

# Chapter 2

## E-Participation: A Way for Creating Public Value

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### ABSTRACT

*E-participation is a major part of e-government initiatives; it is a window through which governments interact with their citizens and allow for a healthier democratic environment. In addition, e-participation is one of the main elements in the free democratic world that is receiving growing interest by governments, through implementing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to involve citizens. This chapter sheds light on different aspects of e-participation; it views a three dimensional picture of e-participation theories and concepts, presents a number of real life examples for successful e-participation initiatives, and ends with an example of how to measure an e-participation initiative and evaluate its success.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

E-government is more than a phenomenon; it is a paradigm that guides the new governance process. Most countries all over the world are embracing e-government initiatives based on confirmed benefits and essential requirements of the new millennium that can be seen as a great opportunity to enhance public performance in different aspects (Khasawneh, Rabayah, & Abu-Shanab, 2013).

E-participation is one of the main elements in the free democratic world that is receiving a growing interest by governments, through taken advantage of implementing information and communication technologies (ICTs) to involve citizens.

Moreover, e-participation can be seen as a socio technical field that can be adopted in different ways through empowering citizens to be involved in the information society using the available communication technologies such as

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6248-3.ch002

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emails, e-forums, web 2.0 technologies and many others. Abu-Shanab and Khasawneh presents in their research (2013) that several governments have started using information and communication technology as a way to improve their interactions with citizens through providing them with real time access to information and many e-services via the Internet which will result in more effective, transparent, accountable and participative governments.

Researches in the area of participation showed different ways that can be used to involve citizens in the political process. Goldfinch, Gauld, and Herbison (2009) distinguished between civic participation and political participation by considering them as the main types of participation; the first type is essentially viewed as non paid, publicly spirited collective action and the second type is more related to dealing with the machinery of government and its actors.

This chapter will review e-participation concepts, key dimensions, tools and technologies, and the measurement. Once governments are willing to adopt electronic channels for their governance process, they are entering a new era with new tools that range from simple information systems to more complicated Web 2.0 tools that open doors for all stakeholders to benefit from the power of reaching to citizens and fostering a decision making process that activates a more participatory picture.

## **2. E-PARTICIPATION: AN OVERVIEW**

In the age of e-government, the need to customize public services and information is increasing in order to make them available for citizens at the touch of a button, or click of a mouse. Achieving such thing would require collective effort from all parts including governments, private sectors, and the civil society to obtain effective e-participation within e-government, and to insure that regardless social, economic, or educational background of

participants, everyone has an equal access opportunity.

It is necessary to distinguish between e-voting and e-participation which are considered as the two major dimensions of electronic democracy; both dimensions focus on the means through which government can strengthen the mechanisms of representative democratic decision making utilizing the available technologies (Saebo, Rose, & Flak, 2008).

E-Participation is all about making the decision-making processes easier by connecting people with the government and enabling them to submit their views, comments/complaints and advice to the government through the use of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The overarching objectives of e-participation are to reach a larger portion of audience to enable broader participation, support participation process by providing a range of technologies to support the diverse technical and communicative skills of citizens, provide relevant information in a more accessible and more understandable format to the audience, and engage with a wider audience to enable deeper contributions and support deliberative debate (Macintosh, 2004).

Saebo, Rose, and Flak (2008, p.400) implied that e-participation involves “the extension and transformation of participation in societal democratic and consultative processes mediated by information and communication technologies (ICT), primarily the Internet”. Putting e-participation into action involves a variety of challenges that bring risks and barriers which need to be managed; political strategic barriers, organizational and legal barriers, value definition barriers, social barriers and technological barriers are examples of e-participation barriers that need to be managed (Gatautis, 2010).

It is noticeable that public participation is not a new concept; it is an old social\political activity that transformed from using traditional methods of interaction and participation to using information and communication technologies as

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