

“The Electronic Government”

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Just as E-Commerce has become a basic need of all types of business from the smallest to the largest and not a choice as it was in the not too distant past, the electronic government is transforming rapidly worldwide to become mandatory. Nowadays, the rush of governments to establish and implement E-government has become over enthusiastic. Similar to the private sector institutions which aim to achieve the electronic leap.

We would like to clarify here that the pressures to accomplish this goal are doubled: from the top to the bottom and from the bottom to the top.

From the top to the bottom like the case of the United Arab Emirates, where His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, ruler of the Emirate of Dubai and Minister of Defense in the UAE, is making strenuous efforts to transform the government of Dubai to the electronic system.

From the bottom to the top as is the case of the United States of America, which as a result of public pressure and the decisions of the US Congress, the subject of E-government turned into a legal issue that strictly binds all the governmental bodies and institutions to provide their services via the Internet.

However, it should be noted that the United States is not the only country that seeks to modernize its government. The year of 2008 has been identified as the deadline for all the government's services to be electronically available, but in March 2000 this was rescheduled to 2005.

We pause here to wonder: What is the E-government? The E-government is the government which electronically regulates relationships between the government and citizens or businesses in all their forms, or between the government's bodies itself.

The traditional government, as we know it, provides and manages a very large number of systems, services and various functions for the citizens, such as jobs, wages of retirement, driving licenses, grants, scholarships, patents, trademarks, and many other countless services. This is in addition to issuing permits for various activities such as construction, import, export, traveling, hunting, fishing and establishing companies and institutions.

There are also many transactions between the different governmental bodies within the same government and between the government and other governments.

The first E-governments meant the flow of information into one direction through the website of the government. These sites were of course linked to the structure of the government, where each governmental body had its own website to which the person who is wishing to obtain information should connect. However, to achieve the desired goal of this information, it was necessary for the person to follow up through telephone, fax or regular mail.

Now, thanks to the technological development, the electronic government which is more modern and more complex, is providing many interactive services that allow the user to completely finish his/her work through the Internet. What might these services be? Paying taxes, applying for certain permits, driver's license renewals ...etc...

The new generation of the E-government websites tends decisively to meet the needs of the user more than of the service providers, which are the traditional governmental administrative departments. These sites are now much easier to the user; they simply review the alphabetical list of the various services and the user can choose what he/she wants without the need to know the name of the governmental body which provides this service.

This attitude reflects one of the most important principles agreed upon that governs the transition to E-government, which is that the focus must be on the user, not on the governmental body that offers a particular service.

This, in turn reveals another important concept in the application of E-government which is that the goal is not automating the governmental processes, but is, and I'm emphasizing this, re-engineering them and improving their efficiency and effectiveness. This is very important, since one of the most important factors to obtain the public acceptance of E-government is to ensure the quality of the electronic communication of information along with the rapid exchange of this information and reducing citizens' wait-times.

The E-government offers the best and fastest way to access to the government's services, which definitely leads the citizen to have more conviction of his/her government. It is a win-win situation, both for the government and the citizen.

When citizens are convinced with their government and are giving it their support, then the government has achieved the main objective of its existence and gained the legitimacy for governing. Furthermore, when the citizen feels he/she can easily and quickly deal with the government and that his/her wishes are met, he/she will feel close to the government, which will make the citizen happy and satisfied and will, as a result, be reflected positively on his/her daily life.

In spite of the fact that there are many benefits of the application of a successful program of E-government, all states, to a certain extent, and the developing countries in particular, will face some challenges. The biggest challenge is the digital divide/gap: this is the dividing line which separates those who can access the Internet and its associated services, from those who cannot. It seems that this divide or this gap is bigger and deeper in the developing countries, as a result of the education barriers and economic barriers and systems that make it difficult for most citizens to access the digital modern world.

This represents a challenge to the governments of the developing countries similar to the challenge they face to develop electronic commerce, because the essential first step for the establishment of E-government is the existence of a large number of computer and Internet users.

Therefore, it is essential to identify quickly the factors leading to the existence of the digital divide/gap, which are: education, barriers and problems of the systems (such as import taxes and restrictions on computer systems and components), governmental monopolies and restrictions on Internet service providers and telecommunications services, and others.

And in line with this, it is necessary that we create and develop legal and artistic climates, side by side, to recognize and differentiate the contracts that are made through the Internet including: electronic signatures, the security and confidentiality of information, and any other specifications to ensure privacy, the development of a proper relationship between the government and the private sector to implement any changes.

Finally, it should be emphasized that, like the challenges that we face in e-commerce, or e-business management, the E-government is the responsibility of the community as a whole: the government, the private sector, NGOs and academics who have to cooperate quickly, efficiently and intensively to cope with the challenges in order to establish, function and develop new technologies that will serve as the manufacturing capacity that will change the form of the community and achieve progress and prosperity for all.

I am confident that our Arab nation possesses a wealth of human resources and creative minds that will enable us in taking a place which will be no less important in any form from other nations, and God bless.