

## Chapter 63

# An Organizing Vision for E-Participation Projects in Africa

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter is concerned with exploring an alternative organizing vision for effective e-participation relevant to developing countries in Africa. The premise is that e-participation, as an e-government artifact, remains relatively poorly developed at the levels of theory and practice. The presentation adopts an explanatory critique by drawing on various perspectives; some of which are grounded on empirical results, while others are based on an analysis of literature. Under the alienating conditions of digital exclusion in Africa, the emergent e-government organizing vision is an evolving and technical artifact, with strong managerialist orientations of augmenting and reinforcing central governments control over its polity. Two consequences are highlighted: an evolution of public administration towards a technocracy, and increasing the efficiency of government bureaucracy through managerialization. This emerged concept reinforces digital exclusion, and thus hinders effective e-participation.*

*To address the shortcomings of this artifact concept, the chapter further presents literature and insights from prior analyses to underpin a nomadic e-participation framework for realizing effective e-participation. The framework is clustered around two major layers of building Mobile Communities: building local networks of governance and building flexible networks. The emphasis in the proposed framework is that the current conceptualization of e-government stifles e-participation, which therefore limits greater online public participation and deliberations on public policy issues.*

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## INTRODUCTION

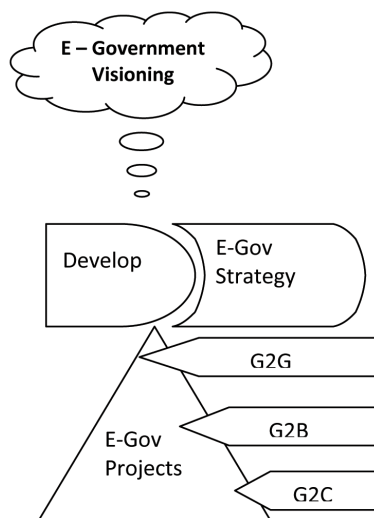
This chapter's contribution is positioned within an information and knowledge society discourse, which rests on the claim that all known societies derive their *power, wealth and meaning* from their possession of information and knowledge (Mazlish, 1993; Castells, 2004) in a new technological paradigm of informationalism<sup>1</sup>. This network society is characterized by a duality of inclusion and exclusion in which there is selective diffusion of the various Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) which impacts on peoples local experiences, while *globalization* structures production, consumption and power (Castells, 2004). This chapter elevates the role of e-participation (based on an e-government infrastructure) as an organizing metaphor for the development of an e-government vision for the restructuring of the public sector service delivery mechanisms. The premise for this claim rests on the rationale that the e-government vision (visioning) forms the foundation for the articulation of e-government strategies (Figure 1) that are linked to specific e-government projects (government - to- government; government –to–business and government

-to–citizens). The *process* of developing a holistic e-government vision and e-government strategy (ies) is crucial for successful e-government project planning and implementation.

The e-government deployment process typically starts, implicitly or not, with the various stakeholders agreeing on some commonly accepted goal for the overall e-government project. Typically, the global perspective of the e-government vision is for governments to serve various stakeholders through Internet – based web interfaces, thus reducing or removing the need to visit brick and mortar facilities (Arif, 2008). In modern governments, the service orientation and e-government are therefore inextricably intertwined, underscored by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2005) to imply the application of information and communication technology within public administration to optimize its internal and external functions, thereby providing government, the citizen and business with a set of tools that can potentially transform the way in which interactions take place, services are delivered, knowledge is utilized, policy is developed and implemented, the way citizens participate in governance and public administration reform; and the way good governance goals are met.

E-Government projects (and project management) must therefore be linked to specific goals that e-government is meant to realize. From a stakeholder perspective, Bhatnagar and Singh (2004) link three generic outcomes that should underpin the development of specific e-government strategies relevant for developing countries. *Client – Centric and Agency outcomes* should focus on impacts that realize economic benefits; improved governance (reducing corruption, enhancing accountability and transparency and increasing participation); improved quality of service and agency process improvements. At the Government –as – a whole and societal level, outcomes of e-government projects should emphasize long term impacts on Millennium Development Goals

Figure 1. E-government deployment



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