A Citizen-Oriented Approach for Evaluating the Performance of e-Government in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an empirical study of the performance of e-government in Sri Lanka from the perspective of citizens within a public value based conceptual framework. The delivery of quality public services, the effectiveness of public organizations, and the achievement of socially desirable outcomes through e-government are considered using the data from several national surveys. The study reveals that e-government in Sri Lanka has not been able to create satisfactory levels of public value due to the weaknesses in both the supply and demand sides of e-government including poor web presence of government, lack of e-services, poor information infrastructure, low information technology readiness of citizens, and low up-take of e-government initiatives. It suggests that the government can improve the public value of e-government by accelerating the development of e-services projects, developing the information and communication technology infrastructure, and taking necessary steps to enhance citizens’ information technology readiness.

Keywords: Citizen-Oriented e-Government, e-Government, e-Sri Lanka, Evaluation, Public Value, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

Electronic government (e-government) is generally referred to as the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for transforming public organizations to make them more accessible, effective and accountable (Golra, 2008; Wangpipatwong et al., 2009). It can be used not only for improving the delivery of public services and enhancing the effectiveness of public organizations through increased their efficiency, accountability and transparency (Kaaya, 2009), but also for achieving various socially desirable outcomes such as improving the quality of life, providing better access to education and training, and bridging the digital divide (Hanna, 2008; Karunasena & Deng, 2010). These potential benefits of e-government motivate various governments to formulate and implement various e-government strategies and policies for making e-government more citizen-centric with real value to citizens (UNDESA, 2010; Zhao, 2010).

Following the global trend of developments in e-government, Sri Lanka initiated the first national e-development program in 2002 for...
improving the delivery of public services and achieving a wide range of socially desirable outcomes (ICTA, 2005; Hanna, 2007). The e-Sri Lanka program has adopted six distinct strategies such as a re-engineering the government strategy, an information infrastructure development strategy, a human resources capacity building strategy, an e-society development strategy, a regulatory environment development strategy, and a private sector capacity building strategy (ICTA, 2005; Karunasena et al., 2011). As a result, numerous e-government initiatives have been initiated over the past several years.

With the implementation of various e-government initiatives, the urgency and necessity for adequately evaluating the performance of e-government become clear. Understanding how the e-Sri Lanka program benefits its citizens would help Sri Lanka better pursue its next stage of e-government development (Karunasena & Deng, 2009a). Although there are several studies about the lessons learnt and experiences accumulated in implementing the e-Sri Lanka program (Hanna, 2007; 2008; Weerakkody et al., 2009), there is so far a lack of rigorous assessment of the performance of the e-Sri Lanka program from the perspective of its citizens.

Most existing approaches in assessing the performance of e-government focus on the evaluation of government websites (Zhao, 2010). Accenture (2003), for example, assesses the performance of e-government by evaluating the government websites in twenty-four countries using the e-government maturity model. The United Nations (UNDESA, 2003, 2005, 2008) uses a web measurement model for assessing the performances of e-government of its member countries. Torres et al. (2005) evaluate the performance of e-government by focusing on the quality and usage of e-services in thirty-three European countries. These approaches have shown their respective merits in evaluating the performance of e-government from different perspectives. They, however, fail to consider the performance of e-government from the perspective of citizens (Zhao, 2010).

The concept of public value is popularly used for evaluating the performance of public services from the perspective of citizens (Moore, 1995). It provides an inclusive framework for examining the performance of public services on the creation of public value for citizens (Kelly et al., 2002; Alford & O’Flynn, 2009). With the use of this concept, the effectiveness of public services delivery can be assessed with respect to the direct benefits to citizens (Moore, 1995; Kelly et al., 2002). E-government offers numerous opportunities for governments to improve the delivery of public services, automate numerous public services consultation processes, and achieve a wide range of socially desirable outcomes (Kearns, 2004). With the rapid development of e-government, adopting this concept for evaluating the performance of e-government is extremely important (Karunasena et al., 2011).

This study aims to evaluate the performance of e-government in Sri Lanka from the perspective of citizens based on the public value created by such e-government initiatives. A conceptual framework is developed for evaluating the public value of e-government. This leads to the examination of the public value of e-government from the perspective of citizens in Sri Lanka. The study shows that the public value of e-government in Sri Lanka is far from satisfactory due to the lack of e-services and the low uptake of available e-government initiatives.

In what follows, we first review existing approaches for evaluating the performance of e-government, leading to the development of a public value based conceptual framework. We then conduct an empirical study for assessing the performance of e-government in Sri Lanka, followed by a discussion on the implications of the research findings to the continuous development of e-government in Sri Lanka.

**THE PUBLIC VALUE OF E-GOVERNMENT**

The concept of public value is a normative theory for measuring the performance of public services (Moore, 1995; Alford & O’Flynn, 2009). Moore (1995), the main proponent of
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