

Chapter 22

“Potential” Barriers to E–Government Implementation in Developing Countries

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ABSTRACT

Developing countries interested in initiating E-Government will confront a number of issues and challenges in this endeavor. These issues and challenges often manifest themselves as “potential” barriers to implementation including: the lack of infrastructure; sustainability; culture; knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes; and, privacy and security. However, as this article shows many of these will not be “real” barriers. This article also presents a number of solutions and recommendations for the potential barriers discussed. Furthermore, research has found that local customization of E-Government will be crucial in developing countries; and, that privacy and security issues do not appear to be as big a concern as may be thought. The intent of this article is to outline the issues and challenges (potential barriers) for E-Government implementation and discuss potential solutions to these barriers, in order to generate a dialogue to establish a solid, technological and social foundation for E-Government.

INTRODUCTION

E-Government can be viewed as a complex mix of and tension between: social inclusion and political engagement; management of change and innovation; and, standardization and integration of information

technology. It includes legal, ethical and political responsibilities (Tassabehji, 2007; Srivastava, 2007; Grant, 2005a; Teicher, 2002). The overall intention of E-Government initiatives is to increase the efficacy, i.e. both the efficiency and effectiveness, of government. To achieve this, countries have been developing and implementing E-Government in a variety of forms for several years (Zambrano,

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2008). However, because it is still a relatively new application of information technology rigorous quantitative research on E-Government covers a broad and somewhat disjointed range of topic areas (Grant, 2005a) and often results in conflicting conclusions. Beyond research, the success of E-Government systems in use has been questioned (Akesson, 2008; Ebbers, 2008; Lovelock, 2002). Even an exact definition of E-Government has not yet been agreed to. Within this article,

E-Government is the term used to refer to a “system” that facilitates interaction between citizens and government via an information and communication technology. Interactions range from accessing government services to increased and enhanced citizen participation in government.

This definition can be applied to virtually every E-Government effort that has been completed, is underway or is being planned. Both the “supply-side” and the “demand-side” of E-Government are embodied in the “system,” in which supply-side interactions are provided by the government and demand-side interactions are used by citizens. E-Government efforts can be small or large, narrowly targeted or very broad, simple or complex. On one hand, government efforts to provide citizens with easier, faster and less costly access to specific transactions such as renewing licenses through E-Government have been largely successful. This is consistent with citizens’ expectations that electronic transactions with their government should mirror the availability and ease of other types of electronic transactions such as E-Commerce or E-Business (Tassabehji, 2007). On the other hand, E-Government efforts with regard to their overall impact are less clear. An exact meaning of the “intention to increase and/or enhance citizen participation” in government, and how that intention can be implemented through E-Government does not yet exist. For example, pseudo governmental agencies such as NGO’s (non-governmental organizations) are

publishing proposed activities on their websites and encouraging citizens to contact their governmental representatives to support these activities. Is this the intention when governments talk about increasing and/or enhancing citizen participation through E-Government?

Whether in developed or developing countries, citizens and their government have a relationship even in abstention. The 2002 Annual Global Accenture Study estimated that 80% of the world’s population lives in developing countries (Chen, 2006). Unfortunately, in developing countries many citizens live in remote areas that are very long distances from government locations. These areas can also be very difficult to get to and/or from. E-Government provides needed access to governmental information and services for citizens in such areas. Further, many E-Government systems now encompass a broad range of information and communication technologies (ICT). For example, telephones and fax machines as well as the Internet and wireless devices such as palm pilots can all be used to conduct transactions with governmental agencies (Singh, 2008). These transactions range from determining where to go to procure various licenses to actually purchasing those licenses. But there are additional needs that can be met through the ICT provided by E-Government initiatives. In fact, within developing countries there is a relationship between ICT initiatives, e.g. a relationship between providing E-Government and bridging the digital divide (Helbig, 2009) that spans access to and the use of technology. By satisfying citizens’ need to access government, E-Government could supply the technology required for many other social initiatives and strategies for growth.

For E-Government to be successfully implemented in developing countries a number of issues and challenges will have to be addressed first (Evans, 2005; Ndou, 2004). This article focuses on these issues and challenges as they are manifested in “potential” barriers to implementing E-Government. These barriers are labeled

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