

Chapter 65

Improving E–Government Project Management: Best Practices and Critical Success Factors

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ABSTRACT

E-government is becoming an enabler for better government through cost-effective and efficient service delivery, and can become a useful tool for effective governance, public administration, and public sector transformation. However, e-government projects are noted for many failures due to several reasons. These include inadequate planning, poor project management, lack of top management support, lack of stakeholder involvement, scope creep, etc. Dwelling on the project management literature as well as reviews of award winning e-government project and portfolio management best practices in a state government and a local utility district, this chapter concludes that e-government initiatives should adopt a more concrete project management methodology, align e-government goals with organizational strategic goals, develop project management competences, as well as understand and apply critical success factors to ensure the successful planning and implementation of e-government projects.

INTRODUCTION

The development and management of information technologies (IT) in the public sector has become a critical aspect of most government operations in recent years. Governments around the world depend on these systems to reduce cost, improve

service delivery, engage citizens and enhance operational efficiency. Unfortunately, studies show that many e-government projects fail to meet expectations in terms of cost, schedule and functionality. Comparing strategic issues and implementation of e-government between developed and developing countries, Chen et al. (2006) argue that most if not all e-government strategies in the literature are from the perspectives of developed

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countries and not from developing countries. A survey of e-government projects in developing and transition economies revealed that 85 percent are partial (unattained goals) or total (abandoned implementation) failure (Heeks, 2003a).

Reasons for the above-mentioned failures include lack of internal ownership, absence of vision or strategy, poor project management, inadequate technological infrastructure and obstacles to data interchange (Heeks, 2003b), lack of a business case for the project, over reliance on technology as the main driver for e-government, lack of sufficient administrative reform to accompany e-government (Schware, 2004), inadequate planning, and lack of top management support. The likelihood of system failure in its implementation has also been linked to the extent of scale and scope (Pardo & Scholl, 2002; Heeks, 2002; Goldfinch, 2007), as well as the complexity (Melin & Axelson, 2009) of the system. E-government implementation problems are compounded by the fact that IT project management in the public sector is complicated by public scrutiny, political pressures, uncertainty, ambiguity, multi-faced stakeholder management issues and the need for accountability. In the public sector, the interconnected natures of e-government systems across different organizations, department and agencies pose many complex challenges that are not easily overcome (Gil-Garcia & Pardo, 2005).

Given the challenges and complexities inherent in e-government implementation, successful project management is needed if the transformation of government through e-government systems is to succeed. Additionally, a project management framework that aligns IT with the strategic goals of public agencies while focusing on project management competences, the work environment, as well as project roles and responsibilities, will help integrate process, people and technology, reduce project failures and meet strategic goals of public agencies. Dwelling on the project management literature, as well as reviews of award winning e-government project and portfolio manage-

ment best practices in a state government and a local utility district, this chapter discusses how the adoption of concrete project management methodology, strategic alignment of project goals with enterprise goals, the development of project management competences, as well as knowledge and application of critical success factors, could help improve the management of e-government projects.

DEVELOPING METHODOLOGY AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT COMPETENCY

E-government project planning and implementation are fraught with various obstacles, including resistance to change, leadership and political commitment, lack of funding, as well as legal and regulatory frameworks (OECD, 2003; World Wide Web Consortium, 1999). Some of the major causes of e-government project failures are the lack of methodologies and concrete models to translate high level prescriptions into actions, as well as the lack of cohesion between related projects (Janowski, Estevez & Ojo, 2007). Consequently, while some individual projects may be deemed successful based on the delivery of the promised products, the overall objectives of the program initiating the different projects may not be met. In order to minimize e-government project failure, understanding of the system development life cycle and adherence to methodology is of paramount importance.

Whitten and Bentley (2005) describes a system development life cycle (SDLC) as a logical process by which systems analysts, software engineers, programmers and end-users build information systems and computer applications to solve business problems and needs. The SDLC applies to information system development projects ensuring that all functional and user requirements and agency strategic goals and objectives are met. The SDLC provides a structured and standardized

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