

Chapter 13

E-Government Initiatives Through Cloud Computing: Empowering Citizens

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ABSTRACT

The recent development of Web 2.0, cloud computing and its related technologies are contributing towards the tendency to utilize mobile services and e-participation through Web 2.0. It offers users the ability to have greater control of information flow in public spaces, making active participation highly possible. Citizens are empowered in the sense that they control the process of interaction(s), either with the government or with other citizens. This chapter presents a model for empowerment of citizens in e-government systems to enhance e-participation in e-government business processes through the cloud. We believe cloud computing is a platform to implement e-participation using Web 2.0 as many of the existing Web 2.0 applications are deployed in the cloud. The model is derived based on contemporary literature on empowerment and participation in e-government services. This model is expected to fill the gap in identifying a strategy of citizen empowerment in e-participation systems.

INTRODUCTION

Many government agencies are making efforts to develop effective mechanisms that will empower and make the general public to participate in public services. In the traditional government practices, citizens are perceived as receivers of services and decisions and they hardly participate in the delivery of services, let alone the decision making processes. However, participation of citizens is considered essential in good governance. For instance, participation of citizens on a government website is associated with e-government satisfaction and e-government satisfaction is positively associated with trust in government (Welch et al, 2005). Thus, empowerment and participation of citizens must be incorporated

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in e-government processes to support good governance. Recent advancements in Web technologies such as Web 2.0 are highly interactive and participatory in nature. In fact, nowadays, citizens use social networks daily and discuss many issues, including government affairs and services.

One of the main objectives of e-government initiative is to deliver services directly to citizens, without them having to go to government premises. Citizens must be able to access those services using desktops, laptops or mobile devices (tablets or smart phones) and provide feedback for improvement. Citizens should also be provided with e-participation tools so that they can participate in any processes or decisions that may affect their well-being. This can only be realized if citizens are empowered during interactions and are able to perform some tasks independently (self-service).

Empowerment of citizens electronically can be incorporated in e-government systems using recent Web technologies. New models can be developed to empower citizens and improve their participation in services delivery and decision making processes. However, empowerment requires the change of attitudes both from service providers (government) and citizens to achieve effective and efficient public services through e-government system. The idea of empowerment of citizens emerges because citizens can play a vital role in achieving good governance (Almunawar et al, 2012). In fact, one of the most interesting aspects in public service is managing the relationship between service providers (government agencies) and its users (citizens) to create a greater mutual understanding, trust, and participation in decision making processes. A good relationship between government and its citizens will lead to improving citizens' satisfaction and trust (Richard and Ronald, 2008).

In addition, nowadays most people have access to cloud computing. They use cloud computing in various ways, from email and file storage to social media. In other words, cloud computing has been widely adopted by people globally. The adoption is spreading at a rapid pace as access to the cloud can be done through light client devices such as tablet computers and smart phones. Cloud computing has opened possibilities for an attractive service delivery for e-government. The introduction of cloud computing for e-government can provide many advantages as information resources can be outsourced in the cloud, simplifying the e-government system. To make e-government highly accessible to citizens and to encourage participations, citizens need to be empowered in using e-government systems through the cloud environment as there are many cloud-based participation and empowerment tools available or can be developed in the cloud.

The purpose of this chapter is to address the issue of empowerment of citizens through the cloud-based e-government to improve their participation. Empowerment of citizens has two main benefits. First, it improves citizens' proficiency in utilizing government services and encourages them to participate in various government processes. Second, it can improve the efficiency of e-government processes as citizens can manage information and information sources themselves.

This chapter is organized as follows. The following section discusses the concept of citizens' participation and empowerment and how this concept can be incorporated in e-government through the emerging cloud computing paradigm. The next section proposes a model for the empowerment of citizens and presents a discussion. The final section provides the conclusion and future directions.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

One important component of democracy is the participation of citizens through voting in an election of their representatives. Public participation is an important part of good governance. Citizens must

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