Chapter LXVII
Developing a Generic Framework for E–Government

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ABSTRACT

Electronic government (e-government) initiatives are pervasive and form a significant part of government investment portfolio in almost all countries around the world. However, understanding of what is meant by e-government is still nascent and becomes complicated because the construct means different things to different people. Consequently, the conceptualization and implementation of e-government programs are diverse and are often difficult to assess and compare across different contexts of application. This paper addresses the following key question: Given the wide variety of visions, strategic agendas, and contexts of application, how may we assess, categorize, classify, compare, and discuss the e-government efforts of various government administrations? In answering this question, we propose a generic e-government framework that will allow for the identification of e-government strategic agendas and key application initiatives that transcend country-specific requirements. In developing the framework, a number of requirements are first outlined. The framework is proposed and described; it is then illustrated using brief case studies from three countries. Finally, findings and limitations are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

E-government (electronic government) is increasingly a global phenomenon that is consuming the attention of politicians, policy makers, and even ordinary citizens. Governments around the world have made and continue to make massive financial and political commitments to establishing e-government (Accenture, 2004). A report by the United Nations (UN World Public Sector Report,

2003) indicates that by 2003, over 173 countries had developed government Web sites. Additionally, many countries (including Canada, Germany, Malaysia, Norway, the UK, and the U.S.) have embarked on ambitious multi-year programs to create more citizen-centered, effective, and efficient governments (Accenture, 2004).

E-government is predicated on leveraging the capabilities and power of IT to deliver services provided by governments at local, municipal,

state, and national levels. While early conceptions of e-government have largely focused on electronic service delivery as the key feature of the phenomenon, a closer examination suggests a more complex set of circumstances. Beyond service delivery, e-government offers additional channels of interaction among governments, businesses, and citizens, separately or collectively. For example, individual citizens may interact with government electronically by filing their income tax documents online. Governments in delivering services may do so directly or indirectly through intermediaries such as banks, postal outlets in private businesses, and by other means. Consequently, any e-government effort must meet the needs of a diverse set of stakeholders that operate in the political, business, or civic spheres of influence. E-government, however, is more than a technological phenomenon. Whether through deliberate choice or passive acceptance, it is transformative in nature, affecting the management of human, technological, and organizational resources and processes. Consequently, the implementation of e-government is a monumental change effort.

The drive to implement e-government has resulted in the adoption of many e-government visions and strategic agendas (Accenture, 2004). However, each vision is driven by its own unique set of social, political, and economic factors and requirements. Consequently, the mission and objectives that emanate from these e-government visions variously manifest strong focus on one or two elements. For example, the United States has placed a major focus on service delivery and on increasing cross-functional efficiencies (OMB, 2003). The South African government's e-government program is heavily weighted towards service delivery, while e-government efforts in the United Kingdom have tended to balance several strategic objectives.

A key factor driving the achievement of any e-government program is the vision of e-government, articulated and adopted by a government administration. Coupled with actual developments undertaken by the administration, the articulated vision (expressed in documents, objectives, frameworks) greatly helps to describe the e-government

space. However, these efforts are not necessarily well articulated nor well coordinated. In large part, this is due to how electronic government is conceptualized. With each administration articulating its own view, it becomes difficult to identify, assess, and understand what is being accomplished under the e-government aegis. While some e-government strategic agendas focus primarily on service delivery issues, others may focus more on creating internally efficient systems and processes. Still others may adopt a more comprehensive view, incorporating issues such as constituent relationship management and e-democracy. Understanding what is meant by e-government becomes complicated because the construct means different things to different people. Although each of these views of e-government may be legitimate, there is a need for some common understanding to allow for assessment, comparison, and explanation of current efforts vis-à-vis past and future investment in the e-government enterprise.

This article addresses the following key question: Given the wide variety of visions, strategic agendas, and contexts of application, how may we categorize, classify, assess, compare, and discuss the e-government efforts of various government administrations? In answering this question, we see the need for a mechanism that will facilitate the articulation and discussion of current issues and concepts related to e-government. We believe this instrument would ideally transcend country-specific requirements and identify experiences and elements that could be transferred across contexts of application. For example, we should be able to describe and discuss the e-government efforts in a country such as Malaysia and make some broad comparisons with similar efforts in the United Kingdom. Therefore, we propose the development of a generic framework that can be used to categorize, classify, and compare electronic government visions, strategic agendas, and application initiatives. Such a framework, rather than seeking to rigidly constrain or categorize e-government activities, should act as a lens to focus attention and awareness on underlying issues and elements that could be debated, discussed, and

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