E-GOVERNANCE AS THE WAY OF SIMPLIFYING AND SPEEDING UP SERVICE DELIVERY

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Abstract:

E-government is one of the terms that are referenced more often in this age of digital technology and innovation. E-government is short for electronic government and refers to the use of internet and web to deliver government information and services to the citizens. E- government , globally is used to simplify and speed up service delivery to the communities. There are countless benefits that come with e-government services if it is strategically implemented to help the government deliver basic services to the people. Accountability is one of the cornerstones of good governance; however, it can be difficult for scholars and practitioners to navigate the myriad of different types of accountability. Most countries are multi-cultural and are homes to other citizens which make population rate to increase tremendously and that results into slow or even poor government services deliveries. Moreover, basic services to community members has been a burden as many people complain of long queues to accessing government services in good time and with less hassle. With the shortage of trained staff, many citizens are always complaining of poor government services deliveries and attitudes. Very few government services are responding to e-governance as the best option to bridge the gap. As many people are Digital Citizens and have access to the internet connection almost anywhere around them, they can use their smart phones, cloud computing, tablets and other internet enabled devices to access information and respond to it. This paper hopes to establish which platforms and open source software they can employ to access government services to bridge the gap both formally and informally. It outlines the present debate, focusing on the definition and substance of different forms of accountability and considers the key role that legislatures play in ensuring accountability. We will further review the current status of e-government services, and present results from user surveys which highlight the benefits that people are gaining from this innovation.

Keywords: Digital citizens, E-governance, cloud computing, open source software.

Introduction

We live in a world that has seen a multitude of scientific and technological innovations and advances. One arguably revolutionary innovation has been the advent of the Internet. The Internet along with various other Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has drastically changed the operations of private business, government and the non-profit sector. These organizations have chosen to utilize ICTs to survive in an increasingly dynamic, demanding and complex world. Furthermore, organizations have seen expectations for value and

quality of services rise from their various stakeholders (Devadoss, Pan, & Huang, 2003). In response, governments, businesses and charities have invested in ICT solutions with the hope of fuelling some of the expectations of their stakeholders. In line with world trends, the government of South Africa has, over the last decade, recognized the importance of information and communications technology (ICT) and more recently e-government in improving the standards of service delivery and increasing the overall efficiencies of government. As a result, investments in ICT infrastructure have been growing steadily. Information and communication technologies are critical in fighting poverty and uplifting the socio-economic and living standards of the people. ICT has the potential to empower people to overcome development obstacles, address social problems, and strengthen democratic institutions. However, for a country to gain from the benefits of ICTs, technology must be implemented and used effectively. The South African government is implementing e-government with a number of poverty alleviation programmes to improve the living standards of its people such as Municipal Public-Private Partnership Pilot Programme (MPPP) and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). The use of e government has since improved service delivery and has sped up processes to the public sector. Kaisara and Pather (2011:212) state that the public sector has formed working relations with the private sector in the pursuit of service excellence in an attempt to meet the service expectations for citizens. Pike and Barnes in Crous (2006:400) define Total Quality Management (TQM) as 'a philosophy that aims to inspire the behavior and interactions of people in work situations, through their attitudes, aspirations and motivations, to produce quality service'. This means that policy implementers and service providers must ensure that services delivered should be satisfactory and expectations should be met. Customers should therefore be consulted about the services continuously through market research. E-Governance is therefore an attempt by government to ensure total quality management and delivery of public services, however this has its challenges and success which this paper will highlight below.

Challenges of e-government in South Africa

Despite South Africa's significant investment in ICT infrastructure, policy and regulatory framework to effectively roll out e-government services, the country faces a number of challenges. Service delivery in South Africa is guided by the principle of public service for all under the brand "Batho Pele" (translated to mean people first). The eight Batho Pele principles serve as an acceptable policy and legislative framework regarding service delivery in the public sector. These principles include (Department of Public Service and Administration, 1996); consultation (engaging with customers in terms of what they want); service standards (continually improving services); access (enabling disadvantaged persons to access services and speaking in understandable languages); courtesy (being polite, courteous and friendly to customers); information (reaching all customers to make sure they are well informed about the services government departments provide); openness and transparency (being open and honest about every aspect of work by publishing annual reports to tell citizens how resources were used, how much everything costs, including costs for staff and equipment delivery, services); redress/dealing with complaints (providing a mechanism for customers to record when they are unhappy with a service); and best value (giving customers the best service using all the

resources, eliminating waste, fraud and corruption; and finding new ways to improve services at little or no cost). Despite well expressed service delivery principles, South Africa is faced with a number of challenges in terms of service delivery, including problems of poverty, inequality, corruption, insecurity, illiteracy, skills shortage amongst many. The low level of success discourages a lot of people from using these facilities meant to enhance service delivery leading to user dissatisfaction. Furthermore, 45 per cent of South Africa's population is estimated to be living in rural areas, where ICT infrastructure is far less developed than in urban areas. Lack of equal access to all citizens especially with regard to rural-urban divide in the distribution of national resources, long distance travelled, shortage in the skills necessary to use the internet, read or understand the content; long waiting times to use the internet; and the high costs of access. The people residing in rural areas rely on word of mouth as a method of passing information. It is therefore important to realize the potential of accessing and passing information via mobile devices and internet in areas where they gather to share information. The growing theft of copper cables has affected e-governance negatively, and undermined the implementation of unbundling policy in South Africa as well as being a threat to the country's security and socio-economic development. South Africa, during 2008, experienced a deficit in its electricity supply.

E-government successes in South Africa

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) successfully developed an e-procurement system that allows for open and transparent bidding of government tenders aimed at preventing corruption. Moreover, the IEC leverages tools of multi-access to promote free and fair elections. In 2004, for example, IEC, in partnership with cell phone service providers, enabled voters to short message service (SMS) their identity number, and in return receive a message back indicating their eligibility to vote and the voting station's details. Moreover, a satellite-enabled network made it possible for the commission to register voters; relay, collect and verify ballots; and relay results across the country. Custom-designed handheld scanners captured information from bar-coded ID books and greatly streamlined the process of voter registration. The other successful e-government project is the South African Revenue Services' (SARS) e-filing system which provides a way to conduct transactions related to tax returns on the internet between government and business. The National Traffic Information System (eNaTIS) an e-government initiative that is used for the application for driving licenses and the registration and licensing of motor vehicles; notification of change of ownership/sale of motor vehicles; and application for learners licenses has been a successful project. The transactions and services can be provided by most transport offices across the nine provinces in the country (National Traffic Information System, 2008). The web site of the Department of Labour is an excellent example of a public agency web site that is well tailored to the needs of its stakeholders. The web site is noted for being attractive and simple in design, allowing users to easily find the information they are looking for. In addition, there are various online filings/registrations, and the posting of online vacancies is available. The Department of Labour's web site is a fully featured site that is a one stop shop for labour issues.

E-Government outcomes

Scholars have purported that e-Government projects have seen more failures than successes (Anthopoulos et al., 2016; Guha & Chakrabarti, 2014; Heeks & Molla, 2009; Nurdin, Stockdale, & Scheepers, 2012). For example, the World Bank has acknowledged that a significant portion of their ICT related investments have been largely unsuccessful (Independent Evaluation Group, The World Bank, 2011). The organisation indicates that with respect to ICT applications, 74 percent of World Bank projects had ICT components, but the Bank Group's record has been modest, reflecting the intrinsic high risks in the implementation of information technology (IT) projects.

Mutula and Mostert (2010) cite some South African examples of e-Government projects that did not meet stakeholder expectations. These include the Golaganang project that was to provide government employees with cost effective ICT resources and address their digital literacy needs however it failed to launch. Alternatively, a project for the National Welfare Agency which did start with an intention to rollout over three years was found to have only reached 40% of their goals in the sixth year of the project with higher than anticipated costs (Mutula & Mostert, 2010). Heeks (2005) highlights that there are three main types of outcomes for e-Government projects namely: Firstly, a total failure: the initiative was never implemented or was implemented but immediately abandoned. Secondly, a partial failure: major goals for the initiative were not attained and/or there were significant undesirable outcomes.

International benchmarking

The world is going through rapid transformation owing to the fast pace of change in technological developments and adoptions. A benchmarking exercise of South African government activities against the UN e government maturity model resulted in an egovernment classification Level 2 enhanced presence.