

Chapter 21

E–Government Issues in Developing Countries: An Analysis from a Digital Divide, E–Skills, and Civil Conflict Theory Approach

Gohar Feroz Khan

YeungNam University, Republic of Korea

Junghoon Moon

Seoul National University, Republic of Korea

ABSTRACT

Electronic government, or e-Government, is the practice of providing public services to citizens, businesses, and other government agencies where government services can be accessed through the Internet, mobile phone, fax, mail, telephone, and personal visits (MGAHA, 2005). Developing countries, utilizing the late comer advantage, are mimicking trends of paperless governments with the expectations to reap the same benefits enjoyed by developed countries. However, e-Government initiatives have not always been successful in developing countries. According to the study conducted by Heeks (2003), the rate of e-Government success in developing countries was only 15 percent. The authors believe that such failures are mainly due to certain unique social, economic, technological, and environmental challenges faced by e-Government in developing countries. For example, some major issues include digital divide, political instability, and skills-related issues. However, the research dealing with these problems is limited. Therefore, in this chapter, the authors discuss these challenges.

INTRODUCTION

E-Government development and implementation initiatives face a number of external and internal challenges that can impact on the structure,

operation, and culture of public administration (Snellen, 2000). These challenges span from technological, economic, and organizational issues to social, political, cultural, and even legal issues (Carter & May, 2001; Chen, Chen, Huang, & Ching, 2006; R. B. Heeks, 2003; Ndou, 2004).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-0324-0.ch021

Chen et al. (2006) described the challenges faced by developing countries (DCs) as: economic--low economic growth and productivity; technical--no technical staff or outsourcing ability; infrastructural--no national informational infrastructure, low Internet access for citizens and employees; and illiteracy: insufficient knowledge and skills of citizens and employees to use the Internet. Developing countries also face ethical issues in which they must strike a balance between e-Government investment and the basic needs of citizens; multicultural and multilingual issues along with matters of poverty, obtaining the trust of the citizens, lack of backbone infrastructure, and unequal access (Mukabeta Maumbe, Owei, & Alexander, 2008) must be addressed prior to e-Government implementation. According to a U.S. General Accounting Office report (2001) the challenges faced by e-Government can be categorized as (1) sustaining committed executive leadership, (2) building effective e-Government business cases, (3) maintaining a citizen focus, (4) protecting personal privacy, (5) implementing appropriate security controls, (6) maintaining electronic records, (7) maintaining a robust technical infrastructure, (8) addressing IT human capital concerns, and (9) ensuring uniform service to the public. Similarly, Jaeger and Thompson (2003) pointed out that educating citizens about the value of e-Government, providing consistent and reliable electricity, telecommunications, and Internet access, and addressing issues of language and communication are crucial for e-Government (Jaeger & Thompson, 2003).

In addition, there are certain unique challenges faced by e-Government that have not been explored adequately, such as *civil conflict*, *violence*, *e-skills*, and *digital divide*, particularly in developing countries." Understanding the complex nature of these societal issues is crucial for delivering e-Government services (G.F. Khan, J. Moon, J.J. Rho, & H. Zo, 2010; Khan, Moon, Swar, Zo, & Rho, forthcoming). Thus in this chapter, we will address the following questions:

- *What is the current status of e-Government research from the perspective of developing countries?*
- *How can societal challenges such as digital divide, civil conflict, and violence affect e-Government adoption, particularly in developing countries?*
- *What kinds of skills are needed by consumers (i.e. citizens, public, and private sector employees) to effectively consume the e-Government services provided to them?*

The questions raised above are based on the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1. As shown in the Figure 1, section 2 serves as a base for analyzing E-Government literature pertaining to developing countries (DCs). The findings discussed in this section are mainly derived from our previous research; where we analyzed 145 articles from 7 core EG journals to investigate E-Government literature pertaining to developing countries (Khan, Moon, Park, Swar, & Rho, 2011). Some critical issues identified in section 2 are further explored in sections 3 and 4, respectively.

In section 3, we the discussion is limited to certain crucial societal challenges faced by e-Government that have been widely ignored and undermined by researchers as well as practitioners. Particularly, we will be discussing civil conflict, digital divide, and e-skills issues faced by e-Government in DCs. Despite the growing number of civil conflicts and violence throughout the world, the influence of civil conflicts and violence on E-Government service use has not been explored adequately. The results discussed are mainly drawn from the study by Khan et al. (2010) and Khan et al. (2011); the authors used conflict theory, digital divide, and technology adoption literature to predict citizens' perceptions of E-Government services in a conflict zone by developing and empirically testing a model using a sample size of 360 citizens.

Furthermore, one of the prominent challenges of e-Government in developing countries is the

15 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/government-issues-developing-countries/64864

Related Content

An Analytic Hierarchy Process for the Evaluation of E-Government Service Quality

Xenia Papadomichelaki, Vicky Koutsouris, Dimitrios Konstantinidis and Gregoris Mentzas (2013). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research* (pp. 19-44).

www.irma-international.org/article/analytic-hierarchy-process-evaluation-government/76927

Cluster Analysis: A Statistical Approach for E-Governance for Better Policy Decisions

Pankaj Nagar (2014). *Governometrics and Technological Innovation for Public Policy Design and Precision* (pp. 123-159).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/cluster-analysis/101269

E-Governance vs. E-Readiness in Urban Municipal Governments in Tamil Nadu, India

Abdul Razak Mohamed (2011). *Global Strategy and Practice of E-Governance: Examples from Around the World* (pp. 1-23).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/governance-readiness-urban-municipal-governments/52255

Methodology for Risk Assessment and Costs Associated with Risk Occurrence in E-Government Projects

Neven Vrcek, Petra Peharda and Dušan Mundar (2013). *E-Government Success Factors and Measures: Theories, Concepts, and Methodologies* (pp. 252-272).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/methodology-risk-assessment-costs-associated/77456

Home (Page) Style: Determinates of the Quality of the House Members' Web Sites

Kevin Esterling, David M.J. Lazer and Michael A. Neblo (2005). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research* (pp. 50-63).

www.irma-international.org/article/home-page-style/2000