Chapter 2

E–Governmentization:
A Panacea for the Democratization of Developing Countries?

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this chapter is to critically evaluate the e-governmentization of administrative processes, which many developing nations have come to enthusiastically espouse. From a theoretical perspective, such a trend is ostensibly positive, as e-government serves to promote transparency and efficient information exchange, which in turn serves to stimulate more equal distributions of power, inside as well as outside the bureaucracy, and perhaps most importantly (efficiently) solicit greater citizen participation. However, such benefits associated with the proliferation of e-government are often contingent upon a host of prerequisite conditions that, often times, developing nations do not meet. Therefore, such enthusiastic attempts by developing nations to e-governmentize administrative processes may be misplaced. As such, the primary thesis of this research is that the e-governmentization of administrative processes are likely to stimulate positive effects only after a certain level of democracy has been achieved. To explore this thesis, this chapter focuses on exploring the evolution and ensuing effects of the proliferation of e-government in South Korea.

INTRODUCTION

The current wave of e-governmentization is not only limited to developed countries, but is instead also affecting many developing and under developed countries, who are drawn to the benefits associated with e-government (Heeks 2003). As the scope of e-government continues to expand from providing public service to communication tools which are critical to the creation and implementation of public policy, e-government is facing a new phase of development (Brewer et al. 2006). To this end, the more e-government is shifting toward a governance platform, the more

complicated issues concerning the accessibility and pre-conditions of successful e-government are (Cibbora and Navarra 2005).

The objective of this chapter is to critically evaluate the e-governmentization of administrative processes, which many developing nations have come to enthusiastically espouse. From a theoretical perspective, such a trend is ostensibly positive, as e-government serves to promote transparency and efficient information exchange, which in turn serves to stimulate more equal distributions of power, inside as well as outside the bureaucracy, and perhaps most importantly (efficiently) solicit greater citizen participation (Brewer et al. 2006). However, such benefits associated with the proliferation of e-government are often contingent upon a host of prerequisite conditions that, often times, developing nations do not meet. Therefore, such enthusiastic attempts by developing nations to e-governmentize administrative processes may be misplaced. As such, the primary thesis of this research is that the e-governmentization of administrative processes may serve to stimulate positive effects only after a certain level of democracy has been achieved. To explore this thesis, this chapter will focus on exploring the evolution and ensuing effects of the proliferation of e-government in South Korea, China, and India.

Studying the process of e-govenrmentization in South Korea is particularly relevant for developing nations for two primary reasons. The first is that South Korea may be considered a pioneer in the process of e-governmentization of administrative processes and today is widely considered to have among the most developed e-government infrastructures in the world (United Nations e-government Survey 2012). The second reason the study of e-governmentization in South Korea is relevant for developing countries is that, concurrent to the aggressive e-governmentization of administrative processes that took place throughout the country, South Korea was also in the process of consolidating its young democracy; in other words, South Korea's aggressive adoption of e-government began at a time when democracy in South Korea was underdeveloped, and a developing nation itself. In fact, much of modern South Korean e-government systems can be traced back to the early 1990s, a period when South Korea had just made its transition to democracy, following decades of authoritative rule under a regime of military presidents. Consequently, by obtaining a better understanding of South Korea's experiences throughout its process of e-governmentization, democratization, and development insight may be provided regarding the nature of the relationship that exists between the benefits said to accompany the e-governmentization of administrative processes and levels of democratic development.

This chapter will provide a literature based review of e-government applications in three different contexts. As such, the findings of this research are indicative only, and may be empirically examined in later research. The following section will discuss the rise in popularity of e-government over the past decades, and introduce popular arguments regarding its application. The second section discusses theory that can be used in assessing the extent to which e-government applications may serve to further the development of democracy within a given context. Bearing in mind such arguments, examples of e-government adoption in India and China are discussed. Section three discusses e-government adoption in South Korea. Based upon the findings of this research, this chapter will conclude by proposing some recommendations for developing nations before pursuing the hasty implementation of e-government projects.

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