Chapter 9
National Culture and E–Government Readiness

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ABSTRACT

Diffusion of information and communication technologies is a global phenomenon. In spite of rapid globalization there are considerable differences between nations in terms of the adoption and usage of new technologies. Several studies exploring causal factors including national cultures of information and communication technology adoption have been carried out. The focus of this article is slightly different from other studies in this area. Rather than concentrating on the individual information technology an overall e-Government readiness is the focus. This research conducted an analysis of the impact national culture has on e-Government readiness and its components for 62 countries. E-Government readiness assessment used in this study is based on the UN E-Government Survey 2008, while the national cultural dimensions were identified using Hofstede's model of cultural differences. The research model and hypotheses were formed and tested using correlation and regression analysis. The findings indicate that worldwide e-Government readiness and its components are related to culture. The result has theoretical and practical implications.

INTRODUCTION

Analysis of electronic government readiness worldwide is difficult for conceptual and methodological reasons. Furthermore, little quantitative assessment of the factors that might cause a country to become ready has been conducted or completed so far. Therefore, it is too early to make any comparative or even meta-analysis of various research efforts. This article aims to contribute to empirical research literature in the area of electronic government, focusing on national

culture that might have an impact on the country's readiness for e-Government. Before setting up a theoretical framework for the analysis, we begin by defining the core concepts and identifying the main issues.

The concepts of electronic governance (hereafter labeled e-Governance), electronic government (e-Government), and electronic democracy (e-Democracy) have not been uniquely defined and used in literature. The term e-Government (also called digital or virtual government) is sometimes confused with e-Governance and the two terms are often used interchangeably. For example, Fountain (2004) defining e-Government says it refers to governance affected by Internet use and other information technologies and also includes e-Democracy (see also Fountain, 2001, for an alternative definition). However, e-Governance is a broader concept, which includes the use of information and communication technology (ICT) by government and civil society to promote greater participation of citizens in the governance of political institutions. According to Fang (2002) e-Government can be defined as a way for governments to use the most innovative information and communication technologies, particularly web-based Internet applications, to provide citizens and businesses with more convenient access to government information and services, to improve the quality of the services and to provide greater opportunities to participate in democratic institutions and processes.

Though most of the e-Government definitions focus more on use of technology, management and delivery of public services (for example Edmiston, 2003), Pardo (2000) stated that e-Government is about transforming the fundamental relationship between government and the public. In other words, eGovernment initiatives are complex efforts to change intended to use new and emerging technologies to support a transformation in the operation and effectiveness of government. Grönlund (2003) pointed to the strategic aspect of e-Government initiative by stating that "elec-

tronic government refers certainly to more use of information technology (IT), but more importantly to attempts to achieve more strategic use of IT in the public sector" (p. 55). This strategic aspect of e-Government opens discussion of some societal and technical topics and the interactions between the two, as was noted by DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, Robinson & John (2001). On the societal level, they suggested that the adaptation of government and civic engagement to increasingly computerized environments raises political, organizational, and social questions concerning use, context, reciprocal adaptation mechanisms, learning, the design of government work, the design of political and civic communities of interest, and the design of nation states in addition to international governance bodies.

In this article, we have accepted the definitions and classification provided by Rogers Okot-Uma. As a starting point he uses the Good Governance concept to clearly explain the relationships between e-Governance, e-Government and e-Democracy Okot-Uma (2004) defines Good Governance as processes and structures that guide political and socio-economic relationships, with particular reference to "commitment to democratic values, norms & practices; trusted services; and to just and honest business". E-Governance includes all processes and structures by means of which the new ICTs can be used by government to enable:

- Administration of government and delivery services to the public; this constitutes e-Government;
- All forms of electronic communications between government and citizen with the aim of informing, representing, encouraging to vote, consulting and involving the citizen. This constitutes e-Democracy;
- Transact business with its partners, clients and the markets. This constitutes government electronic business.

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