Chapter III

The Emergence of Digital Government: International Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This chapter gives an overview of the extent to which e-government has been adopted internationally by reviewing major comparative studies and case studies by international organizations. The characteristics of the five stages of e-government — emerging, enhanced, interactive, transactional, and seamless are outlined and international examples of the innovative practices and potential obstacles faced. Of particular interest are studies on countries that have implemented transactional e-government strategies with service-delivery to citizens as the main priority. Currently adoption of e-government strategies worldwide is varied; however, many countries are making rapid progress in implementing their strategies.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will introduce digital government in the international context and evaluate the extent to which e-government strategies have been adopted worldwide. Enthusiasm for digital government has been widespread among both developed and developing countries, but the opportunities and challenges differ from country to country. Developing countries face particularly acute challenges in designing and implementing e-government strategies.

Internationally, the push towards digital government is a combination of several factors: the use of information and communication technology by citizens and non-governmental organizations to influence policymakers; the migration of information

including draft government legislation and services on-line; and the availability of the necessary telecommunications infrastructure. In addition, e-government strategies have grown, in part, out of a need for public sector reform and the promise of information and communication technology to increase government efficiency. Both domestic and international pressures for increased accountability, transparency, human rights and financial management have influenced national government adoption of e-government strategies (UNESCO, 2002).

However, currently there is no international standard approach to the development and implementation of e-government strategies. By analyzing recent benchmarking reports and detailed case studies of several countries at each stage of digital government development, this chapter will serve to highlight a wide range of international best practices in digital government. These case studies, most of which have been conducted by international organizations, bring to life common classifications of e-government stages with specific examples of the potential opportunities for improved efficiency, better information, new technology and increased interaction and services for citizens, businesses and among government agencies.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter uses the United Nations' (UN) "Benchmarking E-government" classification of the five stages of e-government presence, which builds on previous classifications as proposed by other international organizations, private sector consulting firms and *The Economist*. For each stage of e-government, one national Web site is showcased and the URL is provided in order to give readers a sense for international government Web sites and their services and encourage further exploration of country Web sites. While the use of the terminology of five stages is not ideal due to their heavy focus on service delivery in lieu of other national goals for e-government, it is a useful tool for students, researchers and practitioners alike.

The countries surveyed in this chapter appeared in more than one international study and were selected because of the existence of well-documented case studies by international organizations and private sector consulting firms. In addition, the countries chosen represent a diversity of world regions including North America, Latin and South America, Africa, Europe and Asia and a range of economic development levels.

OVERVIEW OF MAJOR INTERNATIONAL E-GOVERNMENT STUDIES

In recent years, there have been a number of major international benchmarking studies on e-government by university research centers, international organizations and private sector consulting firms. Benchmarking surveys have become important so that government agencies can compare their e-government progress with their peers in other countries. The following section will summarize the main findings of these studies before moving on to specific examples of e-government initiatives at varying levels of development later in this chapter.

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