E-GOVERNMENT IN LEBANON

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Abstract
Technological inventions stand beyond limits in applications to promote and sustain good governance, as man travels in open space, in search and discovery of the mysteries of the galaxies.
In contrast, man in most developing countries still relies upon the primitive instinct reflected in thought, behavior, and culture of violence.
Good governance is enhanced by technological discoveries to promote constructive communication, facilitate transactions, keep accurate records, provide better public services, and combat corruption. It is the key factor to promote governance transparency, managerial effectiveness and sustain development.
The presence of good governance will help countries fight violence and corruption by spreading a sense of equity and utilitarianism.
This research focuses upon collecting data from the developing country of Lebanon, in the MENA region, where most official and public transactions are still carried out, handwritten, in ledgers and endless bureaucratic tapes. The authors aim to collect and analyze the actual data, for its heartbreaking, that in the 21st century humans are still living in the swampy darkness of corruption and backwardness.
The hypothesis of this research aims at highlighting the importance and values, produced by the application of e-government to help sustain the country’s development.

Keywords: E-government, good governance, Mena region bureaucratic, corruption

Introduction
The world wide sweeping innovations, discoveries, and application of information technology, along with the advanced digital connectivity, have profoundly revolutionized businesses and services performance in both, the public and private sectors.
Good governance in the developed world contributed to exporting the technology to developing countries to help them modernize their socio-economic and political systems.
To survive, in these modern times, saturated by competition, continual change and creative innovations, businesses and governance must quickly adapt to changes generated by information and communication technology (ICT) to provide optimum services to citizens and customers, while sustaining economic development. [Malhotra, 2010]. The world, today, is best described as an electronic one. for those who partially adopted the new trends, but remain chained to medieval taboos, awkward ideologies and laws, lack of ethics and poorly individually designed management system and governance, they are missing the ride on the future wagon. Indeed, they remain victims of ignorance, illiteracy, violence, and often self-suicidal cultural missions.
Problems and Definitions

This topic was chosen based on the urgent need by MENA countries, particularly Lebanon, to adopt technological innovations in order to free themselves from the poor governance, based on dictatorial centralization of the administrative, legal, cultural and political systems, which tie these countries to dark times and backwardness.

Some countries in the MENA regions earn huge sums of monies from oil and gas revenues allowing them to physically develop their countries and better service their citizens. Others are struck by poverty with large demographic boost, ruled by “divine” dictators, still living, physically and mentally three to four centuries behind. Examples of these countries are Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and some North African countries.

The people of these countries suffer from many issues that need to be considered and understood:
1. Archaic political systems based on theocratic rule, cult of the leader and the Shari’a religious laws, an economic political mafia ruling under different types and forms.
2. Autocratic systems far from any democratic rule, controlled by military, religious, or political individuals or groups, intolerant of any opposition or challenges within a fully centralized environment.
3. Corruption, nepotism, fear, and lack of human rights’ respect in addition to unqualified bureaucrats who rule the state.
4. Old fashioned systems of education, based mainly on copy-paste practices and imitations. As for those individuals who reach high educational level, they are compelled to emigrate, be jailed, or disposed of for they constitute an ultimate threat to the ruling “princes”.
5. Lack of good governance, meaning absence of the rule of law, accountability of public servants, planning, transparency, citizens’ participation, equity and inclusiveness.
6. Poverty and hunger, as bureaucrats abuse their power instead of serving the citizens, for they are mainly concerned with their individual welfare or that of the “boss” = Al-Zaim.
7. Worst is the lack of economic stability and security as violence, crimes, threats, and terror, constitute daily happenings.

The Electronic Government: Definition and Review

Electronic government consists of wide and efficient use of application of different technologies by governmental departments and ministries to connect with and better serve the citizens. Such application offers many categories of benefits such as: (a) fast delivery of services to save time; (b) reduction of monetary costs along with lesser frustration, confusion, and mistrust; (c) continuous access to correct information and policies by the citizens; (d) reduction of corruptions and bribes; (e) support for administrative, cultural, social and economic reforms; (f) decentralization, privatization, and effective establishment of good local governance.

Methodology of Research

The basic information of this research are primarily drawn from semi-structured interviews, and to concepts already treated by various scholars.

The focus will be on analyzing the implementation of electronic government while evaluating the factors leading to its success or failure.

The great forward strides achieved by the internet growth in the past decades, contributed to revolutionize the communication process and information dissemination, nationally and internationally. James K Scott estimates that websites are increasing at an unlimited pace [Scott 2005].
Literature Review

Although governments of developing countries have slowly begun to incorporate ICT in their planning for administrative efficiency and reforms. The strategic use of such technology would lead to more efficiency, transparency, accountability, and effective public management. [UNDESA, 2004]

In the US, for example, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) claimed that e-government ended up by saving the US over $508 million, in 2007 for tax payers and the federal government. [OMB, 2009]

One must however, use caution, for e-government is not a “magic wand” once applied, it solves all problems. [Saide and Hala, 2006]

Any failure to reach the desired targets may not be in the program itself, rather in the human and legal actors empowered to administer it, [UNDESA, opcit] which often choose to implement their own twisted system.

Sometimes, government in developing countries may initiate such a change to reduce external political and financial pressures, for international agencies [Ciborra, 2003], such as the IMF, the World Bank and other donors, do link their aid to administrative and technological reforms by the receiving government. [World Bank Group, 2003]

E-government encompasses all the ICT with computer networks such as Internet and intranet, to include many digital connections and (a) connections between government agencies and departments for a healthier decision making process; (b) between governments and NGOs promoting accountability before the citizens; (c) between government and businesses for optimum delivery of services. [Heeks, 2006]

The ultimate objective of e-government is to achieve good governance through interactions between the citizens, the state, and civil society, conducting online businesses and communication. [Montagna, 2005]

The UN agency, UNESCO, identifies in its electronic government toolkit, four types of interaction as foundations for e-government application and success. [Patricia, 2003]

1. Government to government involving sharing and exchanging of data on the national provincial and local levels.
2. Governments to citizens through distribution of information and electronic delivery of services: such as obtaining certificates, paying taxes, renewing license, and others. The citizen would consequently be allowed effective participation in the process of policy formulation and building trust.
3. Government to business involving transactions exchanges between both sectors of rules and laws regarding taxation and different policies.
4. Government to employees focusing on rules, laws, training, work guidelines, benefits, pay structure, employees welfare and rights, and public housing.

E-government will quickly and more directly bring information to individual citizens and organizations, enabling them to access these information without physically travelling to government offices, wasting time, money, fuel, and most of all suffer frustration and depression when standing in long lines and be compelled to pay bribes, humiliated, and abused.

E-government Role in Initiating Reforms

It is important to keep in mind that e-government is neither a simplistic automatic application of technology nor purchase of computers to deliver public services; it is rather the creation of a productive relation between the ruled and the ruler, through good governance and the rule of law. E-government ought to be considered as a major key for initiating reforms and changes to revolutionize democratic relations and transparency.

To achieve the finest objectives, major steps must be applied.
1. E-government requires a strong public managerial leadership, fully transparent, ethical, and qualified to manage the state resources.

2. Clearly outline the relation between the public and private business sectors, including NGOs when dealing with ecommerce. [Center for democracy and technology, 2002]

3. Enhance citizens’ engagement and acceptance of the changes by promoting public participation in the national decision making process, sharing national vision to reach efficiency and consumers satisfaction.

As a precondition for the success of e-government's application, the bureaucracy and the public must be ready to accept and engage in this process involving a digital economy and administration.

**Lebanon’s Case**

**Lebanese Problems**

These major problems form the basic parts of the citizens’ daily life in the MENA regions. The authors chose Lebanon as a case, for this tiny country is plagued by so many ills, yet, for almost 90 years, it has not been able to move forward and free itself. The focal point is the awkward administrative system that raises several issues:

- Identification of the major public management problems and weaknesses, whether socio-economic, religious, legal, political, or military.
- Corruption causing high costs to the country and the citizens.
- Inefficiency in applying the rule of law.
- Absence of e-government in most ministries and departments.
- Tight centralized of administration where the citizen who needs approval of a specific document must travel to Beirut; consequently contributing to traffic jam increasing burning fuels causing pollution, wasting two to five days of his/her productive time, shuttling back and forth with little results to end up with frustration and the decision to emigrate.

Lebanese public management continually relies on manpower especially when public employees are hired without adequate qualifications.

Nepotism is the main criteria in hiring public servants ignoring standards, potentials and experience.

In most governmental departments, citizens’ requests and applications are mechanically recorded and processed leading to waste of precious time, corruption, delays, and sometimes loss or shelving of the applications.

Based on this tragic reality, Lebanon, more than ever, needs to install new technologies to provide quality services to its citizens. Such change will definitely face challenges and obstacles that require evaluation.

Following the elaboration of the main problems plaguing the Lebanese traditional public management, it is evident that an evolution has been far too late behind, and needs urgent consideration. Electronic digital government presently appears to be the only available system that would carry answers to inherited public administration problems. New models of public management are needed, making use of sophisticated technical innovations in order to facilitate government-citizens relation. [Opcit]

**Obstacles to E-government Application**

In spite of the necessity to implement the E-government process in the MENA region, and particularly in Lebanon, many obstacles must be either removed, or at least treated within defined and feasible strategy of action. Among these obstacles, the main ones revolve around e-readiness including

1. A favorably developed cultural environment, whereby, leaders, managers, administrators and citizens, ought to evolve from a primitive culture based on violence, blind
religious beliefs, intolerance and political authoritarianism, into a modern, democratic and secular society.
2. Access to networking by opening many channels focusing on utilizing the latest communication technology, tools and means that the citizens will be able to understand and use.
3. Networking education aiming at training and developing human capital to quickly learn how to utilize the Internet and intranet to facilitate the required transactions. This requires major change in management behavior to avoid resistance, abuse, and failure.
4. The culture of violence that is often promoted and “divinized” by uncontrolled theocratic leaders who pretend serving “God”. These latters teach the youth from early age the so called “virtue” of killing and terrorizing others as being divine qualities and desires, earning the criminals, in the eyes of God, favors and much happiness on this earth and after.
5. Scarcity of all kinds of resources to carry the process through. In contrast, such a scarcity may lead to mismatch between future objectives and the reality. Another concern lies in the fact that the private sector recruits top quality human elements, leaving the public one to manage with mediocrity.

The Benefits of E-government Application
Contrasting with the obstacles the E-governing process offers many benefits to the rulers and people alike.
1. It places services online to reduce costs and increase gains to citizens as it reduces time, energy and corruption. [Amit and Zott, 2001]
2. Provides quality service delivery being offered online avoiding the huge and confusing bureaucratic and less tapes. [Rinne, Lage and Andrade, 2001]
3. Enhances transparency and accountability, whereby unethical bureaucrats and managers would have fewer opportunities to abuse their powers and fend off their responsibilities. Documents, applications, fees and other requirements will be fully recorded, subject to scrutiny and accountability while allowing the citizens to review most of the records.

It is recommended in this section that government establishes a special court in every district, pending the geographic and popular size, empowered to listen to citizens, handle their complaints and small claims against the central and local governments.

The ICT’s applications are numerous beginning with granting permits and licenses, recording traffic violations and regulations, payments of taxes and many others.
4. Creates a diversified network of information and dynamic learning process. [Mansell and Wehn, 1998] This improves the communication process and governance effectiveness. [OECD, 2001]
5. Creates partnership and collaboration between central, regional, and local governments to boost citizens’ trust in their public management on the basis of transparent partnership, especially, since dictatorship, violence, incompetence, instability and corruption have been the main factors in the mismanagement practices.

The MENA region, like the rest of the world, has been recently lacking effective and visionary leadership. In the case of E-government, leadership becomes a prerequisite driving force to achieve success, before, during, and after the implementation.

The modernization of the administrative system in Lebanon through E-government application must take into full consideration the socio-cultural – religious – legal - economic and technical state of the matter as it pertains to
1. Technological factors centering on the development of the national infrastructure, which has not yet recovered from destructions, incurred during the 1975-1990 civil war. The basic issues encompass the electrical energy that is still primitive, the telecommunication
(internet intranet and telephones) ranking Lebanon very low among the developing countries. Government officials competence to deliver their promises remains either verbal or ink on papers stashed in dark drawers. Among the main premises are (a) implement a national microwave system with high network capacity; (b) lunch satellite stations; (c) link ministries and state institutions.

2. Legal and political factors, whereby the Lebanese government ought to review the country’s old laws, regulatory procedures, overlapping and conflicting authorities, and its policies toward human resources elements.

3. Organizational factors to focus on leading the country and its people out of the medieval mentality and behavior. Lebanese public institutions are still run in the same manner as in 1926 and even 1860, when Lebanon was granted semi-independence status. The main organizational problems that stand as firm obstacles to national development comprise (a) old and obsolete laws; (b) an archaic political system torn between theocracy and secularism; (c) poor and unqualified human resources; (d) lack of true national leadership; (e) corruption and lack of accountability; (f) multiplicity of military actors spreading violence and fear; (g) cultural promotion of warfare and hatred by some groups.

4. Regional and international factors whereby a large portion of Lebanese citizens are either blinded by empty emotional slogans and religious affiliations, or are bought by foreign bribes, to a point that they have forgotten how to be loyal Lebanese citizens. They have plunged the country into foreign conflicts and narrow stereotyped rumors or interpretations; consequently Lebanon has become a theater for regional and foreign gladiators who fight their wars through their Lebanese puppets.

Conclusion

The successful application of electronic government to generate the desired value and healthier environment in the targeted country, Lebanon, and most developing states, requires much preparation to reduce the obstacles and prevent failure. E-government adoption necessitates much preparation by the citizens, the bureaucrats and top public decision makers. It requires e-readiness to be strictly and meticulously evaluated, and continually reviewed to sustain profitability and success. The minimum in certain issues must be secured, such as training citizens and bureaucrats, and easing the system’s use by the average individual. Universities and learning institutions as well as the media could play a crucial role in support of E-government application. The most important factors in the adoption of this system remain above all the political stability and the rule of law.

References: