

Chapter 73

Overlooking Organizational Culture: Problems in Analyzing the Success and Failures of E-Government in Developing Countries

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ABSTRACT

The growth of the information communication technologies (ICTs) has fostered the adoption of e-government across the globe. E-government offers many benefits to developing countries. However, these countries are often plagued with problems that inhibit the implementation of e-government initiatives. As a result, research in e-government has attempted to offer solutions by listing the factors that influence the success and failures of e-government initiatives. The argument is made here, however, that by failing to consider the internal complexities unique to developing countries, these factors only offer palliative solutions to problem. Furthermore, these factors overlook the role that organizational culture plays in influencing the success or failure of e-government initiatives. Following existing literature in e-government, this research will highlight some the major factors listed for e-government successes and failures in developing countries. It will also show how influential organizational culture is in understanding the organizational changes proposed by e-government programs as well as how it has been overlooked in much of the existing literature.

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INTRODUCTION

With the growth of information communication technologies (ICTs), e-government initiatives have become common place in governments across the world. Despite the substantial amount of research, 35% of e-government initiatives in developing countries are classified as failures (Heeks, 2003a). The central question then becomes why are e-government initiatives in developing countries often unsuccessful? Shin et al. state that though there have been many studies on e-government success factors, the focus has however been directed to developed countries (2008). They add that empirical studies examining the unique requirements or conditions of e-government in developing countries are still scanty. As such, Ndou (2004) contends that the effect of e-government strategies requires focused studies and approaches in the study of e-government in developing countries. Becker et al. (2004) note that research should be directed unto those factors that influence e-government success, which do not result from national characteristics. Though this is a step in the right direction, I contend that it is still problematic since developing countries are heavily influenced by internal complexities, such as differing political, cultural and social environments. By failing to consider these internal complexities much of the research offers only palliative solutions to the problems faced during the implementation of e-government in developing countries. The result is often a list of generalizable success factors that may or may not apply to differing contexts.

Nevertheless, a few recurring themes do arise when these factors are analyzed such as organizational change and organizational responsibility for e-government. Despite this, only a limited amount of the literature focuses on the underlying influences of organizational change, such as organizational culture or organizational learning. Following the current literature in e-government, this chapter will highlight some of the major underlying factors often presented as a reason

for e-government failure. Granted that many of themes involve some aspect of organizational change, efforts will be undertaken to point out how developing countries can smoothen out the transitional problems that arise from e-government by first understanding how organizational culture influences organizational change. Due to internal complexities it is difficult, if not impossible, to create a universal model for e-government implementation that ensures success. However, the suggestion is made that if leaders in developing countries understand and consider their contextual issues, then they can increase the probability of e-government success in their countries.

BACKGROUND

Defining E-Government

The growth of ICTs has had a significant impact on the function of governments. ICTs are technologies such as the internet, intranet, extranets and other such technologies that “cover the spectrum from basic infrastructure implementation to technologies that improve services and operations in an organization” (Gupta, Dasgupta and Gupta, 2008, p. 140). The use of ICTs in government is referred to as e-government. The governmental use of ICTs is on the rise across the world with 19% of all governments offering online services (Ibid.). Gupta et al. (2008) state that e-government is defined as the use of technology to enhance the access and delivery of services to benefit citizens, employees and business partners. Literature in e-government often borrows or builds upon the definition offered by the World Bank (Dada, 2006; Falabi, 2007; Kaaya, 2004). The World Bank defines e-government as the use of ICTs by government agencies, such as the internet, wide area networks, and mobile computing, “to transform relations with citizens, business and other arms of government” (World Bank, n.d.).

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