Chapter 12
Comparative Study of E–Government Implementation in Two Public Agencies in Oman

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ABSTRACT

Electronic government has been established as an effective mechanism for increasing government productivity and efficiency and a key enabler of citizen-centric services. Like the rest of the world, in Gulf countries, public sector transformation efforts are focused towards increasing accessibility, availability, competitive advantage, and enhancing services in civil administration. The e-government initiative in Oman was officially started in 2003 and has achieved mixed results due to various challenges faced by the different ministries engaged in implementation. Using a semi-structure interview, this chapter examines some of these challenges from the perspective of two government ministries. The chapter investigates the improvements that have been made to facilitate electronic services in the chosen public ministries and their resulting impact within the organization. The results of the empirical study reveal that some of the challenges faced by the Omani government in implementing e-services are generic, while other specific challenges faced by the individual ministries such as top management support, IT integration, and IT staff skills and capabilities are more significant in terms of facilitating e-government success in the Omani public sector.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic government (e-government) can be broadly viewed as the adoption of information and

communication technology (ICT) in government organisations to improve public services. Equally, it has created a platform for better collaboration and information sharing between various government agencies. Implementation efforts in most countries have now evolved from basic infor-

mation provisioning to more integrated service offerings that involve cross-agency process and information systems (IS) transformation to enable more joined-up and citizen-centric e-government services. However, public sector service transformation is a complex undertaking involving distributed decision-making that requires a good understanding of the political context, business processes and technology as well as design and engineering methods capable of breaking through the traditional boundaries that exist between public organisation units. Conversely, from a demand perspective extensive efforts are required to increase citizens' awareness about the transformation of the delivery of government services and their online availability (Weerakkody, et al., 2008; Moulder, 2001).

For many countries, e-government implementation efforts began in the late 1990s. The e-government led implementation of ICT in public administration during the last ten years has offered better, faster and more transparent means for citizens and businesses to interact with government organisations. Given that the public sector is often classified as bureaucratic, inefficient and less technology savvy, e-government can be considered as a revolution that was waiting to happen, particularly in a developing country context. Given this context, e-government has the potential to radically change public sector agencies and offer many benefits that were previously not envisaged (Irani et al., 2007; 2008).

While all developed countries have now implemented some form of e-government with advanced level of services and transactions (Al-Kibsi et al., 2001; Weerakkody et al., 2007), the majority of developing countries are beginning to follow suit (Kurunananda and Weerakkody, 2006). Not surprisingly, wealthy Middle Eastern countries such as UAE and Bahrain have made plans to provide e-government services to citizens and businesses (Al-Busaidy and Weerakkody 2008). As in many countries, the national e-government focus in Oman is to achieve the highest performance in

executing governmental transactions electronically, through streamlining Government services to citizens and business, creating and nurturing knowledge-based industries, developing a local ICT sector, providing employment for Omani youth, Improving educational opportunities and enhancing social development using IT Making Oman a more attractive destination for foreign investment and conducive for business (ITA, 2009).

However, for e-government implementation to be widespread and successful, exemplary strategies and practices need to be identified in addition to establishing and prioritizing processes to be e-enabled. Furthermore, every e-government programme needs to have a clear idea of the proposed benefits to citizens, what challenges need to be overcome and the level of institutional change that needs to take place for it to be successful in a given context (Hazlett and Hill., 2003). While many developed countries have identified successful strategies and overcome obstacles to pioneer the e-government concept (Jones et al., 2007), developing countries such as Oman have much to learn in this context. However, there has been little research done to examine, for instance, the reasons for the lack of progress since the initiation of the national e-government project in Oman in 2003 (Al-busaidy and Weerakkody, 2009). The national e-government programme has been delayed more than once and its strategy and focus have also been changed in recent times (ibid). Moreover, there is very little published literature (apart from UN reports) that identifies the issues impeding e-government efforts in Oman. The study aims to address the question of why the progress of e-government has been laggard in some Omani governmental ministries while a few others have made exemplary progress to implement fully integrated and interactive e-government services. As such, the chapter aims to determine the most salient factors that are influencing e-government progress from the perspective of the IT directors in three government ministries who are at various levels of e-government implementation

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