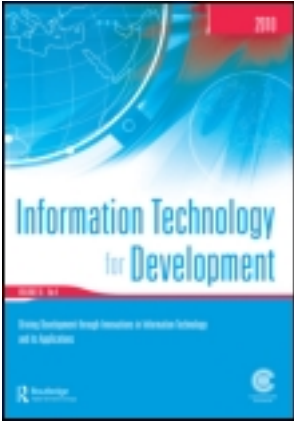


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E-Government and IT Policy: Choices for Government Outreach and Policy Making

Editorial Introduction

Sajda Qureshi

Editor-in-Chief

Governments that want to connect with their citizens through online media can potentially implement their policies more effectively and increase their influence on citizens more directly. The delivery of public sector information and services to citizens through the Internet is considered to be e-government. While the benefits of e-government are compelling, it is worth noting that the countries that are taking advantage of this trend are those that have a high concentration of Internet hosts per thousand inhabitants. The benefits of e-government may indeed materialize in countries where a majority of the electorate uses the Internet frequently. At the same time, GSM-based mobile (wireless) phones are replacing land line connections in many developing countries because of the cost and unreliability of land connections—this has an impact on Internet viability for e-government.

A study conducted by West (2003) on global e-government of 2,166 national government websites in 198 countries around the world paints an interesting picture. While most of the government Web sites offer primarily informational content, only 16% offer services that are fully executable online. While West's definition of services included only those services that were fully executable online, he found that interactive features, such as information provision over e-mail, enabled public outreach. Such outreach is achieved when citizens register on the website and receive information on a particular subject, such as a newsletter highlighting a prime minister's views, as it becomes available (West, 2003). West (2003) found that the country with the largest number of online services was Singapore, with an average of 7.8 services across its government agencies. This was followed by the United States (4.8 services), Turkey (3.2 services), Hong Kong (3.1 services), and Taiwan (2.4 services). It is interesting to note that many of the countries in which e-government is the most developed are those that were considered developing countries only a few decades ago. Have investments in e-government combined with concerted IT policy measures enabled these governments to inject momentum into their economies?

The connection between national policies and development appears to be an illusive one. However, an understanding of what constitutes this link can provide governments with powerful tools to bring about economic growth (Easterly, King, Levine, & Rebelo, 1991). There appears to be a sense that Information Technology (IT) can bring about economic growth. Balamoune-Lutz (2003) suggest that income and government trade policies influence

information and communication technology (ICT) diffusion. The diffusion of particular ICTs, such as personal computers and Internet hosts, seem to have a positive association with income (Bali moune-Lutz, 2003). In practice, the distinction between e-government and IT policy is not as clear as we expect it to be. The practice of e-government tends to feed into the policies that governments undertake in attempting to stimulate growth through IT and, in some cases, vice versa. Another question arises as to whether e-government changes the role of government or does it merely take existing services and deliver them in a different way? The papers in this issue reflect this interdependency and shed valuable light onto the practice of e-government in and policy implications for particular countries—China, India, Jordan, and Thailand. These countries represent economies that are emerging as part of a potent force driving IT for development.

The first paper in this issue, entitled “The Impact of Information and Communication Technology on Relation-Based Governance System,” is by Shaomin Li. This study offers an analysis of the interface between ICT and corporate governance and how the interface differs across countries with different political and economic environments. Li proposes a theoretical framework of relation-based and rule-based governance that distinguishes economies based on whether they rely on personal relations or public rules to govern business. He suggests that, from an economics viewpoint, more-developed countries tend to be rule-based and less-developed countries (LDCs) tend to be relation-based. Using the theoretical framework presented in this paper, Li analyzes the interface between ICT and corporate governance, and the barriers to adopting ICT by relation-based LDCs. He argues that economic and legal-system-specific governance effects are more important in achieving development than national cultural effects on ICT adoption. He concludes that, in the long run, ICT will make rule-based, developed countries more competitive. They will thus exert pressures on relation-based LDCs and accelerate the transition of LDCs from relation-based to rule-based governance. Increasing ICT compatibility, in turn, will facilitate LDCs transition to rule-based governance.

“Implementing Public Information Systems in Developing Countries: Learning from a Success Story” is the second paper in this issue and is coauthored by S. Krishna and Geoff Walsham. Public information system implementations in developing countries have had to confront many serious challenges, and generally have had a poor record of success. The authors report on a series of successful projects implemented in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India. They analyze the context and processes involved, and consider implications for the success of information systems projects in general in developing countries. The lessons can be summarized as (1) detailed effort and attention to the involvement of multiple groups; (2) innovative organizational structures; (3) a people-orientation in project selection; and (4) persistence over time, backed by committed and knowledgeable leadership. The principal lesson from the Andhra Pradesh experience is that successful implementation of public information systems in developing countries needs to clearly state and communicate objectives. Facilitating people can create a virtuous cycle enrolling stakeholders and sustaining such projects. They conclude that successful implementation of public information systems involves managing processes at several levels in complex contexts.

Claudio Ciborra and Diego Navarra coauthor the third paper, entitled “Good Governance, Development Theory, and Aid Policy: Risks and Challenges of E-Government in Jordan.” Ciborra and Navarra suggest that poor governance is among the most important causes of state failure and underdevelopment. Hence innovations and reforms in the bureaucratic apparatus is an important prerequisite for development. E-government policy initiatives have become attractive in the donor community as e-government applications can enable a state

organization to become more successful. This study focuses on the analysis and early design of e-government solutions in a less developed country: Jordan. It shows that implementing a general standardized ICT portfolio to support good governance is a difficult task, as there are a number of risks related to development aid policies aimed at good governance. The paper provides evidence suggesting that the e-government view of the minimal state put forward by International Development Agencies might not be conducive to rapid development.

The fourth paper, entitled “Factors Contributing to IT Industry Success in Developing Countries: The Case of Thailand,” by Felix Tan and Kallaya Leewongcharoen, explores this country’s information technology (IT) industry success. Tan and Leewongcharoen contend that the factors that contribute to IT industry success in developing countries are likely to differ than those that play a role in small developed countries. They suggest that research to date on IT industry success has neglected developing countries and present in this study an alternative IT industry success model for developing countries. They adapt Ein-dor, Myers, and Raman’s (1997) model in developing an adapted framework which they then apply in their study of the IT industry in a developing country: Thailand. Tan and Leewongcharoen found that IT-related foreign direct investment to be vital to IT industry success in Thailand. Contrary to findings from earlier studies on small developed countries, geographical location and government investment promotion policies are important to IT industry success in a developing country. These findings support the view that there are differences in the factors that affect IT industry success in developed and developing countries.

This issue’s View from Practice section features a commentary by Paul Ulrich and James George Chacko, entitled “Overview of ICT Policies and E-Strategies: An Assessment on the Role of Governments.” Ulrich and Chacko draw upon and the results of the *Asian Forum on Information and Communication Technology Policies and E-Strategies* to present the challenges facing governments attempting to implement successful ICT strategies. In drawing upon their experiences with policy makers Ulrich and Chacko identify approaches they suggest, if implemented judiciously, can bring about development.

To conclude this issue, Lyn M. Holley provides a review of a book by Jeffrey James entitled “Bridging the Global Digital Divide.” She suggests that this book is an excellent resource for international policymakers and practitioners who seek to understand the global digital divide or to take action to diminish it. Holley adds that the book will also be useful to scholars as it provides an important critique of the applicability of established theories and challenges assumptions relating to ICT in developing countries.

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