

The Experience of Malaysian e-Government

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Abstract. Many governments in the world believe that the new wave of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will have a significant impact on their administration. The Malaysian government embraced the idea of e-government enthusiastically by introducing Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1996. By adopting the notion of e-government, the government's image of a better and more modern government may be enhanced, forming new ways of managing public services whilst improving the efficiency of government apparatus. This study presents the status of implementation of e-government initiatives in Malaysia and a hybrid approach that may well suit the Malaysian government in managing e-government will also be discussed in this paper.

Keywords: E-government, Malaysia, Hybrid, Competence

1. Introduction

The emergence of e-government does not come out of the blue. Rather, it has become a mantra that has been chanted by all governments all over the world to enhance services and perfect their governing processes. As a result, the internet has changed the way in which the government interacts with citizens and businesses, and has also had a significant impact on government administration and operations. The Malaysian government embarked upon this notion under the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) initiatives, which were launched in August 1996 (Muhamad Rais & Nazariah 2003) with e-government as one of its flagships (Abdul Karim & Mohd Khalid 2003). She believes that by embracing this notion it could improve the quality of public services, making them more efficient and effective, and also increases productivity in the economy by maximising the use of information and communication technology (ICT) within the governmental system. This was championed by Silcock's point of view (2001) that this can transform government administration to be more responsive, open and cleaner. Not only has it become the heart of the government's agenda, but it is also of prime significance in terms of public value.

Therefore, in this paper the author will present the status of three e-government projects in Malaysia (e-syariah, e-land and pemudah (e-business)), which represents the relations with Government to Government (G2G), Government to Citizen (G2C) and Government to Business (G2B) respectively. From here, an appropriate approach to e-government management will be introduced in this paper as a suggestion to smooth the implementation of Malaysian e-government.

2. Implementation Status of e-Government Projects In Malaysia

This paper considers three e-government projects in Malaysia, namely e-syariah, e-land and pemudah (e-business), which facilitate relations with Government to Government (G2G), Government to Citizen (G2C) and Government to Business (G2B) respectively. The detailed and status of the project implementation is discussed as below:-

2.1. E-syariah

In the past, the Syariah court, which has jurisdiction only over matters involving Muslims, the majority population in Malaysia, has tended to be seen as an outdated institution, with inefficiencies, and providing an incompetent service to the public. Problems with the previous system were the slow pace of proceedings, from the registration to the management process, and also the delay in the disposition of the Syariah court cases which contributed to the number of redundant cases every year. Therefore, to uphold the splendours of

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the Syariah court, e-syariah has been seen as a solution to enhance the quality and efficiency of public service delivery through the use of ICT. The project comprises various modules, including the Syariah Court Case Management System, Syariah Lawyers Registration System, e-Portal, Library Management System and Office Automation System (MAMPU 2009). The current challenge that the Syariah Judiciary Department Malaysia (JKSM) is facing now is online payment, with the need to deal with third parties, notably banks, regarding management charges.

Overall, it may be noted that e-syariah has had remarkable success in its implementation, albeit there have been some difficulties in the early phase of its operation. As far as the system is concerned, the efficacy of e-syariah as an e-government application is hinged on several aspects, for instance leadership and environment factors. Having a strong and determined leader has assisted the Malaysian government's mission in reforming and revamping the syariah court administration and management in order to enhance the quality of public service delivery. Besides this, the idea of technology advancement was booming globally with governments adopting and embracing the idea of e-government.

2.2. E-land

E-Land is one of e-government's flagship projects which was initiated by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MAMPU 2009). It aims to develop an integrated, comprehensive and user-friendly land management and administration system to enhance the speed and quality of public service delivery. Until a few years ago, land dealings were still conducted in a conventional manner, which caused many repeated complaints and dissatisfaction from citizens such as red tape, corruption, rigid procedures and too much bureaucracy (The Star 2007). For example, there were still about RM 1.73 million of outstanding land charges, including registration and strata titles, in Peninsular Malaysia, and also RM 1.2 billion on unsettled revenue until 15 March 2008. In this case, the maladministration of land management and administration has tarnished the government's reputation amongst foreign investors, businesses communities and the public. Thus, in order to eradicate these problems, the government has moved forward to apply ICT to land administration, hence *e-land* was introduced in 2005. As digital technology has been recognised by the law through the introduction of the Sixteen Schedule of the National Land Code 1965, the Electronic Land Management System, e-land is believed to be able to enhance the transparency of land administration, whilst modernising the administration and management of land offices throughout Peninsular Malaysia (MAMPU 2011).

Overall, the implementation of e-land in Penang has had a huge impact on the quality of public service delivery (Berita Harian 2009). An impact research was carried out in 2010 amongst the public, users (public officials) and land administration in Penang to evaluate the effectiveness of the e-land project. The public realise that by dealing through the e-land system, the service is much better and more efficient. Thus, although public officials were very reluctant to adopt the system, they admit that it can enhance the transparency and integrity of land administration in Penang. Meanwhile, as for the land administration and organisation, it modernises land management through a new technological infrastructure, and facilities in the office, and provides appropriate training to government servants regarding ICT skills. On the other hand, there is a need for an ICT and land law expert to enable the project to succeed.

2.3. Pemudah

PEMUDAH is a short form for the Special Task Force to Facilitate Business, set up on 17 February 2007. It comprises representatives from both public and private sectors, with the aim of supporting Malaysia's transition towards a knowledge driven economy (PEMUDAH 2008). PEMUDAH was given the task of addressing areas related to the business environment, and also to provide a catalyst for change towards placing Malaysia in the top 10 of the World Bank Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) (PEMUDAH 2010, New Straits Times 2008a). By addressing each area highlighted in the EoDB Report, respective ministries/agencies/departments were challenged to improve processes and procedures. Faster, Easier and Cheaper was the mantra for all related agencies to further enhance their Standing Operating Procedures. Among the initiatives undertaken in the area of online services developed under PEMUDAH are Business Licensing Electronic Support System (BLESS), Malaysia Corporate Identity Number (MyCoID), One Stop Centre (OSC) Online for Building Plans and e-Payment facilities (PEMUDAH 2008, 2009).

In the early stage of its implementation, there were some major challenges and issues faced by PEMUDAH such as limited integration. Most online systems were developed in silos, thus creating a problem in integrating them with existing systems in other agencies. Besides this, differing working practices and SOP by different agencies and authorities, on account of state regulations, further hampered the successful implementation of the system. Indeed, practising different sets of procedures resulted in complications in the implementation of the projects. The challenge that PEMUDAH will face, now and in the future, is to maintain the improvements made and to start to explore new areas in ensuring business can be done easier, faster and cheaper.

3. Hybrid Approaches to E-government Planning

As e-government brings many benefits to the government administration and operations, it has become an indispensable mechanism for the Malaysian government to improve the quality of public services to make them more efficient and effective. It has now been almost thirteen years that the notion of e-government has been embedded in the operation of the Malaysian civil service. Notwithstanding improvements in public service delivery including rapid-online services, it still lags behind other Asian countries such as Singapore, South Korea and Japan. This has been proven through evidence from several reports and studies which were conducted by well-known institutions and organisations (United Nations 2005, 2008 & West 2002). Furthermore, based on the implementation of the aforementioned of the three government projects above, there are some barriers that impede the effectiveness of the Malaysian e-government, for instance lack of expertise, financial constraints, lack of a quality of technical infrastructure and lack of integration across governments.

Therefore, an appropriate approach to e-government management is of vital importance in overcoming these barriers. By using Heek’s model, it seems that the hybrid approach is one of the strategic methods that can be beneficially adopted by implementers in developing countries, because it is able to bring a balance between tensions that are inherent in e-government planning (Heeks 2006). In the hybrid approach, factors like the environment, organisation, work processes in the sector and also the role of information systems, as illustrated in Figure 1, will be of importance.

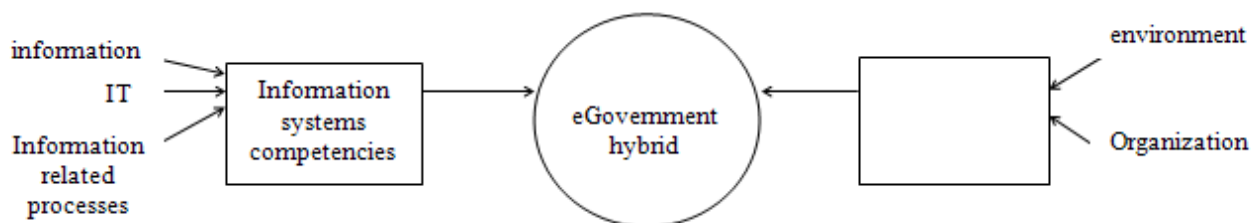


Fig. 1: Hybrid Approach

In addition, this approach emphasizes a set of competencies that entail three elements, namely knowledge, skills and attitudes. The element of knowledge means that public servants is up-to-date of IT, the role of information, IT and information systems in the public sector and also very knowledgeable on organizational context, policies and strategies. The second elements of skills stresses about skill to identify opportunities for new information systems, install of hardware and software system and redesign of existing processes. While the elements of skills relates to problem-solving matter, the third element of attitudes demands positive mindset amongst stakeholders to embrace the idea of e-government as a means to reform public sector.

This also means the creation of hybrid public servants that do not have expertise in IT (‘e’) but have a better understanding of public sector values and work (‘government’). Indeed, Harper, Ibrahim & Ithnin (2004) have mentioned that people, processes and systems are the three main factors that are likely to guide the implementation of e-government. While Schwester (2009) highlights political support and adequate financial, technical and human resources will also unlock the potential of e-government, other factors such as leadership and e-government efficacy are also responsible for the success of e-government implementation (Abdullah & Kaliannan 2006).

Taking the hybrid approach will reduce the risks of e-government failure, as it will close the gap between design and reality, and in turn lead to an improvement in the performance of the systems. This approach basically gives the idea to the government on how to plan skills and knowledge development for current and future staff (Heeks 2006). Therefore, it tries to reduce the gap between mainstream staff and IT professionals by hybridizing their own competencies profiles (Heeks 2006). However, there is something lacking in this model which ignores the importance of having a technical infrastructure as a main component in e-government management. The absence of having a quality infrastructure will make the services limited, accessible only to urban populations. As a result, the issue of the digital divide between rural and urban areas emerges, and this will bring about serious repercussions for the system. Hence, e-government visions are impossible to attain. Above all, a quality technical infrastructure should be included in the 'wheel of competencies' along with the hybridization of skills as it will bring successful in implementing e-government. In order to do that, a strong e-government leadership is a prerequisite for the success of the notion of e-government.

4. Implication and Conclusion

Most governments in the world believe that e-government will improve their image as a better government through technological deployment. E-government will lead to a quality of public service which becomes the foremost driver in digital government. Malaysian e-government has faced many challenges while implementing the notion, for instance lack of expertise, low-quality of technical infrastructure, financial constraints, public servants' resistance and so forth. Therefore, the hybrid approach which unites the 'e' and the 'government' of e-government appears to be a suitable idea to permit the Malaysian government to have a better understanding of e-government competencies. Yet it is nonetheless important to include other factors, mainly technical infrastructure, in e-government planning. Although the hybrid approach might sound impressive, there is no guarantee that the approach will always succeed. Having said this, it may help to reduce the risks of e-government failure that arise in the gap between the design and reality while implementing the notion of e-government.

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