Chapter 3
City E-Government:
Scope and its Realization

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the authors identify and explore the optimal scope of a generic city-level e-Government program. In order to corroborate theoretical research, a comprehensive feature comparison of different e-Government elements/services, of select city web sites from various countries in the world is conducted. The research finds that despite the manifest common features, the inherent scope of service provision by the websites studied is unique. This finding gives rise to the understanding that customizing e-Government initiatives is ideally conducive to the local needs of the constituents.

INTRODUCTION

The allure of "transformation", of making the city government agile, efficient, responsive, and of "potential" cost savings, may seem "irresistible" to a new city government that is committed to change the traditional bureaucratic ways of working as well as to reduce taxation. This trend for electronic government (e-Government) is growing, and 189 countries were online in 2008, as compared to 179 countries in 2005 (United Nations, 2008). E-government is being increasingly viewed as a vastly available, increasingly acceptable and generally integral aspect of modern government, with potential to enhance efficiency and effectiveness, reduce costs and even transform the government "affecting the management of human, technological, and organizational resources and processes" (Grant & Chau, 2005, p. 1). As far back as in 2001, in an e-Government conference, "New York City's then-mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, presented his city's goals to reduce costs, eliminate

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bureaucracy and become more open, responsive and accountable" (Ballmer, 2002). Also, it seems that the trend has now shifted from focusing on the "technical issue" of providing a Web site, to having an integrated e-Government solution. The leading consultants' international firm Accenture, in its sixth annual global report of 2005, "Leadership in Customer Service: New Expectations, New Experiences," states that "A look at e-Government programs across the globe shows that continued incremental improvements in this area are unlikely to yield significant boosts to maturity. To advance now, governments must focus on a much broader vision" (Accenture, 2005, p. 1). Such a possibly predicted shift indicates the future provision of customer service to citizens through multiple channels. It is also suggested "that genuine cost savings and quality improvements will occur only if there is a re-engineering of the internal structures and processes of the administration towards a connected form of governance" (United Nations, 2008). These trends are increasingly indicative of the fact that this is the ideal time to rework the basics to bring about the expected efficiency near-future demands will necessitate. We find this as an adequate motivation to study one of the very basic aspects of a city e-government: the scope of a city e-government.

In this paper we attempt to broadly outline the scope of city e-government, essentially to find the area within which the city e-Government is expected to operate. In the absence of any landmark study on the subject it is interesting to look at the scope *ab initio*. After considering the basic paradigms, we look at some studies which have researched the features of city e-Government Web sites and have set up benchmarks grounded in prevailing theory for the same. Then, we study at the city e-Government Web sites of select major cities across the globe and try to ascertain the area within which these e-governments are practically operating at the present. This gives the study checkpoints for the scope that has been actually realized, or achieved in practice, by these city e-governments.

SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE

E-Government has been defined in various ways, one of the common definitions being: the use of the Internet to deliver services and information to citizens and businesses (Ho & Ni, 2004; Holden, Norris & Fletcher, 2003; Reddick, 2004a). Arguably, this definition needs to encompass other users, other government levels, and also the government employees. A number of studies have looked into the functioning of e-Government at local levels in the U.S. (West, 2001; Kaylor et al., 2001; Edmiston, 2002; Holden, Norris & Fletcher, 2003; Reddick, 2004a; Ho, 2002; Reddick, 2004b; Moon, 2002), in Canada (Charih & Robert, 2004; Kernaghan, 2005; Reddick, 2007), in European Union and in other countries (Torres et al., 2005; Criado & Ramilo, 2003; Archer, 2005). While many studies have focused on the evaluation of features of the city e-Government Web sites, their navigability and content standards; benchmarking studies based on optimal set of functions are relatively less (Stowers, 1999; Johnson & Misic, 1999; West, 2000; Spearman, Welch & Associates, 2000; Norris, Fletcher & Holden, 2001; Kaylor et al., 2001). However, features and functions on a Web site are the manifestations of the extent of the scope of e-Government that has been realized, or achieved, in practice. The realized extent of the scope may actually be only a fraction of the full scope of city e-government. In the public sector, scope is of critical importance, as its lays down a boundary, beyond which any use of public monies or government budget may neither be advisable, nor legally possible. We have not been able to find any literature dealing with the scope of local e-Government in this context; therefore, we start our study from basics.

Defining Scope

For the purpose of this paper we define scope of e-Government as the extent, range or area in which it can act or operate; or has power to control in order to attain its objectives. In this paper we