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# The Impact of National Culture on the E-Government Readiness

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## The Impact of National Culture on the E-Government Readiness (Survey)

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### الملخص

إن موضوع الحكومة الالكترونية يعتبر من أهم القضايا المعاصرة التي تحظى باهتمام دول العالم.. ولا يستثنى من ذلك دول العالم الأقل نمو. وليست المشكلة في بناء الحكومة الالكترونية البنى التحتية من أجهزة وشبكة اتصالات، والبرمجيات اللازمة لنظام الحكومة الالكترونية، ولكن الأهم هو تهيئة المجتمع لقبول هذا النظام الجديد الذي سيعطي بيئة جديدة للتعامل مع أجهزة الحكومة.. وكما يتفق الكثير أن البشر بشكل عام يتشابهون في كثير من العادات والممارسات، ولكن يظل لكل مجتمع هويته الخاصة وثقافته الاجتماعية الموروثة عبر الأجيال من العادات والتقاليد. وما قد نجده طبيعياً في مجتمع قد نجده غير مرغوب فيه في مجتمع آخر.

كثير من الدراسات الأكاديمية بحثت في عوامل قيام الحكومة الالكترونية بما فيها عامل الثقافة الاجتماعية. إذ أن مشروع الحكومة الالكترونية لا يمكن له النجاح إلا إذا أخذ بعين الاعتبار الاستعداد لدى المجتمع للتفاعل مع الخدمات الحكومية عبر الانترنت والذي يعتبر الهدف الأساسي لقيام الحكومة الالكترونية. ومن أهم أسس هذا الاستعداد هي الثقة التي يجب أن تعطى للمواطن لتشجيعه على التفاعل مع خدمات الحكومة الالكترونية.

تعمل هذه الدراسة على استطلاع ومسح لأهم البحوث العلمية العالمية التي بحثت في تأثير الثقافة الاجتماعية على الاستعداد الالكتروني لقيام الحكومة الالكترونية، ويسعى البحث إلى التوصل إلى رؤية موحدة لخلاصة هذه الأبحاث.

### Abstract

Many studies are exploring fundamental factors of e-government including national cultures of information and communication technology adoption that have been carried out (Kovačić, 2005). While there seems to be substantial growth in the development of e-government initiative, it is not clear that citizen will embrace the use of such services (Carter, et. al. 2003). If countries are going to plan success in the e-government project, they must effectively manage the complex multidimensional process of building citizen trust (Allen et. al. 2004, Al-Omari, et. al. 2006). This research is an e-readiness survey about the impact culture impact culture on e-government readiness. The purpose of this study is to review some academic publications based on the impact of the national culture on e-government readiness, and conclude their results to come out with unified view if possible.

**Keywords:** e-government, e-readiness, national culture.

### Introduction

It is well-know that the importance of e-government in this time (e-era) that pushes all communities to rush into this new world with its new roles that have been changed in dramatically way, as a result this necessity pushes the communities towards dealing with new technologies that include both Hardware (HW), Software (SW) and procedures. Moreover the problem is not in transferring the society from traditional manual procedures and tools due to HW and SW, the problem is how the end user (citizen) can be convinced to accept these new changes (Cooper, et. al. 1995, Al-Omari, et. al. 2006, Allen et. al. 2004). So technology acceptance should be studied in extensive and intensive researches that focus on the culture dimension. Many countries have started to develop national e-government project. E-government is not only concerned about the automation of



existing procedures, but mainly about changing the way in which government conducts business and delivers services to citizens and companies (Aita,2006, Cooper, et. al. 1995).

It is important to revise the way that the government functions are carried out today to improve processes that fulfill these functions. Also to determine the range of services that may be provided by e-government project form simple information sites to fully interactive experiences. So the citizens and government engage in a dialogue mediated to information technology (Pacific Council on International Policy, 2007).

It is not enough to automate organization business processes and use high technologies (Cooper,et. al. 1995, Al-Omari, et. al. 2006). Each business should create a new business environment.

Building the new social and culture system is more difficult than creating the technological system to run it (Al-Omari, et. al. 2006 ).

Some people assume that the e-government is only concerned about delivering government services over the internet (Aita, 2006, Pacific Council on International Policy,2007).

This popular assumption is very limited for two reasons: - first, it narrows our vision for e-government because it does not allow the existence of the wide range of governmental activities that are not direct services nor does it recognize the essential use of technologies other than the internet. Second, it grossly oversimplifies the nature of e-government, leaving the impression that a nicely designed, user-oriented web site is the whole story (Aita, 2006).

Probably, people from different cultures will handle technological developments in very different ways, but is "culture" in this case the determining factor? (Kortemann, 2005).

Through experience in daily life and from many different information sources, most people agree about the existence of many different cultures in this world (Pair,2002). However, things that might be very logical and self-evident in one culture can be offensive or illogical in another culture (Pair,2002). Or do other less obvious, factors play a part in this process as well? And what is known about local cultures in developing countries and technological developments? (Kortemann, 2005).

### **E-government History**

The e-government project was created in 2001, as a result of the desire expressed in the conclusions of the third global forum: fostering democracy and development through e-government in Naples March 2001 that, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) should contribute through its future work program to the deepening of understanding of the potential and implications of e-government and sharing the result as widely as possible (History of e-Government,2007).

In November 2001, the public management committee (PUMA) endorsed the creation of the e-government project. The project receives oversight and guidance from the PUMA committee and guidance from an e-government working group composed of high level e-government officials from member states (History of eGovernment,2007).

### **E-government Definitions**

There are many definitions of e-government, some of them consider information and communication, and some are concerned about the broad definition.

Some of the common definitions are the following:

- E-government refers to the government' agencies use information technologies such as Wide Area Networks

(WAN), the internet and mobile computing that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government (World Bank, 2002).

- E-government is the use of information and communication technologies, and particularly the internet, as a tool to achieve better government (OECD, 2003).
- E-government is defined as utilizing the internet and the world-wide-web for delivering government information and services to citizens (GBDE, 2007).
- E-government is the application of on-line technology for the delivery of government services to citizens (Strassman, 2001).
- E-government is the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve on-line activities in the public sector organizations (Heeks, 2004, Strassman, 2001).

#### **E-government Objectives**

E-Government is not only about using technology for technology's sake. It is more concerned about enhancing service effectiveness and improving service delivery (Northamptonshire County Council, 2006, Strassman, 2001). In particular it means:

- Making services available 24/7.
- Improving access to services by making them available on-line.
- Making it easier to find information about services
- Helping to improve the quality of the services .
- Helping to join up more effectively with other organizations so that more integrated services can be then, offered.
- Helping to build trust between governments and citizens
- Open up the policy process

- Challenges the existing ways of working.

Strassman (2001) also added some of e-government objectives such as the following:-

- Citizens should be able to do everything they have to do or want to do with their government through one e-government portal.
- All e-government applications should be integrated with each other, so citizens can avoid the need to provide the same data over and over.
- Access to e-government services and applications should be available to citizens from any internet-capable connection.
- E-government sites should be designed and operated so that the most novices of computer users can readily find the information they need, provide the information requested by the government sites.
- The design and operation of e-government systems should take into account the special needs of the disabled, and make it possible for them to use these systems as easily as the non-disabled.
- E-government systems need to protect the confidentiality of data provided by citizens.
- Data about citizen-government transactions, and the content of those transactions, needs to be fiercely protected by the government.
- It is necessary to thoroughly re-evaluate the overall mission of the jurisdiction and then design a digital structure that creates a government-citizen interface. That therefore simplifies and streamlines each transaction individually and the entire process of government administration generally.



- The full organizational structure of public sector bodies, allowing the citizens and representatives to consider and approve new forms of organization and then design a digital network to implement these new forms.
- An excellent e-government site is one that provides appropriate and up-to-date links to other e-government sites.

E-government objectives also from (e-Government Objectives, 2007) are:-

- E-government should offer better services, more suitable, lower cost and more reliable.
- E-government services should be cost effectiveness and efficiency and lower transaction costs.
- E-government should aim greater participation by citizens in government.

#### **E-Readiness Definition**

There are many definitions of e-readiness some of them are as following:-

1. E-readiness is the ability to pursue value creation opportunities facilitated by the use of the internet (Choucri, et. al.,2003).
2. E-Government readiness is defined as the ability of a government to use Information Communication Technologies ( ICTs) to move its services and activities into the new environment (Kovacic, 2005).
3. E-Readiness can be defined as the capacity of nations to participate into the digital economy (McConnell International,2001).
4. Degree to which a country is prepared to participate in the network world (Docktor, 2007).



### **E-Readiness objectives**

The objective of e-readiness is to identify how the ICTs and the participation to the digital economy can help a government to reach more expeditiously its objectives in terms of economic and social progress and growth. (GeoSINC International, 2002).

There are many factors that promote the countries to be e-ready (Budhiraja, et. al. 2002).

- The enormous advantages that ICT will bring along by. It will not only lead to a simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent smart government, it will also lead to making the citizens life easy. ICT promises various social and economical benefits as well.
- International leaders, foreign donors, and lending agencies are integrating ICT into development and aid programs.
- The countries are facing a threat of being left behind.
- ICT is a key weapon in the war against world poverty.

### **National Culture**

A lot has been written about culture and its consequences. Whilst on the surface most countries of the world demonstrate cultural similarities, there are many differences, hidden below the surface. The first generation of e-readiness studies assumes one-size-fits-all set of requirements, regardless of the characteristics of individual countries (Choucri et. al. 2003).

Cultural differences between countries in general and particularly in relation to information technology adoption in a highly researched subject ( Kovacic, 2005).

### **Definition of culture**

Some of the known definitions are the following:-

1. Culture is the way in which a group of people solves problems (Trompenaars, 1993).
2. The beliefs, values, behavior and material objects that continue people's way of life (Wiktionary,2007).
3. Any knowledge passed from one generation to the next, doesn't necessarily with respect to human beings ( Wiktionary,2007).

### Elements of Culture

The elements of culture as indicated from (Carter,1997) are the following:-

- Material culture: It refers to tools, artifacts and technology.
- Language: It reflects the nature and values of society.
- Aesthetic: It refer to the ideas in a culture concerning beauty and good taste as expressed in the arts -music, art, drama and dancing.
- Education: It refers to the transmission of skills, ideas and attitudes. Education can transmit cultural ideas.
- Religion: It provides the best insight into a society's behavior and helps answer the question why people behave rather than how they behave.
- Attitudes and values: They often have a religious foundation, and attitudes.
- Social organization: It refers to the way people relate to each other.

Also, the elements of culture as indicated from Hofstede are:-

- Power distance: It means society's support inequality.
- Individualism vs. collectivism: It means the tendency of individuals primarily to look after themselves and their immediate families.

- Masculinity vs. femininity: Self-confident or competitive orientation.
- Uncertainty avoidance: The feeling of discomfort in unstructured or unusual circumstances.
- (Kovačič, 2005)

#### Literature review

*Kovačič* conducted an analysis of the impact national culture has on e-government readiness and its components of 95 countries. E-government readiness assessment used in this study is based on the Hofstede's model of cultural differences. The research model and hypotheses were formed and tested using correlation and regression analysis. The result has theoretical and practical implications.

His main objective was to investigate the relationship between national culture and e-government readiness. More specifically the purpose of his research is to provide a theoretical framework for the impact of national culture on e-government readiness and to test whether the national culture dimensions have significant impact on e-government readiness.

Kovačič decided in this research to use measurement and assessment of e-government readiness based on the United Nations (2003) framework.

The four factors of Hofstede model as presented in this research were as following:-

- Power distance.
- Individualism vs. collectivism.
- Masculinity vs. femininity.
- Uncertainty avoidance.

The hypothesis's of Kovačič research were as following:-

Hypothesis H1 : The government of a country with a larger power distance would have a negative attitude toward increasing the level of e-government readiness

Hypothesis H2 : The government of a country with a strong individualistic culture would give a positive attitude toward increasing the level of e-government readiness

Hypothesis H3 : The government of a country with a high/low masculine culture would give a positive attitude toward increasing the level of e-government readiness

Hypothesis H4 : The government of a country with a strong uncertainty avoidance culture would give a negative attitude towards increasing the level of e-government readiness

Three results emerge from the correlation matrix presented in Kovačič's research:-

First, e-government readiness and all its components are highly, negatively correlated with power distance and positively with individualism.

Second, there is a highly significant negative correlation between power distance and individualism.

Thirdly, the absolute value of the correlation coefficient between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capital and all e-government readiness indices is higher than the correlation coefficients of e-government readiness indices with any cultural dimension.

In summary, based on regression models with cultural variables only, the first two hypotheses of Kovačič hypotheses were confirmed.

National culture constructs were derived from the Hofstede cultural model. Since there are other cultural models it would be necessary to check whether cultural constructs based on an



alternative theory of culture to Hofstede's theory confirm the impact that national culture has on e-government readiness.

**Merchant** carried out his study to explore IT adoption and its relationship with national culture. It was argued that knowledge of cultural orientation of organizational employees would greatly facilitate IT adoption and implementation, which in turn would contribute to a successful project managers.

She pointed that technology has made global teamwork an everyday reality for thousands of people. She depended on examples such as video conferences, voice mail, the internet, corporate intranets, groupware and virtual team rooms are just some of the technologies that enable people to work together no matter where they are based on (Benson-Armer et. al. 1997).

Researcher believed that the successful adoption of information technology has an area of interest in IT research for many years. One of the most often used instruments to measure the acceptance of new technology and intention to use is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).

Researcher's research depended on a conceptual framework outlined by Harrison(1975). Harrison's strength is that his study is directed to employees currently on job. Harrison identified four organizational ideologies as following:-

- 1- Power-oriented: The organization wants to control its industry.
- 2- Role-oriented: The organization wants to be rational and orderly in all of its dealings.
- 3- Task-oriented: The organization strives to achieve its goals.
- 4- Person(Self)-oriented: The organization exists primarily to serve the needs of its members.

For individuals, Merchant mentioned that give their orientation to the type of manger they need and are comfortable with, the characteristics of the four orientations which provide them with varying degrees of :-

- 1- Security against economic, political, and psychological deprivation.
- 2- Opportunities for voluntary commitment to worthwhile goals.
- 3- Opportunities to pursue one's own growth and development independent of organization goals.

For organization, the four ideologies listed as following:-

- 1- Effective response to dangerous and threatening events.
- 2- Dealing rapidly and effectively with complexity and change.
- 3- Internal unity, if necessary, at people's expense.

Merchant expressed her research's methodology that the cultural orientations instrument of Harrison(1975) and the Technology Acceptance Model were administered to employees in the United States, France, and China.

Researcher used Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to identify the TAM factors for each country.

The findings of Merchant's research which were presented can be summarized as following :-

- TAM only factored correctly to America sample.
- TAM was not possible to perform the analysis since the TAM could not be validated for the Chinese and the French.

In summary, Merchant pointed out that IT adoption has been instrumental in contributing to the effectiveness of organizations striving for competitive advantage. New developments and applications of IT have assisted many organizations, in many

industries, to maximize the potential to exceed previous expectations on a global scale from a competitive standpoint.

*Kortemann* research described the effects of culture on the acceptance process of ICT-projects in developing countries.

He explained the difference between the developed countries and developing countries in matter of technology. He mentioned that in Europe and North America the adoption of ICT is at a very different stage where people spent many years to get used to these new technologies and have given them a place in their lives. In many other communities however, people still have to find a way to join their traditional way of living with new technologies such as computers and internet.

Kortemann presented the fact that in developing countries the knowledge about the failure of ICT projects is not captured so the same mistakes might occur many times. Kortemann presented in his research some successful ICT projects in developing countries.

From Kortemann' point of view, the process of acceptance and adoption should be understood. Kortemann assumed that the most famous theory was "The Theory of Diffusion of Innovation (DOI)" developed by Rogers (1995) in his book " Diffusion of Innovation". Rogers defined diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of social System.

Other theories were presented by Kortemann research, one of them was the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and its extended TAM. Some other models were discussed in this research as well.

Hofstede Model was one of the methods to measure culture in Kortemann's research. The researcher made use of Technology

Acceptance Model (TAM) with external variables in the TAM includes the concept of culture.

He used three dimensions only from Hofstede model, they were power distance, collectivizes versus individualism and uncertainty avoidance.

The information was gathered from questionnaires, interviews and observations and the results were presented and analyzed.

A conclusion, Kortemann mentioned that age plays the most important role in determining the actual use of computers. Moreover culture has no direct influence on actual use, but does influence people's opinion and attitude towards computers.

The objective of *Al-adawi* research was to understand how citizen perceive e-governments as primary government interaction channel and factors that affect their level of usage.

Only Government to Citizen (G2C) category has been consented in this research.

The aim of the research was to find answers to the following questions:

- 1- How are intentions towards the use of e-government formed and to what extent are they related to the actual use of e-government?
- 2- To what extent the intentions to get information and to conduct transactions differ from each other?
- 3- What are the beliefs that influence citizens' propensity to use e-government? How do these beliefs affect their intentions towards the use of e-government?
- 4- Are there any perception and adoption differences between segments of citizens on the basis of their technology readiness and demographic characteristics?



The researchers argued about the concept of trust and perceived risk. They derived the hypotheses which were leading to the development of a conceptual model, that intends to explain the citizens adoption of e-government.

The research's hypothesis were:-

H1a: Behavioral intention to use e-government website for getting information will positively influence the actual getting information behavior.

H1b: Behavioral intention to use e-government website for conducting transactions will positively influence the actual conducting transactions behavior.

H2: Getting information from an e-government website positively influences conducting transactions on e-government websites.

H3a: Perceived usefulness of getting information will positively influence the intention towards getting government information from an e-government website.

H3b: Perceived usefulness of conducting transactions will positively influence the intention towards conducting government transactions on an e-government website.

H4a: Perceived ease of use of getting information will positively influence the intention towards getting government information from an e-government website.

H4b: Perceived ease of use of conducting transactions will positively influence the intention towards conducting government transactions on an e-government website.

H5a: Perceived ease of use of getting information will positively influence perceived usefulness of getting government information from an e-government website.

H5b: Perceived ease of use of conducting transactions will positively influence Perceived usefulness of conducting government transactions on an e-government website.

Trust and perceived risk in e-government were important factors in the researchers's research. They argued that trust is central to most daily interactions, transactions and practices.

The researchers supposed that e-government websites are open to the public and accessible from anywhere in the world. That is why external risk must be considered to explain citizens' intention to use e-government services.

Following the literature on trust and risk it was proposed by the researchers the following hypothesis:-

H6a: High trust on getting information from and e-government website will lead to low perceived risk.

H6b: High trust on conducting transactions from and e-government website will lead to low perceived risk.

H7a: Low perceived risk in getting information will positively influence the intention towards getting information from an e-government website.

H7b: Low perceived risk conducting transactions will positively influence the intention towards conducting transactions from an e-government website.

H8a: High trust on getting information will positively influence the intention towards getting information from an e-government website.

H8b: High trust on conducting transactions will positively influence the intention towards conducting transactions from an e-government website.

The conclusion was as following:- the comprehensive, the model proposed in this research made an important contribution

to the emerging literature on e-government adoption. This was by grounding new variables into well-accepted model(TAM) and applying them to a new context of e-government. Once the relative importance of the trust is established, the government can concentrate on influencing the important trust and perceived risk attributes.

*Al-Omari* research presented a trust model for e-government implementation. Researchers argued that the main building blocks of trust are:- Information Technology (IT) security, process automation, policies and procedures, social and culture practices and legislation.

Researchers believed that the most important concern in the internet world is how to trust that buying is from the right shop, paying is to the right person, dealing with the right entity. The items will arrive after paid for them, privacy is preserved, personal files and records are kept securely, credit card details or login credentials. These are the issues the networking environment has to be resolved before belief in the internet transaction system can be put.

From researcher's point of view the main key enablers of trust are customers and organization. In order to build a trusted relationship and a partnership between both parties, as researchers said a concise trust model has to be built.

Researchers discussed that trust concerns is a central defining aspect of many economic and social interactions. Building trust is a core requirement for establishing new relationship regarding to security, confidentiality, integrity, non-repudiation, trust especially in an online virtual environment.

Researchers overviewed information technology security in their research that should be embedded in e-commerce or e-government, as strong security may enhance on trusting the

other part in the exchange. From a security perspective as researchers pointed out that trust is the result of applying a combination of IT controls which focus on availability, integrity of data and system, confidentiality of data and system, accountability and assurance.

Researchers discussed the policies and procedures, they are very important to build up trust between exchange parties.

Researchers overviewed social and cultural practices in point of the importance of this factor in building the trust model.

Legislations and legal cover was one of the elements of trust model as presented by researchers, they said the e-governance should focuses on rewriting laws whose applicability is challenge in cyberspace and formulating new rule to address new business models.

At the end researchers came up with the following elements for the trust model:-

1. Information technology security: It is not enough to provide trust without integration of information technology security with the other trust elements.
2. Process automation: It is the last step toward building e-government trust.
3. Trust: The main element in the trust model.
4. Policies and procedures: These are the legal issues.
5. Social and cultural practices: The fair and lawful treatment between the people and government is required to build the trust model.
6. Legislations and legal cover: It provides the legal cover for both customers and government authorities.

Researchers concluded that each government who aims to establish an e-government initiative can use this model (e-government trust model) to build its trust and strengthen relationship with its citizens.



However, they do not present any hypothesis nor apply their model in particular community.

### Overall Conclusion

All the researches emphasized the importance of the culture as a vital factor in building the e-government environment.

Most of the researchers used Hofstede Model and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and adjusted both of them to fit the aim of their research.

It was clear that each country has its national culture (*things that might be very logical and self-evident in one culture can be offensive or illogical in another culture (Pair,2002)*). Based on this fact, no unified rules can be followed to measure the e-government readiness in all countries, each country should conduct its own researches to find out the suitable model to fit its situation to measure the e-readiness.

The other important point found in these researches was that the e-government issue is not only how to establish the infrastructure in term of hardware and software or in term of finding the skilled people to manage the e-government system. However, how to encourage the citizens to make full use of the e-government services in both ways getting information and conducting transactions through the e-government websites (e-service).

From these researches it can be concluded that the trust in using e-services is one of the main elements in citizens adoption of e-government services. However, the change in the interaction with the government from the traditional way to e-services way should be addressed and protected by law and rules to manage the e-transactions.

We deduced that culture in any country is not a barrier in using e-government websites. But it might have an effect on the usage of e-government with full confidence from one side. On the other hand, it might marginalize part of the citizens with limited education, or those who lack the required skills or old people.

To conclude, e-government is the now issue and there is no option for countries including developing countries but to consider it as a high priority. Each country should mobilize its citizens about e-government to overcome e-phobia. To measure the e-readiness of a country, the culture should be deeply researched to identify the impact of the culture on the e-government readiness, and establish the best methods to overcome all negative phenomenon.

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