Chapter 9

E–Government in Malaysia:
Barriers and Progress

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ABSTRACT

This chapter assesses the challenges and achievements of e-government development in Malaysia. After carefully examining the findings of e-government ranking for Malaysia produced by the United Nations; the Centre of Public Policy, Brown University (US); and Waseda University Institute of e-Government, disparities amongst these three institutions were evident. It is argued that different methodological criteria employed by these institutions served as one of the fundamental factors attributable to the varying results. However, findings from these institutions also unearthed some major problems and challenges bedevilling the implementation and growth of e-government in Malaysia. Furthermore, in the course of ascertaining factors which undermine or hinder the further development of e-government in Malaysia, questionnaires and interviews were employed to gather the relevant information. Questionnaires were administered to public officials in federal ministries and departments. And interviews were conducted with 7 e-government pilot project managers. The findings of the survey indicated that while Waseda University Institute of e-Government and the United Nations had exposure to adequate information on e-govenrment development in Malaysia, the same cannot be said of the Centre of Public Policy, Brown University (US). It is vital that for an accelerated and resilient environment for the development of e-government in Malaysia, there must be an systematic and cohesive consolidation of e-government mechanisms such as regulations, capacity building, security measures and policy framework.

INTRODUCTION

From the 1990s, after the Government of Malaysia announced its e-government initiative, tremendous efforts have been made towards enhancing public service delivery via electronic means. Most apparent is the construction of facilities and amenities designed to enhance the electronic flow of information to the public. An example is the establishment of the Multi-Media Super Corridor in 1996 which has a key strategic thrust of developing the Malaysian ICT Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) so as to proliferate ICT expertise and development within Malaysia's public and private sectors. Unfortunately, institutional and organizational progress was still lagging and as a result, it has exacerbated the effectiveness of information delivery to a considerable extent.

Poverty continues to pose serious threats to the development of e-government in Malaysia as most urban and rural poor are cut off from the benefits of the services of e-government due to lack of computer skills and significantly, lack of access to computers and Internet services. As such, there has been an unequal advantage to the benefits of e-services and e-information amongst Malaysians. Access to computers and the Internet are indispensable to the success of e-government services delivery because both are the instruments that make all the goals and targets of the whole concept of e-government to be realized. For instance, the Internet serves as the electronic linkage to e-services and computers serves as the executing instruments of the services. It is discernible that only some, especially the urban population have access to computers and Internet. Due to this reason, e-government service delivery has not been holistic and as a result, its purpose tends to have been hampered since it does not reach certain targets amongst the population.

Coupled with the foregoing, there are disparities with regards to the visibility of e-services at the first tier level agencies, specifically ministerial departments. At this level, access to Internet and the capacity of public officials to utilize the Internet is not encouraging for the development of e-government. The disparity is apparent when one looks at agencies requiring minimal interagency collaboration and integration (Alhabshi, 2001; MNRE, 2006).

In spite of the setbacks inhibiting the rapid development of e-government in Malaysia, its achievements and level of progress cannot be overemphasized, bearing in mind the time e-government earnestly started and the present successful reformation of the public sector. Virtually all services rendered by the Government today are via electronic means. Presently, access to Government services are faster, of high quality and public officials have become more responsive following their exposure to computerized means which has reduced burden inherent in the former conventional practice. It has also made life a lot convenient for citizens. For instance the former conventional process of obtaining an international passport from the immigration department, which takes several months, can now be obtained within a day. Since e-government in the developing world is still an emerging phenomenon, Malaysia's achievements demands reckoning as the Government is still striving hard to tackle all possible drawbacks inhibiting its development in Malaysia.

This chapter specifically explores the level of Malaysia's e-government advancement as well as taking into cognisance, the drawbacks that consistently pervade its progress. This is done through intense study on e-government findings on Malaysia by International e-government research institutes namely; United Nations, the Centre of Public Policy, Brown University, USA and Waseda University Institute of e-Government, Japan. Distinct inquiries and examination were carried out in ministries and government departments simply to obtain up to date facts. Web surveys were also carried out on 71 agencies within Malaysia's 28 ministries. Questionnaires were also distributed to investigate accessibility, administrative and management policy matters; there were intense

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