available e-readiness assessments are designed to assess countries’ e-readiness in general without a specific focus on the issues that affect e-government projects in particular (Ojo et al, 2007). Furthermore, these assessments do not identify how their factors affect citizens’ usage of e-government services.

The research investigates citizens’ readiness for e-government (CREG) in developing countries, the factors that influence it, and the extent to which it affects e-government success, form a primary focus of the research.

The research investigates the following question and its sub-questions:

RQ: What are the factors that affect citizens’ readiness for e-government (CREG) in developing countries?

SQ1: How do factors from e-readiness assessments affect citizens’ usage of e-government?

SQ2: How do trust factors affect citizens’ usage of e-government?

SQ3: How do other factors affect citizens’ usage of e-government?

SQ4: How do e-readiness assessments affect e-government projects?

SQ1 was introduced as a result of reviewing the current e-readiness assessments that show e-ready citizens who have appropriate ICT infrastructure and have computer and internet skills are using e-government services more than non e-ready citizens. Consequently, it becomes crucial to identify the e-readiness factors that citizens’ in developing countries should have to be ready for e-government.

Identifying e-readiness factors was not sufficient to have successful e-government projects in developing countries. This is because there are some developing countries with reasonable levels of e-readiness but nevertheless with low levels of e-government success (Prattipati, 2003) which draws the attention to the existence of other factors. Reviewing the literature showed that many researchers report that citizens’ trust in e-government is important in encouraging their usage of e-government services (Al-adawi et al, 2005; Gefen et al, 2002; Otto, 2003). Identifying these factors, based on the discussion about them in the published literature, forms a second and crucial category of factors influencing CREG and is thus presented in SQ2.

Conducting a pilot study with citizens showed the existence of other factors including awareness, perceptions of e-government services and non-resistance to use (or conversely resistance to use) that affect citizens’ usage of e-government. These formed the third group of factors affecting CREG and are investigated in SQ3.

The pilot study with managers, on the other hand, demonstrates the importance of understanding how e-readiness assessments, which