Chapter IX

E-Government in Developing Countries: A Sri Lankan Experience

Ramanie Samaratunge
Monash University, Australia

Dianne Waddell
Edith Cowan University, Australia

ABSTRACT

Even though there is an emerging literature on information age reform of the public sector, research focused on potential and problems related to introduction of information-based reforms in developing countries is still limited. Thus in this chapter, experience in one developing country, Sri Lanka, is examined. Problems related to information-based technology is analysed and the lacuna in the literature is narrowed. It is argued that despite the great potential for IT in enhancing effective and efficient public sector in Sri Lanka, there are a number of difficulties hindering the development of computerised information systems. The upgrading of infrastructure facilities in Sri Lanka is long overdue. A lack of competent
and committed individuals who could provide effective guidance in developing IT services in the public sector is another concern. The issues such as appropriate training, attractive promotion systems and remunerations for public officials need to be addressed urgently. Reforming existing organizational structures and changing officials’ attitudes towards change are essential. The increasing public awareness of the potential of IT services enhancing the quality and timeliness of the public service is essential.

INTRODUCTION

The use of information technology (IT) in the public sector is increasing rapidly, with innovations including government web sites, electronic transactions such as electronic tax filing, and electronic kiosks. IT can have its greatest impact on the quality of government services by integrating what are often perceived as disparate functions. For this to happen, the public servants who manage these programs must bring about the integration and assimilation of such functions while being cognisant of the community’s receptivity to these innovative practices. Thus, realising the potential of public sector IT (electronic government) is not merely a technical and organisational issue, but more a cultural issue, involving matters of both organisational structure/strategy and the management of change.

Electronic government (e-government) is the ability for government to provide access to services and information twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Governments are more broadly turning their attention and resources to providing information and services on-line, exploring digital democracy, and using technology for economic development. This is a broad definition, requiring a different mindset, and affects all customers of government, including the interactions between government and the public (G2P), government and business (G2B), government and other government departments (G2G), and between government and its own employees (G2E). While many current activities are predominantly G2P, an understanding of e-government is not complete unless it identifies and considers all of its customers. It must be stated that the definition of e-government will be different for each situation based on the community’s values, goals and culture. Hence it is important to understand that e-government is much more than a web site, e-mail or processing transactions via the Internet.
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