E-GOVERNMENT IN PAKISTAN: NEED FOR INTEGRATION

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Abstract

It has been nearly a decade that Pakistan formally started its e-Government initiatives by establishing E-government Directorate (EDG). There are many challenges and critical success factors faced by these initiatives. Political will, adequacy of the ICT infrastructure, vision and strategy, effective project management, self interest, competencies of the officials involved, change management are some of the critical success factors. But integration is one of the main and major critical success factors that are needed to improve e-government efforts in Pakistan.

Keywords: *E-Government, E-government directorate, critical success factors, ICT infrastructure.*

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INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technology (ICT) has affected all aspects of human life. No one can find any area of our daily lives where ICT has no effect. Telecommunication has made significant changes in our daily lives in Pakistan. Today one cannot imagine without mobiles phones, computer and internet. E-commerce is one of the areas that have emerged due to ICT development. As e-commerce is evolving slowly in Pakistan, it is not hard to claim that within a decade most of us would be addicted to online shopping. Beside the general buying and selling side of e-commerce, e-Government is one of the innovative areas of e-commerce (Efrain and David, 2008). Pakistan formally started its e-government initiatives by establishing of e-Government Directorate (EGD), a Federal Government department in 2002 (EGC Pakistan). According to the Global Dialogue by World Bank over "20 Most Important Services in Pakistan: A review of e-service Prioritization Methodologies" (World Bank, 2007), between low income countries Pakistan's e-government readiness index is 0.49 and others are 0.12 which is quite encouraging. Though e-readiness index is so promising in Pakistan, still EGD has failed to produce what it is supposed to produce. There is not only disconnection between Federal and Province levels with their own e-government agenda but also there is a disparity between developed and underdeveloped provinces such as Punjab and Balochistan. It means duplication of effort and waste of resources. One of such example is the Land Record project at federal level by EGD (eGovernment Directorate) and same project with different tools, methodology and strategy at Punjab Provincial Government (World Bank, 2007). That's why Pakistan needs a standard model to save its resources and energy and remove the duplication effort. Pakistan needs a consistent approach, a plan is required to help everybody come to the same page and get the same vision from e-government and also help develop common technical standard. Beside the need for the joint effort, standard model and strategy for e-governance, developing countries have their

own critical success factors for the success of such project. Alongside the resistance to change and other technical issues one need to understand other human and regional issues as well. As in a developing country such as Pakistan there are cultural, social, political and gender issues which are hindering all such innovative steps in some ways. Some of these issues might be common with the rest of the world but others might be totally new. It is needed to research such issues thoroughly. Research will help not only e-government efforts and initiatives in Pakistan but in all over the world in developing countries.

Background
E-Government:
One finds different definitions of e-government depending on the focus of the research. The term E-Government refers to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance the range and quality of public services to citizens and business while making government more efficient, accountable, and transparent (Schware, 2005). This definition is more focused on improving government Internal Efficiencies and Effectiveness (IEE).

E-Government is a key instrument for modernization and reform as government face the continuing pressure of increasing their performance and adapting to the pressure of the new information society (Mclean and Tawfik, 2004). This definition addresses more boarder context.

Some of the common e-government services in different countries are Income Tax, Passport, Visa, Immigration, Insurance, National ID card, Pensions, Banking, Agriculture, Employment, Land Records, Municipalities, Police, Transport, e-BIZ, e-Courts, e-Procurement, eTrade and Treasuries.

According to EDG, government of Pakistan has implemented fifteen projects so far and nineteen projects are under implementation (EGC, Pakistan). Though these figures are quite encouraging but ground reality is not. Most of these projects are on federal ministry level for e-Management, to improve the management of government department. So far these projects are only G2G to improve Internal Efficiency and Effectiveness (IEE) of the government departments and are not G2C or citizen centric.

Critical success factors
According to some researchers, lack of proper institutional, regulatory, monitory and financial policy, lack of Government Information Infrastructure (GII), Digital Divide, Low Literacy Rate and lack of basic e-services for citizen and business are some of the challenges faced my Pakistan Government (Faizullah et al., 2010).

According to others, lack of financial resources for developing infrastructure, Internet access, reliable telecommunications infrastructure, lack of ICT literacy and cultural resistance are the challenges for eGovernment initiatives by Pakistani Government .

According to Kazmi quality of the government web portals should be maintained by designing users and citizens' friendly portals, updating web portals frequently. Skilled ICT professionals are available in the country but needed to utilize them properly and government policies are needed to reset towards the quality technological infrastructure in order to successfully complete the government projects.

Need for Integration:
According to literature review there are different views about the challenges and success factor for the e-government initiatives in Pakistan. Beside these views from local experts in Pakistan there are other views as well from outside Pakistan, such as National Academies Press emphasis on the need for the joint effort and integration between e-governance agencies. In order to make government truly "Citizen Centered" agencies will have to work together to consolidate similar functions around the needs of citizens and business.

A United Nations initiative to create an e-government Academy for West Africa

(AfeGA) has also emphasized that e-government need to be the centre-piece and spur networking among relevant parties. According the available literature, availability of the technical infrastructure is a prerequisite for relations both citizens and government. A positive response from both the government and citizen side is the driving force for such initiatives in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

Pakistan has not a very long journey towards a mature e-government aptitude. A sustainable vision of Pakistan's future in e-government needs to be developed. Critical success factors that contribute to the successful development of e-government policy in Pakistan are both technical as well as non-technical.

Political will, adequacy of the technical infrastructure, vision and strategy, effective project management, self interest, competencies of the officials involved, change management are some of the critical success factors. But cooperation and integration are other main and major critical success factors that are needed to improve e-government efforts in Pakistan.

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