An exploratory study of factors determining e-government success in Saudi Arabia

Ali Nasser H. Al-Solbi, Computer Centre, Air Academy, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, ali@kfaa.net
Sami H. Al-Harbi, Information Technology Center, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, s.h.alharbi@gmail.com
P.O. Box286089 Riyadh 11323, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

The public policy and e-government implementation issues of any country have a direct impact on the e-readiness of that country. It helps in creating and promoting public and private sectors to invest in the ICT field.

The aim of this paper to explore the main key e-government and policies factors that contribute to the success of e-readiness assessment from the experience of some of the public and private organizations in Saudi Arabia. With this aim, a questionnaire has been developed and distributed, and semi-structured interviews have been conducted with ICT managers in those organizations. The findings are very important since they indicate that both the Saudi leadership and the organisations bosses are aware of the importance of the ICT Infrastructure to the Saudi society. However, the lack of legalisations to regulate the Internet use is very important issues. The designed e-readiness tool has highlighted these important issues. The legislation to regulate the use of the Internet is the most important issue in any e-readiness assessment tool.

Keywords:Policy,e-government,e-Readiness, Developing Country, Information and Communication technology (ICT).

1. Introduction

Certain studies have found that only a limited number of Arab countries have embarked on projects [ICT and Development 2002; Al-Ghobiri 2003]; aimed at introducing integrated ICT capabilities in government institutions with view to rendering government services more accessible to their citizens. However, notable efforts in this direction have been made in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt. Ministers of State, high-level governmental and non-governmental bodies, in addition to national information centres, have recently encouraged promoting ICT development in Arab countries. Saudi Arabia and Oman, for example, are engaged in formulating ICT policies and related strategies.

In this study, the author has developed seven questions intended to ascertain whether the seven factors namely Leadership and awareness, Planning, E-services, Security and electronic signatures, Political openness, E-government are relevant or significant in determining successful e-government implementation in Saudi Arabia. researchers also strongly believe that, other than ascertaining these factors, the study was also aimed to identify other potential factors in the context of Saudi Arabia. To this effect, they recommend that the purpose of the study should be rephrased "to explore factors determining successful e-government implementation in Saudi Arabia".

2. Conceptual Framework

There is no doubt that the Saudi government supports ICT development in the country. [Al-Sudairi, 1994] stated that 130 billion pounds were spent to develop the Saudi ICT Infrastructure and economy between 1975 and 1985, while [Al-Turki and Tang 1998] stated that the Saudi government spent SR 12.717 million on ICT systems.

[Al-Maliki 2005] said:

> "The Saudi government has established several guidelines pertaining to IT development which are constructing a strong IT infrastructure. These policies focus on the computerisation process, such as planning, implementation, effectiveness and evaluation. The guidelines provide an outline of the steps to take and pitfalls to avoid when selecting new computer systems or upgrading existing ones. They are expected to help private organisations in computerising their operations, solve the problems that many of them face and ensure that they obtain maximum returns on their investments."

The Saudi government encourages people and organisations to use the new technologies to be ready for e-government, but [Al-Ghobiri 2003] stated that there are no clear ICT guidelines to

help many organisations to utilise ICT System in their activities.

In the PRIISM tool, there is no direct political openness factor although; there are some other relevant variables e.g. political stability, press freedom and rule of law. The conceptual model of this study includes some variables related to political policies such as government commitment towards developing ICT systems, leadership, rule of law, political stability, privatisation policies, foreign investments, business regulations etc. [Bui, X. et al, 2002]

3. Research Method

Empirical studies addressing readiness and successful implementation of e-government have been quite extensively among the few are [Al-Omari, A., Al-Omari H. 2006; Rahman, H. 2007; Bui,T.X. et al 2003; Al-Solbi A., Mayhew, P. 2006]. These studies have found diverse factors, the author of this decided to address only seven factors which are: Leadership and awareness, Planning, E-services, Security and electronic signatures, Political openness, E-government.

This survey is part of evaluating and improving e-readiness assessment tools. In order to design and test alternative e-readiness model, the researcher collected live data from public and private Saudi organizations rather than using published data from the international organizations e.g. the World Bank [Rizk 2004]. Therefore, 200 questionnaires were distributed to Saudi organizations across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

A total of 87 organizations (48 public and 39 private sector organizations) responded. The selected samples include small, medium and large organizations and their daily activities were found to include different business organizations from both governmental and private sections in order to assess level of e-readiness for whole country. As a result, the researcher designed 7 questions to contribute in designing an alternative e-readiness assessment tool [Al-Solbi A., Mayhew, P. 2006]. These questions were answered by all ICT managers who are working as executive mangers or decision makers in their organizations.

A number of authors noted that Government plays a key role in the digital environment [MI 2000; Heeks 2002], not only by providing the right regulatory framework, but also by leading the way in using ICT for offering government services and transforming the internal processes. Effective regulations should promote competitiveness, ensure affordable pricing for citizens and maximise telecommunications access in society. Leadership awareness, planning, government preparedness, services, infrastructure and data systems play a vital role in e-policy and governance.

The issues considered in this framework are:

Question1: Do you think awareness of ICT among government leaders is important in ensuring e-government success?
1- Yes ( ) 2- No ( )

Question 2: Do you think that political will and commitment to developing ICT system is important in ensuring e-government success?
1- Yes ( ) 2- No ( )

Question3: Do you think that the head of your organisation has a commitment to develop ICT systems in your organisation?
1-Yes ( ) 2- No ( )

Question4: Do you use ICT to archive the organisation's official documents?
1- Yes ( ) 2- No ( )

Question5: Do you that the existing government legislation is sufficient to regulate the use of the Internet?
1- Strongly agree ( ) 2- Agree ( ) 3- Neutral ( )
4- Disagree ( ) 5- Strongly disagree ( )

Question6: Do you think that political instability in this region (i.e. the Middle East) is important in ensuring e- government success in the country?
1- Strongly agree ( ) 2- Agree ( ) 3- Neutral ( )
4- Disagree ( ) 5- Strongly disagree ( )

Question7: Do you think that the rule of law of the country is important in ensuring e-government success?
1- Strongly agree ( ) 2- Agree ( ) 3- Neutral ( )
4- Disagree ( ) 5- Strongly disagree ( )

4. Findings and Discussion

This factor deals with the government's polices and also with the organisations' policies. Seven questions were designed to investigate these issues. [Goh, 1995] indicated that government policies have a major role in supporting ICT diffusion within organisations. Descriptive statistical methods are used to find the means, percentages to find the differences between the public and private sectors.

4.1 Awareness of national leaders of ICT developments

Question 1 (see above section), was designed to show in the ICT managers' view, whether the political leadership is aware of the rapid ICT developments and in term whether this variable is worth studying as it has an impact

on e-readiness progress and is significant to e-readiness assessment.

The results show that 86.2% of the surveyed organisations believed that the national political leadership is aware of rapid developments in ICT. This variable helps to investigate how political leadership understands ICT development since this has a direct impact on decisions related to improving ICT systems. This result shows the manager's opinion that Saudi political leadership is aware of the rapid development in ICT technology. As the survey was conducted in Saudi Arabia, the results relate specifically to that country. The researcher considered this variable has an impact on the progress of e-readiness. This survey was conducted in Saudi organisations and showed that the Saudi government encouraged their agencies to utilise new technology and has made good progress towards their e-government project. For the government promoted ICT conferences and created initiatives in the ICT national projects.

4.2 The Political will to develop ICT systems

The results of question 2, show that 86.2% of the surveyed organisations believe that there is the political will to develop ICT systems in Saudi Arabia. This is very important since the political will of any government has a direct impact on ICT systems. The government has the required resources and tools to create a technological environment that will help in the diffusion of ICT systems within society. The researcher therefore added this variable to this study.

43 Influence of the head of the organisation

In question 3 the results show that 77% of the respondents in both private and public sectors indicated that the head of their organisations have the willingness and commitment towards developing ICT technologies. The role of the top management is an important issue since decisions are made at the top level of the organisation and this has either a negative or a positive impact on the adoption of ICT systems.

4.4 Using ICT to archive official documents

The result of question 4 reveals that the great majorities (79.3%) of the ICT managers use ICT to archive their documents with similar responses in both public and private sectors see Table 6-66. The question is a measure of the skills of the employees in the surveyed organisations. It is an indication of the extent to which employees use ICT systems to serve their business needs and therefore the researcher studied this variable as a part of the new e-readiness tool.

4.5 Government Legislation

Question 5 was designed to investigate whether there was a shortage of government legislation to regulate the use of the Internet. The majority of the respondents indicated that there was a shortage of government legislation regarding usage of Internet technology. The result shows that there was a similarity between the responses of the surveyed organisations. This result means that there are obstacles facing e-readiness development and this variable about government legislation is included in the new tool, it will help to identify a problem that is hindering e-readiness.

4.6 Political Instability

Question 6 was designed to investigate an influence of political instability and whether it affects the e-readiness assessment. As the survey was conducted in Saudi Arabia, the question assessed the impact of political instability in the Middle East on the development ICT in Saudi Arabia since the survey was conducted and the results shown relate specifically to that country. The majority of the surveyed organisations believe that instability in the Middle East has a negative impact on the development programmes of ICT systems in Saudi Arabia. Both public and private sector organisations believe that this instability has a negative impact on the development of ICT systems in this area. Instability in any area around the world reduces ICT competition and investment. Therefore, this variable has been included in the study for the new e-readiness tool.

4.7 Effect of the rule of law in the ICT development of any country

The results of question 7 show that the 44.8% and 33.3% 'strongly agree' and 'agree' respectively of the surveyed organisations agreed that the rule of law contributes a positively and is helpful to develop the ICT systems in any country. They agreed that this issue has a significant impact on development of e-readiness for their organisations. As a result, the researcher believes that this variable is necessary to study e-readiness assessment and needs to be a part of the new e-readiness tool.

5. Conclusion

The study has revealed that 86.2% of the surveyed believe that the Saudi political leadership is aware of the rapid development in the ICT fields. The study also revealed that 86.2% of the surveyed sample believes that the Saudi political leadership has the commitment towards developing the ICT infrastructure. The study has shown that 77% of the sample believes that their bosses have the willingness to develop the ICT systems in their organisations. The study has found that 79.3% of the sample uses ICT archive in saving their documents. The study has shown that 75% of the surveyed organisations in both public and private sectors believe that there is a lack in the Internet legalisations. This is a very important issue and the government should take the appropriate action to solve this problem.

Lack of legislations, to promote the foreign investment and also competitiveness in the Saudi business market. This point should be tackled by the Saudi political leaders to encourage more foreign investment in Saudi Arabia. The tool has employed the e-economy and e-commerce factor to investigate e-commerce generally in the whole country, including privatisation, money transactions via Internet, tariff and non-tariff policies, barriers to new investors, and the use of an electronic signature. The tool discovered that there are problems with these issues. Privatisation was found to be not well established in Saudi and there are barriers for new investors, most of them related to government regulations. The electronic signature was found to be in limited use in the organisations surveyed. The government should introduce legislation to regulate the use of the Internet, money transactions, and attracting new investors. As previously mentioned, the government should create a national ICT strategy with a specified budget.

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