Chapter 18
E-Government Policy Implementation in Brunei:
Lessons Learnt from Singapore

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ABSTRACT

Policy reform initiative in e-Government and other public management areas such as good governance has been momentous and visible in many societies in recent years. However, in many countries, reasonably good policies have made somewhat slow progress at the implementation stage. It has to be appreciated that policy implementation occurs in several ways, manifesting multiple challenges. Taking a key interest in Brunei Darussalam and Singapore, this chapter has made an attempt to see how these challenges or critical factors play a key role in making e-Government policy a success. The authors have examined e-Government strategies in Brunei in the light of policy success in Singapore. Based on their empirical research in these two small countries in South-East Asia, this chapter highlights the salient features and success factors that have enabled e-Government policies to be successfully implemented in Singapore. Learning lessons from Singapore, the authors have proposed potential success ingredients for an effective e-Government policy implementation in Brunei.

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INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the Web and its related technologies in the 1990s, the governments across the World, especially in the developed countries, started adopting 'Internet' in their daily businesses to improve service quality in terms of reaching out to people and communicating with key stakeholders including business, media, professional groups and other civil society players. This public policy move has been somewhat revolutionary in speed that gradually gave birth to the concept of 'e-Government'. The Internet and the Web have indubitably become the main medium of e-Government. They offer non-linear, two-way and non-hierarchical and 24/7 delivery systems which have the capability to significantly improve government services, if utilized effectively. However, e-Government is not merely a government website on the Internet for service delivery, it is a new way to improve government responsiveness and public outreach (West, 2004). As the 1990s also witnessed a global interest in achieving good governance to curve corruption, to improve public management and to democratise policy making, e-Government has evolved into an e-Governance process in some societies to achieve good governance elements such as accountability and transparency by connecting state with citizens. Thus the Internet and the Web has become a tool of transformation in the way government does business and citizens interact with government.

In the past few years, many countries of the world paid enormous attention to developing policies and strategies around the emerging concept of e-Government. In terms of implementation and action, some countries have made quicker progress than others and potentially succeeded in producing desired results. Those who failed at the implementation stage could not take the e-Government agenda much forward. However, some countries in the latter group (e.g. United Arab Emirates), through continuous efforts and best practice research, are sharing experiences with and learning lessons from the successful operational models (e.g. Singapore).

The conceptual focus of this chapter is to examine the implementation challenges and critical success factors in e-Government policy operation. Based on a survey and consultation with key stakeholders of e-Government, this chapter also takes a closer look at Singapore's e-Government policy implementation model to observe the key success factors that Brunei can learn to make its e-Government strategy successful.

BACKGROUND

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) including computers, satellite, Web and the Internet are now able to work together and combine to form the 'networked world' which reaches into every corner of the globe – allowing remote communities to become integrated into mainstream development and decision-making processes. There is virtually no limit to the reach of ICT. That is why it brings people closer and helps in reaching the unreached. It treats people alike irrespective of social and economic status, sex, religion and caste of creed (UNDP, 2001; Harris, 2004). ICT is a combination of two concepts – information and technology. Access to information is power. In the case of good governance, information is acquired and used strategically for public good purposes. And in the case of bad governance, the same information is used for private gains and for suppression of citizens. Access to information forms the basis for decision making and if the community is empowered by providing information and knowledge then this is the most critical factor in breaking the cycle of poverty (ADB, 2003).

In a narrow sense e-Government can be defined as the use of information and communication technology, especially the Internet and the Web technology in running government activities in relation with government stakeholders. These