Chapter 33
Evaluating E-Government

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few years, e-government growth has resulted in the development of many state and local e-government initiatives in both developing and industrialised countries. In most cases, e-government programs incorporate the implementation and operation of Web portals and Websites, putting information online, transforming processes to Web-based transactions, interacting with citizens and companies. While e-government Websites are evolving, evaluation and effectiveness assessments are emerging processes in order to optimise digital services and enhance the engagement of citizens and companies to government administrative processes for their own benefit. So far, many different measures of governmental Website effectiveness have been developed to address strategic, marketing, and design issues. This chapter aims to provide an insight on the theory and application of evaluation and effectiveness approaches with regards to Web portals and Websites implemented to operate under central or local government authorities. Both quantitative and qualitative aspects are analysed, addressing operational and functional tactics.

INTRODUCTION

E-Government is the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and particularly Internet-based and web-based telecommunication practices to facilitate connections within and between the authorities and agencies of the Public Sector and also deliver government critical information and digital services to both citizens and companies. Various e-Government business models have been implemented and matured to enhance the efficiency of public sector organisational processes by supporting transactions between the employees in government agencies and also transactions with private individuals, businesses and other stakeholders in the e-government environment.

So far, e-government web sites remain the main critical information resource and service delivery medium. Because of the diversity and range of e-government web sites, a typology of them is required to address issues with regards to business models' analysis, strategic design, management and evolution. With most e-government

projects in the maturity phase of their life cycle, effectiveness assessment is becoming vital for the optimisation of their performance. Particularly in the e-government area, evaluation and effectiveness measures of public sector web portals and sites are both quantitative and qualitative. While quantitative measures examine the level of adoption and impact of the web sites in question with the use of e-metrics and user-satisfaction indices, qualitative measures have a different dual purpose: firstly, to investigate and assess the government web sites performance in terms of functionality and usability and secondly to identify information and system qualitative factors in evaluating e-services delivered by the web sites in question.

The European Commission of the European Union and the U.S.A E-Government Resource Centre have provided guidelines and standards for effective federal, state and local government web sites addressing analysis, design and evaluation issues. However, in many cases governmental web portals and sites have failed to meet their objectives. In this context, the implementation of evaluation frameworks is vital as it will contribute to the identification of the key performance factors and indicators for better and further e-government development.

It is a common belief among academics and practitioners that e-government is now growing in a fast manner. Government web sites are transforming, from basic online presence providing mainly information and a medium level of interactivity to fully transactional channels. Meanwhile, Web 2.0 government has strengthened the relationship between governments and the citizens or companies. For public and government administration authorities that have already stepped in the digital era proving information, communication and services through the operation web portals and web sites, web site evaluation should be a continuous process to achieve efficiency of their performance.

DEFINING E-GOVERNMENT

What is E-Government

The e-government idea was introduced by a former U.S vice president and includes two concepts: firstly the governments' obligation to provide a link to citizens for getting services from various government agencies in an automatic way and secondly the governments' need to reduce cost and improve performance with the use of information and communication networks among its authorities (Almarabeh & AbuAli, 2010). Despite its short history (e-government emerged in the late 90's), the e-government concept has been well defined by academics and researchers. Different definitions of e-government focus on different elements and dimensions of government or governance emphasizing on its strategic role. However, in most definitions, the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is described as the key enabler for all e-government projects.

It is clear, that each definition describes the environment formed in that particular period of time by the advances and applications of ICT and the e-government initiatives in progress. Table 1 includes definitions to capture the evolution of e-government over the past ten years.

Bannister's (2007) definition of e-government as the "delivery of government services over the internet in general and the Web in particular" describes best the e-government evolution with most e-government projects implementing and supporting web-based applications through the development and exploitation of public portals and web sites. As ICT advances, e-government portals and web sites are becoming more complex in architecture and structure supporting multiple business models.

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