

Competency Trap in Organizational Learning: Turkish E-Government Gateway Application During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to depict the competency trap in E-Government Gateway Application and its reactions during the COVID-19 pandemic. A case study with the delphi method is carried out to examine Turkish E-Government Gateway Application during COVID-19 pandemic as extraordinary condition. The major finding of the study is, as a virtual organization, Turkish E-Government Gateway Application has dapperly adapted itself without falling into the competency trap during the transition from routine to the time of COVID-19. In the wake of gathering, synthesizing, and summarizing the ideas on the digital interactions from specialists among citizens, government and other government agencies, employees, and business comprehensives, detailed reactions are identified according to governmental agency and institutional courses of action during routine and time of COVID-19. This is the first study unfolding e-governmental solutions without a competency trap within the unexpected, extraordinary condition.

KEYWORDS

Competency Traps, Delphi Method, E-Government Gateway, Organizational Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings' individual and collective behaviors are developed by learning, a process that is rooted in and passed down through the generations. Learning enables individuals to better understand and gain insight into their current activities, redesign inefficient processes, and improve future performance (Cook & Brown, 1999; Canato, Provera & Montefusco, 2010). As a long-lasting process, learning is arranged, conducted, and evaluated to survive in a competitive environment. Organizations develop overtime though gaining experience. The more experiences are gained, the more knowledge is created. This provides the organizations to increase their efficiency, productivity, reliability. Such conditions warrant capacity, which is related to competency. Competency, itself is the inevitable necessity of learning and controlling not only at the individual but also at the organization level. In clarifying organizational competence, it is necessary to find the underlying skills, expertise, capacity,

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information, experience, involvement, innovation, and preparation that empower the organization to offer its products or services (Scott, 2011); however, somehow organizations tend to fall into a trap, known as the competency trap (Levitt & March, 1988) which is defined as “the pathology of learning” by some experts (Ahuja, 2016).

These traps do not happen only in physical organizational structures. Virtual organizations such as e-government can also fall into these traps. Therefore, the government agencies should take into consideration facilitating conditions, information quality, performance, and effort expectancy to provide self-control for citizen-centric services. Besides, the government agencies would associate experiences during developing and implementing projects (Sharma et al. 2018).

Since its emergence in late 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the whole world, except Antarctica. Cases are rising daily in Asia, Africa, South America, and Europe. For many places, this implies calamity (The Next Calamity, 2020). Besides many challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic “has presented policymakers at all levels of government with unprecedented challenges to respond to the critical needs of their countries” (UN, 2020). For providing clear and up-to-date information, governments around the world are engaged in digital platforms. As stated in the United Nations E-Government Survey (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic has led countries in terms of focusing on the more innovative ways for especially some activities as healthcare, education, communication, etc. In the light of all these, an answer to “how organizations can enhance their capability to learn and oversee the impacts of competency traps to survive” will be sought.

Motivated by such concerns, the present study is conducted to examine competency traps occurring in the course of a successful electronic government (e-government) gateway project before and during the COVID- 19 pandemic as defined by the World Health Organization. To achieve this purpose, a case study with the Delphi method is carried out to examine the Turkish e-government gateway application during this period.

The structure of the paper is as follows: The first section presents the literature review related to organizational learning, focusing on the competency trap and its various determinants. The research methodology, analysis and findings are discussed in the second section. Finally, the conclusion and discussion sum up the main findings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Organizational Learning

The advancements within the field of science and innovation amid World War II and the ensuing post-Cold War period led to the formation of new societies, trades, and businesses. Such a period made it obligatory for the managers to welcome, accommodate, accustom and adapt to the abnormal, unexpected conditions brought about by the dynamic and ever-changing environment (March, 1991; Scott, 2011). Doubtlessly, meeting these circumstances has become quite complicated from the organizational perspective. In this sense, learning is proposed as a new model (Levinthal & March, 1993). Organizational learning is considered one of the key elements of the strategic renewal of the organizations (Crossan, Lane & White, 1999). Thus, it should be considered as a process that contains four steps as intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing-linking individual, group and organizational levels (Crossan et al. 1999). Accordingly, organizational learning is retained for some time and such factors as routines, procedures, and standards facilitate its existence. In essence, organizational learning opens the way to behavioral changes and moves toward organizational performance by promoting action-orientedness. This implies that organizations can designate, appoint and choose what their future activities or movements will be by recalling past occasions - in the same way, that individuals decide their behaviors agreeing to their environments. Such problems as emergencies, crises, wrong or harmful choices, chaos, or financial trouble that an organization experiences at some point may provide some clues to its leaders in terms of how to act in the future

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