

Chapter 88

E-Government in Vietnam: Situation, Prospects, Trends, and Challenges

Ngô Tân Vũ Khanh

Tien Giang University, Vietnam

Ma Thanh Danh

Department of Risk Management, Toppion Group, Vietnam

Gwangyong Gim

Soongsil University, South Korea

ABSTRACT

Electronic government (e-government) has established as an effective mechanism for increasing government productivity and efficiency and a key enabler of citizen-centric services. Despite the considerable investment of the Government of Vietnam in e-government, the outcomes of it are still far below the expectation. This paper aims also to assess the current situation of e-government in Vietnam and to investigate the reasons for the modest results of it. Different indicator groups for the measurement of e-government will be applied to assess the status of each dimension of e-government as well as the overall performance of e-government in general. The challenges and issues of implementing e-Government systems will also be relevant to implementing ICTs to build systems to support e-governance.

1. INTRODUCTION: E-GOVERNMENT DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM

Successful diffusion of information communications technology (ICT) has technologies triggered the usage of Internet, e-commerce, and eventually in electronic government (e-government). Electronic government initiatives have often sounded very promising but have been difficult to implement. The challenge lies in the implementation of e-government successfully. One likely barrier is that e-government is approached as if in a universal context, which can be generalized across the globe. On the other hand, the individual countries' contextual imperatives, culture and conditions vary. Therefore, a universal approach is less likely to be effective in all contextual settings. This article mainly focuses on e-government in Vietnam,

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explore important factors affecting the adoption and implementation of e-government in Vietnam via trends, prospects and challenges.

The development of electronic government (e-Government) has become a global trend of public sector reforms during the last two decades. Although the term 'e-government' appeared more than twenty years ago, there is no commonly accepted definition. The definition that is often cited is the one Layne and Lee mention in their research: "E-Government refers to government's use of technology, particularly web-based Internet application to enhance the access to and delivery of government information and service to citizens, business partners, employees, other agencies, and government entities" (Layne & Lee, 2001, p. 123). Holiday (2006) also points out 'the core idea' of e-Government in his paper: "e-Government usually comprises public sector use of information and communication technology (ICT), including the Internet, to boost information dissemination, enhance service delivery, and facilitate citizen participation" (Holiday, 2006, p. 516).

Furthermore, the growth of e-Government is often divided into stages, such as the five-stage model suggested by UN and American Society for Public Administration:

1. **Emerging:** An official government online presence is established;
2. **Enhanced:** Government sites increase, information becomes more dynamic;
3. **Interactive:** Users can download forms, e-mail officials and interact through the web;
4. **Transactional:** Users can actually pay for services and other transactions online and
5. **Seamless:** Full integration of e-services across administrative boundaries (UN/ASP, 2002, p. 2).

Heeks (2001, p. 4) argues that there are three main domains of e-Government: improving government process (e-administration), connecting citizens (e-citizens and e-services) and building external interaction with and within civil society (e-society). Based on Heeks's three main domains, Holidays divides e-Government in three key dimension: e-administration, focused on internal government process (G2G); e-services, focused on government service delivery to citizens and business (G2C/G2B); and e-citizenship, focused on citizen and business input into governance (C2G, B2G) (Holidays, 2006, p. 519).

Started before the boom of Internet, public administration computerization in developed countries already created a concrete background for the government to provide online public services. In developing countries, however, the computerization process started much slower. Hence, developing countries "usually combine three targets: computerization, public administration reform and online services into one e-Government program" (Obi and Nguyen, 2010, p. 39). This "three in one" e-Government program has been used in many countries as "an enabling tool to increase efficiency, enhance transparency, collect more revenue and facilitate public reform" (Bhatnagar, 2004, p. 13). However, e-government applications are not always fruitful as expected. Robert Schwart, Lead Informatics Specialist at the World Bank, remarked that "about 85% of the e-government systems that were implemented in developing countries turned out to be either total (35%) or partial (50%) failures" (Rahul, 2005, p. 26).

ICT has been being used in the Vietnam public sector for more than 22 years and the advent of the Internet has given this usage more than just a new name e-Government- and a higher profile. During last 22 years, 5 big projects have been implemented: two of which were financially supported by the French Government (in the 1991-1993 and 1994-1996 periods); one invested by the State budget (a part of the

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