The Key Organisational Issues Affecting E-Government Adoption in Saudi Arabia

Abdullah AL Shehry, Prince Nayef College, Saudi Arabia
Simon Rogerson, De Montfort University, UK
N. Ben Fairweather, De Montfort University, UK
Mary Prior, De Montfort University, UK

ABSTRACT

The e-government paradigm refers to utilizing the potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the whole government body to meet citizens’ expectations via multiple channels. It is, therefore, a radical change within the public sector and in the relationship between a government and its stakeholders. In the light of that, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a keen interest in this issue and thus it has developed a national project to implement e-government systems. However, many technological, managerial, and organisational issues must be considered and treated carefully before and after going online. Based on an empirical study, this article highlights the key organisational issues that affect e-government adoption in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at both national and agency levels.

Keywords: E-Government, IS Adoption, Organisational Issues, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, a series of initiatives to transform government processes has led to the development of concepts such as “reinventing the government” and “new public management” (NPM) to address shortcomings in public administration and make government “work better” (Kettl, 2005). In addition, ICT and Globalisation has encouraged the idea of public sector reform and had a significant influence on the relationships people keep with other individuals, with the business community and, more recently with the government (Castells, 1996; Howard, 2001). The adoption of e-government is the decision to utilize electronic services to share information with other government agencies and provide services to stakeholders and to make full use of information and communications technology as the best course of action available (AL-Shehry et al., 2006). E-government is more than a technological is-
sue as it is influenced by many factors such as organisational, human, social and cultural issues which are related to the nature of the government in a particular country and its responsibility in the society (Prins, 2001; Howard, 2001). Thus, this article focuses more on identifying the elements that will promote the successful introduction of e-government in a developing country context, rather than assessing the success or failure of an implemented e-government system in a developed country environment from an organisational perspective.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Many theories have attempted to explain the acceptance of technology such as Theory for Reason Action (TRA), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Diffusion of Innovation Theory. For example TAM uses two perceptions: perceived ease of use and usefulness to determine an individual’s intention to use a technology (Davis et al., 1992). Igbaria et al (1997) found that perceived ease of use is a major factor in explaining perceived usefulness and system usage. Molla and Licher (2005) identified the organisational factors that might affect e-commerce adoption in South Africa which are human, business, technology resources and awareness. Wang (2003) examined the factors affecting the adoption of electronic tax-filing systems by using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Tung and Rieck (2005) indicated a significant positive relationship between perceived benefits, external pressure and social influence, and the firm’s decision to adopt e-government services. Kim and Lee (2004) suggested that organisational culture, structure and Information Technology all exert significant forces on knowledge-sharing capabilities among South Korean government employees. Carter and Belanger (2004) indicated that perceived usefulness, relative advantage and compatibility are significant indicators of citizens’ intention to use the state government’s services online. Al-Dosari and King (2004) have developed a framework to deal with e-government implementation stages at the national level. Ebrahim and Irani’s study (2005) identified the benefits and the barriers for e-government adoption. Gil-Garcia and Pardo (2005) identified some challenges in e-government such as: project size, complexity, organisational diversity and the lack of alignment between organisational goals and IT projects. Al-Fakhri et al (2008) indicated to the importance of increasing the awareness among government employees and the public at-large during e-government implementation; making Internet access more available across the full spectrum of society and adopting a flexible approach to technological change and the IT environment more generally. Amoretti (2007) pointed to a four way typology of e-government regimes which are: reform-oriented e-government; authoritarian e-government; managerial e-government and open e-government. However, the findings of several studies indicate that despite high costs of e-government projects, both tangible and intangible, many e-government efforts are failing or are slowly diffusing (United Nations 2001; Pardo and Scholl 2002; Heeks 2003; OCED, 2004; Dawes et al., 2004). In addition, previous studies pay little attention to the organisational aspects of this transformation, particularly, the interrelation between current reality of government administration and implementation of e-government.

Organisational Issues and IS Adoption

The term ‘organisational issue’ is frequently used in the literature to describe a wide range of non-technical aspects (Clegg et al., 1997). Thus, it is defined as “any distinct area on the interface between a technical system and the characteristics and requirements either of the host organisation or its individual employees which can lead to operational problems within the organisation” (Doherty and King, 1998: 105). A report conducted by OASIG (1996), cited in Cabrara et al. (2001) summarized the experiences of 45 leading Information Technology (IT) researchers and consultants in the UK.
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