

Chapter 11

E-Government in Syria: Obstacles and Interoperability Framework

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ABSTRACT

The information technology revolution has forced many governments to create new mechanisms for delivering services in order to reduce costs, increase the ease of administration, and overcome some of the economic and social problems. E-Government uses the methods of new technology to simplify administrative procedures and assist decision-makers in their operations. Using the survey method and interviews, this chapter investigates e-Government activities in Syria in order to explore the main barriers of e-Government. It focuses on how to utilize the necessary frameworks in policy, economics, administrative procedures, society, and technology, with the aim of showing the benefits of Enterprise Integration in e-Government. The chapter extensively reviews the literature on barriers to e-Government and Enterprise Integration technologies. Based on the investigation of barriers to current e-Government activities in Syria, the chapter proposes an e-Government Interoperability Framework that is designed to address effective implementation of e-Government in developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

Many developing countries have begun to develop new policies to fit the requirements of the digital revolution. This is aimed at facilitating the provi-

sion of public services in an appropriate, accountable, and efficient manner. The public sector is characterized by intermittent bureaucracies that must be restructured to suit the requirements of the digital revolution as a strategy towards global application of e-Government. E-Government

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-0324-0.ch011

presents new opportunities for changing the way in which citizens and businesses can access public services through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). E-Government is a paradigm shift away from the traditional practice of visiting a physical government office to obtain a service. Transition to e-Government makes it possible to access public services in the shortest period of time, at a lesser cost, and at the convenience of the recipient of the services. The main requirements to successfully implementing e-Government include solving technical, social, political, and legal problems. It entails providing an appropriate ICT environment to citizens that results in increased number of home computers, Internet service providers, telephone home lines, and Internet high-speed communications.

Collaborative strategies for information flow among public sector organizations are very critical issues for successful implementation of e-Government projects. To achieve this there is need for enterprise integration and interoperability to enable easy access to data and to be able obtain information from many sites, across different applications platforms, and databases. Data integration (DI) has become very important in e-Government (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006). The main objective of enterprise integration is to facilitate the collection of information from different sites and make it accessible from a single entry point. Lack of IT skills, complex Enterprise Integration tools, and high cost in deploying Enterprise Integration between systems are among the major problems associated with enterprise integration projects (Magic, 2008). In addition, there are many types of enterprise integration technologies (Janssen & Cresswell, 2002). In e-Government, the old models of independent silos of information must be replaced by an integrated environment.

Due to the availability of a variety of integration technologies, in most situations it is not easy to identify the best technology to use to achieve appropriate enterprise integration (Themistocleous, 2004). Furthermore, many applications are

written in different languages, and run on different platforms. This makes it difficult for independent applications to readily share network resources. Vendors such as Microsoft and IBM have typically delivered proprietary and restrictive solutions that perpetuate and even exacerbate the problem of integration (Amin, 2007).

Approaches to implementing e-Government will depend on the technical, socio-economical, and political environment where it is being implemented. There are few empirical studies that have focused on understanding the impact of demographic variables on implementing information systems in Syria (Al-Shehry, Rogerson, Fairweather, & Prior, 2008). National efforts towards articulating e-Government strategies in Syria could be traced to the first conference on e-Government that was held in 2007 (Sana News, 2007). Unfortunately, since the conference, there has been very little done by the government to put in place the necessary measures to facilitate the development of an affluent e-Government strategy (Vassilakis, Lepouras, Fraser, Haston, & Georgiadis, 2005; Amber, 2007; Al-Assad, 2010). However, such interventions lack appropriate awareness campaigns so that citizens can buy-in. One of the reasons why there has been little progress towards implementing or articulating a robust e-Government strategy has been lack of political will by the government.

An e-Ready environment is one of the prerequisites for successful transition to e-Government. An e-Ready environment is characterized by, among others, higher penetration of broadband Internet and computer usage; political will; and financial resources. abundance of e-Skills within among citizens and systems operators; Some of the main impediments of e-Government are the lack of technical knowledge, difficulty to access global network (WWW), lack of a robust e-Government strategy, and lack of awareness of e-Government benefits by various stakeholders including business, the civil society and citizens at large. In addition, amongst the key issues

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