

Promotion of E-Government in Japan and Its Operation

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INTRODUCTION

In Japan, e-government has been considered since 2001 as one of the strategies of so called “e-Japan” (Ohyama, 2003). It had been decided that e-government shall be constructed within the fiscal year 2003. Preparation in terms of the legal system and technological developments made steady progress towards that goal. The construction of e-government should alleviate residents’ burdens in terms of bureaucracy, enhance service quality rationalization, lean and transparent administrative agencies, countermeasures for natural calamities, more participation in policy making and administration by residents and so forth. Various tasks have been carried out at many places. For example, in autumn of 2002 a “basic residential register network” was established. Its initiation enjoyed broadly smooth operation. Residents had received administrative services only within certain jurisdiction limits until then. Now they are free to enjoy access to any administrative services from anywhere in Japan thanks to this e-system. Some local authorities introduced electronic tenders to enhance transparency of administration. Some local authorities adopted an electronic voting system in part of their areas. This paper explains the details of how the construction of the e-government came about and the status of its operation.

In constructing an e-government, basic researches in respect of relevant individual electronic chores are necessary. In reality, however, planning and drawing up an idea will often be brought about, depending on certain actual domestic social circumstances of the legal systems or certain consensus within and between relevant representative bodies of the government. Because of such circumstances, we have decided to list up general magazines easily available which report often on these themes, and the most up-to-date URLs of relevant organizations of the Japanese government (see Appendix).

BACKGROUND

Information processing on the part of the public administration has progressed in line with each development of

computers (Makiuchi, 2003). It followed the progress of information processing in the private sector. The first steps included, as early as the 70s, information processing for specified jobs such as accounting and salary payments. It also controlled systems of government offices on the basis of one PC per person, as personal computers spread around 1990, internet technologies were introduced, and so forth. In particular, the Patent Office in Japan adopted an online system for patent application to speed up the processing of patent applications and it did substantially increase.

Nevertheless, given the progress and more use of the information processing for administration, the mentality that it only simply meant computers would replace mechanical style jobs lived a long time. In addition, it exerted a negative influence in that the conventionally vertical administration confined the progress of the information processing for administration to specific ministries and offices. And it made services difficult to access from the standpoint of the people.

The Mori Cabinet came into power in 2000. He decided to shift the nation to the use of state-of-the-art information under his “e-Japan strategies”. He would emphasize the importance of information processing in Japanese society in order to get out of the economic slump. Objectives were placed in five fields; broadband infrastructure, education, public/administration services, e-commerce, and security. Among the items, administration services are selected so that e-government will be realized within the fiscal year 2003. Preparation in terms of legal systems and technological developments have made progress in that respect. Legal systems were reviewed. Now, there are the Online Transmission Regulations, Revised Basic Residential Register Law, Public Individual Certification Law etc. On the technological front, there were also some new introductions of electronic systems for administrative procedures, for example all-purpose reception system for applications, the introduction of a one-stop system for import/export harbor and taxation procedures as well as the electronic tender system. Electronic systems for revenue bookings allows payments per Internet and an online transfer system. The purposes of the introduction of information processing for administrative chore and business operations are; simplification of work for human

resources, salaries, etc. and connection of the National Networks with LGWAN (Local Government Wide Area Network) owned by communalities.

Electronic procedures will be put into practice in various fields as described above. From their own perspectives, users consider more or less that the essential part of e-government is mainly the given opportunity of the electronic application and its ease.

E-government is one of the e-Japan Strategies in the Five Year Plan which started in 2000. Preparatory activities on legal systems and system construction are to be completed by March 2004. On the other hand, as regards set-up of broadband infrastructure, the objective was set that 30 million households would use it by the end of the fiscal year 2005. In reality, 50 million households (the actual number of subscribers is about 5.70 million) were able to use it as early as June 2002 due to the rapid progress of information telecommunication technologies. Partly as a result of these unexpected circumstances, e-Japan Strategies could enjoy another review only after one and half year of their inception.

E-Japan strategies seem to have advanced rapidly. An international comparison survey by a consultancy company called Accenture shows, however, that Japanese e-government ranked 17th. According to this study, the top three positions are Canada, Singapore and the USA. The same survey classifies and names these three nations as the “pioneering leaders”. Australia, which clad the 4th to the 13th positioning it calls the nations as “visionary challengers”. It calls the 14th positioning to Japan, which is the 17th, as “emerging performers” and the 18th onwards as “platform builders”. Whether or not they succeed in construction of e-government can be a good clue, a basis requirement for international competition for any country.

SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT CASES

Here are some cases of e-governments established on national scheme or at local authorities.

Basic Residential Register Network System

Resident registration cards, tax payment certificates etc. are normally applied for at the desk of an agency. The regional jurisdiction of a resident is responsible and issues them. E-government will enable any application at home or application and issuance from an office outside the resident district. Confirmation of the subject person beyond an administrative boundary and the necessary information exchange between administrative bodies in this respect becomes easier with the use of Basic Residen-

tial Register Network. The Basic Residential Register Law regulates undertakings for this system, how its operation should look and its practical use. Information contained in this system be the four items: name, birth date, gender, and address. It also contains resident card code numbers and information of any changes to them. The resident card code allows easy access to these four data items. It consists of eleven digits, selected at random, and will be issued only in Japan without duplication for any other person. This code can be changed at the request of the subject person. The system constellation is 3-fold in vertical; the levels consist of national, prefecture and municipalities. Depending on the distance between the “clients” making use of the common contents from each other, the option would be made which of the 3 levels of networks should be used. If two towns sit in the same prefecture, the communication server of one of the two towns and the dedicated line in connection with this server on the level of the prefecture would be used in order to communicate with the other town magistrate. If the communication should go to the level of prefecture-prefecture, the network of this constellation level would be working plus the national network involved. Communication servers have firewalls both inside and outside to prevent illegal access (Inoue, 2003; Yoshida, Mizokami & Watanabe, 2003)

Electronic Tender

Here is a case of Yokosuka City in Kanagawa Prefecture (Hirokawa, 2003). Up until the 1997, order placement of civil works in the city took place mainly by public tender in which 7-10 specified and pre-selected bidders could join the tender. However, it became known that there had been some collusions on the bidding. It was considered that reform is necessary. The tender system was changed in the fiscal year 1998 to a conditionally open tender where any business entity could participate, if inspection standards prescribed were satisfied. In the fiscal year 1999 information on order placements started to be shown on the agency’s homepage. It became possible for companies wishing to participate to confirm general picture of an order. Where is the site? What is the nature of this work? Firstly, a company wishing to bid will transmit a tender application form to the contracting section by facsimile. If confirmed that this company is qualified to participate, it will purchase design documents from a designated printing company, and draw up an estimate. Then it sends the tender documents poste restante at the Yokosuka Post Office by registered mail with a delivery certificate by the deadline. On the date appointed, the contract section of the magistrate will open all the tender documents collected at that time and chose the successful bidder with

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