Chapter 105

E-Government of Occupational Safety and Health:
Improvement Prospects for a Developing Nation

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ABSTRACT

Electronic government (e-gov) has not been implemented as extensively in many developing countries as in developed countries, especially in certain fields, such as occupational safety and health (OSH). This chapter considers e-gov that is effected through the websites of leading OSH bodies in a developing country, Trinidad and Tobago, and two developed nations, the USA and UK. Using a content analysis and comparison exercise, OSH e-gov shortcomings and opportunities in T&T are noted. Improvement recommendations include development of a strategy and strategy execution plan to boost stakeholder recognition of the value of the OSH agency and OSH e-gov in T&T; partnership-building to make resources available for OSH e-gov enhancement; enhanced accessibility and utility via a wider range of media formats to users; better stakeholder responsiveness via engagement with social media and better online support; and increased data collection and analysis in order to drive continual improvement.

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that almost a third of the US population is comprised of Millenials, a group of youths and young adults who are always connected (Sewake, 2015) to their devices. As a result, this group may also be called the net generation, electronic generation or digital generation (Shih & Allen, 2006), and they have ushered in a communication age that is increasingly online. This group is smart; they use various

devices and social media resources to inform their purchasing and other decisions as well as to actually make their personal and work transactions more efficiently.

Indeed, in the past few decades, society as a whole has come to embrace electronic technologies more, so that even older adults have become more digitally competent and more reliant on electronic devices such as smart-phones, laptops, and tablets. In some cases, face-to-face communication has been supplanted by electronic communication as they access social media and online news; upload or download photo, video and audio resources; dash off tweets, blog articles, texts, and emails; post reviews and ratings; and share statuses. Government systems have therefore been increasingly embracing electronic modalities in an effort to reach populations more effectively. Through such e-government or e-gov systems, governments seek to leverage the population's electronic connectivity in order to build their awareness, appreciation, and competence and to encourage sharing of attitudes and access to content (Gil-Garcia, Helbig, & Ojo, 2014).

When it comes to ICT access and use, Losh (2013) reports that a digital divide exists not only due to generation differences, but also due to differences in education, gender, and ethnicity in users. One concern that arises with e-gov systems is the disadvantage potentially created for lower socio-economic brackets, whose constrained access to internet and communication technology (ICT) and lower levels of ICT skill reduce their ability to "access and use ICT to promote well-being and prosperity"(United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2014, p. 9). Since developing nations reasonably enjoy lower standards of living than developed nations, these lower socio-economic challenges also apply. Thus, developing nations must aggressively work to bridge their ICT gaps (i.e., updating and leveraging ICT technologies and applications), or there is likely to be a widening economic divide between themselves and the first world, which continues to forge ahead with ICT enhancements (Ndou, 2004).

Over the past several years, The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), a developing nation, has actively worked toward e-gov system development and rollout in many areas. A 2014 assessment by Nathai-Balkissoon and Pun (2016) identified several shortcomings in the e-government systems for Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Management. Their view was that OSH had not been a high-priority area, even if the International Labour Organisation [ILO] (2009) recognised it as a critical field of practice for developing companies. With respect to T&T, OSH has an important role to support the efforts of government and industry to diversify the economy from oil and gas, develop more small and medium companies (Nathai-Balkissoon, Maharaj, Guerrero, Mahabir, & Dialsingh, 2017), and support international and regional efforts to provide decent work (ILO, 2017; United Nations Development Programme, 2017). E-gov systems have already proven their utility in boosting safety: social safety in Brazil, food safety in the USA, fisherman safety in T&T (UNDESA, 2014; 2016), and it remains to be seen whether T&T's OSH e-gov system has advanced significantly since the aforementioned 2014 assessment.

In T&T, e-gov has also begun to expand to include OSH matters but more is needed to be truly effective. Updating the work from Nathai-Balkissoon and Pun's assessment, this chapter reports a content analysis that compares the 2017 incarnation of T&T's OSH e-gov site with those of the United States of America (US) and United Kingdom (UK) and suggests how some of the recognised initiatives may be used for T&T's case. The focus is on answering the following research questions:

1. What approaches are used on primary OSH websites of the UK and the US, two of the world's leading OSH and e-government nations, to enable strong OSH e-government?
2. How does T&T's primary OSH website compare to those of the UK and the US?
3. How should the T&T OSH website be enhanced to practice better OSH e-government?

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