The UAE Model of Smart Government: An Exploratory Analysis

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Abstract

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) government has gone through various administrative reforms since the Union was established in 1971. In these reform efforts, the role of state leadership has been central in inculcating a culture of service improvement and efficient policy implementation through multiple tools. Lately, the vision of the state leadership to achieve people’s happiness has been a critical factor in reconfiguring one of these tools - eGovernment. In the beginning of 2013, the UAE government came up with an innovative idea of smart government (also known as mobile Government or mGovernment), which is seen as an amended vision to outstrip its eGovernment strategy to reach the stage of smart government by as early as 2015. This paper is basically exploratory in nature. The specific objectives of this paper are: (a) to make a theoretical review of existing literature on public service quality, public service innovation and smart government to propose a framework for discussion; (b) to analyze the contextual factors impinging on the adoption of the smart government model; (c) to describe the elements of the model in the UAE; (d) to assess the status of implementation in the UAE; and (e) to evaluate the problems and prospects of the smart initiative. Data and information for this paper were collected from secondary sources. For the UAE, the thrust of the smart government reform was to take advantage of technology as a tool to connect people closer to government and to facilitate the delivery of integrated public services through smart phone application. The two-year reform journey (June 2013-May 2015) has shown remarkable success in terms a smooth transition from eGovernment to mGovernment and subsequently the country has set new targets to achieve between now and 2018. However, there have been two major concerns at the policy level: (i) a number of public organizations have failed to pull alongside other champion entities and (ii) a somewhat low usability by the government clients including citizens and businesses. These two issues need to be addressed to ensure that the smart government policy agenda makes steady progress in the coming years.

Keywords: eGovernment, Smart government, Innovation, Public service quality, Leadership

1.0. Introduction

To understand the evolving relationship between eGovernment, smart government, innovation and public service quality, it is imperative to observe the changes that are taking place in the contemporary global society. The unrestrained demographic shift (occasionally intensifying from...
prolonged civil war and bad governance in some regions of the world), movement of human and financial capital, evolving relationships between states and citizens, and above all information and knowledge spread through technological advancement are pressing for change in governance throughout the world. In this context, the link between government, governance, citizens and space has become more complicated than ever before. However, this apparently unsettled scenario is perceived by some scholars like Jiménez et al. as a new “ecosystem” that merits a new approach. Their view is centred on city-based governance to maximize benefits and minimize disadvantages. They maintain that public governance should be characterized by an open and smart government and it should make the most of information and communication technology (ICT) as one of the powerful tools. The authors however caution that the implementation of this “intelligent” public management is a complex task that requires a multidisciplinary approach (Jiménez et al., 2015). Incited by this resounding view, our research begins with a search for a theoretical construct on smart government and therefore it is considered fruitful to take the discussion further to conceptualize the connection between eGovernment, smart government, innovation and public service quality.

2.0. Conceptualizing the Nexus between eGovernment, Smart Government, Innovation and Quality

2.1. eGovernment

At the beginning of the new millennium, a group of new public management (NPM) sceptics such as Dunleavy categorically argued that the reform spirit of NPM gradually waned in many countries as a form of governance it has become more complex in terms of managing institutions and policies. Based on their extensive research in seven “leading-edge” countries5, Dunleavy and his colleagues observed that as a paradigm shift from new public management, digital-era governance has made citizen-state relationship closer through openness, engagement and service integration. Unquestionably, ICT-led governance (or eGovernment per se) now is one of the most important strategies in the public sector, for it serves as a tool for data analysis, better decision making as well as for enhancing accountability and transparency. Moreover, such systems facilitate multi-level interaction involving citizens, government, businesses, and at different tiers of government at municipal, state and federal levels. In the literature these computerized systems are usually referred to as eGovernment, or eGov for short (Almarabeh & AbuAli, 2010, cited in Alencar, 2015). In a narrow sense eGovernment can be defined as the use of information and communication technology, especially the Internet and the Web technology in running government activities in relation with government stakeholders (Rahman, et. al., 2012).

The use of ICT in government is not new. Many eGovernment initiatives are basically the continuation of computerization projects in government agencies in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, from 1980s until mid-1990s the government of South Korea (ranked 1st in United Nations E-Government Survey 2014) utilized computers to store government and related information in digital format. Various administrative databases and infrastructure were constructed to provide basic government service to public and private sectors. The basic information technology to support computerization projects are powerful hardware such as mainframe computers, centralized database management systems and computer networks. Some governments (such as Singapore and South Korea) even instituted campaigns to gain

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5 The study was conducted in the UK, the US, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Netherlands and Japan during 2000-2004.
The greater use of the Internet and eGovernment services by its citizens. With the development of the Internet and the Web technology, innovations in business and government have started to flourish in a high speed (Rahman, et.al., 2012; Almunawar, et.al., 2011). Over the years we have witnessed the fast development of eGovernment systems which has now been fully adopted across the world as a way to deliver services to government clients including citizens, businesses and others.

From a government perspective, Al-Khouri contends eGovernment as an unquestionable strategic task to deal with facilitating the operation of government and the distribution of governmental information and services with an ultimate goal of increased portfolio of public services to citizens in an efficient and cost effective manner (Al-Khouri, 2014). Based on Atkinson & Castro’s perception on eGovernment’s contribution to building efficiency, improving services, providing better accessibility to citizens and enhancing transparency and accountability (Atkinson & Castro, 2008), the benefits of eGovernment are comprehensively abstracted by Al-Khouri in the following Figure.

![Figure 1]

Primary Drivers of eGovernment

2.2. Smart Government

Of late, smart government and smart city have received enormous attention in public management literature and forums worldwide. The concept ‘smart’ has generated development discourse amongst the academics and policymakers alike. Smart Government is defined in various ways. Gartner, Inc. defines smart government as a government which “integrates information, communication and operational technologies to planning, management and operations across multiple domains, process areas and jurisdictions to generate sustainable public value” (Gartner, Inc., 2014). The definition of smart government by the World Bank is captured by an acronym SMART - a government with “Social, Mobile, Analytics, Rational-Openness and Trust” characteristics (World Bank, 2014). It is also known as “intelligent
government” (Mellouli et al., 2014). Looking through the lens of an eGovernment stage model, the above-mentioned SMART characteristics seem to be fallen on the fifth stage of eGovernment. In that sense, smart government may be conceived as a highest stage of eGovernment where government is expected to be connected with its clients and stakeholders.

The other associated terminologies emerging from the current discussion on “smart” are smart city, open government, big data and so on. A working definition of smart city is provided in Gartner report which defines a smart city a city with sustainable capacity over time to generate economic development. It is an urban area functioning and articulated by modern information and communication technologies in its various verticals, providing ongoing efficient services to its population (Gartner, Inc., 2014). From a public organization perspective, open government can be seen as an evolution of eGovernment, in which the governance paradigm is achieved, and the ICT role and its degree of adoption is a key driver that has important implications (Jimenez and Gasco, 2012, cited in Jiménez et al., 2015). Big data are formed through the recording and storage of traces of various acts performed by several individuals over time, such as financial transactions, social media traffic, health records, and GPS coordinates, often by means of mobile tools (Manyika et al., 2011, cited in Asquer, 2015). Mellouli observes that increased citizen’s engagement introduces this new form of government to engage citizens meaningfully and intelligently. Open data and smart government are likely to serve this engagement fruitfully (Mellouli et al., 2014).

South Korea is moving ahead with an agenda of transformation from eGovernment to smart government which it calls “eGovernment paradigm shift in the smart society”. This country, which has been leading the world in eGovernment in terms of ranking, is currently introducing various innovative concepts in their public life and society, including smart work centre and social media based public services (Kim, 2013).

While smart government with big and open data culture can potentially promote collaboration in what can be called an interactive policymaking, however, there are policy challenges in the arena of big and open data government, such as privacy, security of citizens and businesses as well as access to and dissemination of data and information.

2.3. Public Service Innovation

The need for innovation in public services cannot be overemphasized as many observers argue that it is now more expedient in improving public services than any time in the past. Asquer sees the emergence of challenging social, economic, and political issues, digitalization of social activities, the growing call for transparency and public participation, and the increasing stress on public finance as the pretext for innovative ways of providing public services (Asquer, 2015). Albury’s decade back observation was somewhat similar: “Innovation is essential to the improvement of public services; it is not an optional luxury but needs to be institutionalized as a deep value” (Albury, 2005). Mulgan and Albury define public sector innovation as the design and implementation of new processes, products, services and methods of provision resulting in

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6 A typical stage model may be a Web Presence Measurement Model used by the United Nations (United Nations, 2003, cited in Almunawar, 2011), which has the following five stages. The model proposes a linear and stepwise development of eGovernment starting from a limited web presence to full integration, seamless and transformation:

- Stage 1 (Emerging): Limited web presence
- Stage 2 (Enhanced): Easily accessible information on policy
- Stage 3 (Interactive): Online services and interactive portal sites
- Stage 4 (Transactional): Two-way interactions and online transactions
- Stage 5 (Connected): Seamless online service and integrated back-office
significant improvements in terms of efficiency, effectiveness or quality (Mulgan, and Albury, 2003, cited in Alves, H. 2013). As in the private sector, management innovations do take place in government as a part of the process, particularly at policy planning and service delivery levels, but often, such innovations get unnoticed due to lack of incentives and motivation in government to publicize such developments (Kaul, 1997). Moore and Hartley, two champions of public value, recognize innovation as an important way to improve the standard of public services, both in terms of increasing quality and addressing public value (Moore and Hartley, 2008). Some of the writers have stressed on the impact of innovation in increasing efficiency and effectiveness of public service programmes (Albury, 2005; Osborne and Brown, 2011).

Drawn from the United Nations awards made annually for the best public-sector practices and innovations, some public sector innovation enthusiasts like Alves have advocated for ‘co-creation’ in public sector. Borrowing the concept of ‘co-creation’ from Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), Alves refers to the joint creation of value by the organization and the customer. It is worth remembering that decades ago in the early 1970s, Gilman raised many significant questions about who chooses the goals of innovation and who benefits from innovation, is it public policymakers or the innovators themselves? Gilman then proposed that technological innovation must be socially controlled and people should play a greater role in the choice (approval or rejection) of innovation (Gilman, 1971).

2.4. Public Service Quality and Quality of Life

Ovretveit places ‘public service quality’ within the overall framework of total quality management (TQM) and defines public service quality as “meeting the needs of those most in the need of the service, within higher level requirements, available resources and at the lowest cost within the TQM strategy of organizational and attitude change for enabling staff to learn and use quality methods in order to reduce costs and meet the requirements of customers” (Ovretveit, 2005). In service delivery, the term ‘quality’ is more widely perceived by Bovaird and Loffler, who think that quality ranges from ‘fitness for purpose’ (i.e. meeting organizational objectives’) to ‘meeting customer expectations’ (i.e. deriving service excellence from customer psychology) and even to the extent of ‘passionate emotional involvement’ (i.e. going beyond language and number) (Bovaird and Loffler, 2009). Bovaird and Loffler go beyond quality of public services to the ultimate value of ‘quality of life’ (Bovaird and Loffler, 2009).

Putting it all together, it is conceivable that there is a logical linkage between eGovernment, smart government, innovation and service quality leading to better quality of life. The connectivity is not a new reality, it is rather a stronger imperative as rapid changes in technology vis-à-vis human relations took place over the past decade or so. But before the study proposes a conceptual framework, Prahalad’s notion of ‘citizen-centric governance’ may offer value to discourse on an appropriate framework to analyse the role of smart government and innovation in improving citizen’s quality of life in a given context. Prahalad’s model is based on the assumption that the entire government and governance processes should be as transparent as possible. Once there is a shift from a delivery channel approach (which is often described as institution-centred government), to a citizen-centric system (where citizens form the core of development agendas), this means citizens are involved in all decisions and policy making agendas. The gap that exists in the old institution-centred government model between the State and citizens is overcome by empowering and consulting citizens through their participation. Once citizens become active participants and no longer remain passive objects of development, then actual human development results. The State becomes accountable and responsible, citizens’ quality of life improves. The State becomes able to develop its full potential and this in turn positively impacts on investment inflows, as is shown in the model in Figure 2.
The study proposes the following construct for analysis (see Figure 3). It is somewhat adapted from Prahalad but exits from the model to conceptualize a direct downward nexus between the four elements under study (i.e. eGovernance, smart government, innovation and quality). It proposes that smart government succeeds eGovernance as a new paradigm of governance, just as Dunleavy and his colleagues (Margetts, Bastow and Tinkler) questionably argued a decade ago that digital-era governance (or eGovernance) was born out of the ashes of new public management. The study also proposes that smart government and innovation have the potential to enable a government to bring efficiency and effectiveness in public services and ultimately achieve its goal of improving people’s quality of life and happiness.
3.0. **Smart Government Model of the UAE**

3.1. The UAE’s journey from eGovernment to Smart Government

In the past few years, many countries of the world paid enormous attention to developing policies and strategies around the emerging concept of eGovernment. In terms of implementation and action, some countries have made quicker progress than others and potentially succeeded in producing desired results. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), through continuous enthusiasm and initiative from its leaders and with a reform vigor with best practice adoption, have achieved greater and quicker results (Rahman, et. al., 2012). The coupling of quality management ideas, government performance paradigms and excellence models led naturally to an adoption of eGovernment in the UAE at the turn of the century. The two following figures (Figure 4 and Figure 5) show the continues evolution that took place in the eGovernment policy and strategy of the country.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highlights</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
<th>Owner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-Dirham</td>
<td>February 2001</td>
<td>The first online service launched by the Ministry of Finance in the federal government to replace the traditional means of fees collection for government services</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eGovernment Programme</td>
<td>November 2002</td>
<td>The Coordinating Committee for the Federal eGovernment Programme was formed and led by the Ministry of Finance and Industry</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eGovernment Strategy</td>
<td>March 2003</td>
<td>IBM was assigned to conduct an assessment study for the federal agencies and to develop an implementation plan</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The eGovernment Implementation Plan</td>
<td>June 2004</td>
<td>A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Emirates Telecommunications Corporation (Etisalat) to provide the infrastructure for the eGovernment. The plan was divided into three phases ending in 2007</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eGovernment Portal</td>
<td>March 2005</td>
<td>The launch of the first eGovernment portal in cooperation with Etisalat, which was exclusively assigned to implement the plan</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigning the Ministry of Government Sector</td>
<td>March &amp; July 2006</td>
<td>A ministerial decree was issued to move the eGovernment programme from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of Government Sector Development</td>
<td>Ministry of Government Sector Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of the Information Systems Strategy</td>
<td>June 2008</td>
<td>A ministerial decree was issued to assign the TRA to lead the efforts to develop a strategy for the information systems in the UAE. TRA, in cooperation with Booz Allen Hamilton, developed the Information Systems Strategy of the Federal Government</td>
<td>Telecommunications Regulatory Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of the Government Service Strategy</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>The Office of the Prime Minister developed a Government Service Development Strategy, which was the third foundational element of the eGovernment Strategy</td>
<td>Prime Minister's Office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5
eGovernment – Strategy 2012-2014


In May 2013, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai launched the Mobile Government Initiative (also popularly known as UAE’s smart government) with the aim of providing government services round the clock and facilitating their access to people from wherever they are. Sheikh Mohammed, in his inaugural speech on the launching of the smart government shared this optimism, “We have succeeded in promoting a modern concept of a creative eGovernment, and today we are proceeding towards a government which will provide its services via mobile phone, building on the fact that we have the best communications infrastructure in the world with nearly 14 million mobile phone subscribers, and an average of two mobile phones for each person…..I want every citizen to be able to process all his governmental transactions by smartphone.”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMlwHohz6jc#aid=P-o5tv_yOY. Thirteen years and almost 1000 eServices since the launch of eDirham, the UAE’s wise and visionary leadership have now fixed their vision at simplifying further the process to access government services. With the mGovernment Initiative government services will be offered through mobile phones, smart phones, portable devices and kiosks. Sheikh Mohammed aims for satisfaction of people and their happiness by providing a well-rounded lifestyle. (Al Mansoori, 2014).

3.2. The UAE mGovernment roadmap 2013-2015 and Its Impact

The evolutionary phase of smart government (mGovernment) transformation initiative, followed by smart government roadmap, mGov guidelines and national level smart government plan with a deadline to transform prioritized government services in a timeframe of two years. This
The mGovernment roadmap (shown below in Figure 6) has four phases. The first and second phases (i.e. establishing the environment and assessing capabilities of government agencies) was completed in May 2015. In these two phases, an ambitious initiative with a 24 months' timeline was sponsored by The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Fund of AED 200 million to support mobile phone applications along with other resources required, including ICT technical assistance and advice [Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), 2013]. In the third and fourth phases (2015-2018) the main tasks are being implemented such as the integration of services and enhancing user happiness through a citizen-centric vision of the state. Currently, the UAE government has developed over 342 smart applications\(^7\) to provide more than 800 services to citizens out of a planned 2000.

\(^7\) 174 for IOS and 168 for Android.
The Smart Government Initiative Structure is shown in Figure 7 below. It illustrates the relationship between the different players within the initiative. The key players are the Higher Committee for Smart Government, Director of Smart Government in the TRA, TRA Smart Government Team, Prime Minister’s office and the UAE Smart Government stakeholders, which are Government Entities and projects consultants (TRA, 2015).

Figure 7
mGovernment (Smart Government) Initiative Structure

Clear mandates are assigned to the 48 federal entities as stakeholders and implementers, Moreover, a leading role given to the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) as the initiative owner and enabler translated into one of its strategic objectives in the TRA’s Strategy (2014-2016) that is “Establishing the bases for the e-government at the federal level” (TRA, 2015).

The Higher Committee of mGovernment is at the top of the structure which approves strategically the related mGovernment Roadmap, National mGovernment Plan and makes necessary decisions to implement the initiative where the UAE smart government advances through the maturity levels from electronic government where limited electronic access level are available only, through mobile government where services are delivered through targeted access channels until reaching the smart government stage where services are cloud-based and selectively targeting demographic indicators with intelligent delivery based on predictive analysis (TRA, 2015).

On May 24th, 2015, the Emirates 24/7 newspaper published the results for the rate of m-government transition (Emirates 24/7, 2015). As resulted from the evaluation of the first phase of the initiative, the success rate of smart transformation index stood at an impressive 96.3 % for the most important 337 services as prioritized by the government entities and PMO.
Figure 8 shows infographic on the results of smart government transition (Gulf News, 2015). The education sector in particular was spotted as an underperformer in this transition, but all other sectors have done almost equally well with the energy sector ranking the top position.

The next stage in the country’s mGovernment journey will entail linking all the services together, improving the quality of smart applications and achieving a high satisfaction rate for smart services. It targets raising the number of smart services users to 80 per cent of a total number of around 1000 services by 2018 (Emirates24/7News, 2015). This future phase is supplemented with defined strategic KPIs for the mGovernment Sector in the TRA (2017-2021) which monitors and measures the federal entities’ commitment with mGovernment enablers, development of the mGovernment and eGovernment services maturity index platform and the initiative of smart maturity for federal government services and performance (TRA, 2014). This leads the initiative to the next level where the target is to enhance the usage of available smart services provided by the UAE Government.
4.0. Overall Achievements

The United Arab Emirates has climbed 21 places to stand at 28th rank in the 2012 United Nations eGovernment survey of more than 190 countries. It had stood at 49th rank in 2010. The UAE has also leaped to rank 7th on ‘online service index’ in the United Nations E-Government Survey 2012; up from rank 99th in the 2010 version of the biennial report (Khaleej Times, February 29, 2012). In 2014, the UAE achieved 32nd rank in the eGovernment Development Index in the United Nations eGovernment survey. The UAE is 2nd in GCC and the Arab world in the eGovernment Development Index, amongst the top 20 countries in Asia in the eGovernment Development Index, 12th globally in Online Service index, 13th globally in eParticipation Index. Compared to 60th rank in 2004, the UAE has gradually elevated its global position in eGovernment reform record.

4.1. Abu Dhabi

In recognition of its efforts in implementing Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI) and driving the cooperative use of geospatial information across a wide range of Government entities in Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi e-Government was the inaugural recipient of the first-ever “2015 Smart Government Award” launched by the Environmental Systems Research Institute (Esri) User Conference, held in San Diego, California in the United States on 20th – 21st July (Abu Dhabi eGovernment, 2015)

4.2. Emirates ID Authority

The deployment of the Emirates ID Authority’s Biometric Enrolment by the Emirates ID Authority as part of the National ID Registration Program is recognized as one of the world’s best biometric programs (United Nations, 2014).

5.0. 2015: The UAE’s Innovation year

As reflected in its long-term strategic goals (UAE Vision 2021), the UAE aims to achieve a competitive economy driven by knowledgeable and innovative Emiratis and a diversified and flexible knowledge-based economy powered by skilled Emiratis and strengthened by world-class talent to ensure long-term prosperity for the country. Recently, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai also envisioned UAE to be one of top innovative countries in the world in the next seven years. Central to these aims are the development of human and intellectual capital to facilitate the process of innovation in both public and private sectors of the UAE. For the public sector, this means producing high caliber government officers, with:

a) the skills to comprehensively develop innovation strategies and policies, and the capability to formulate innovative and workable solutions;
b) the ability to manage the implementation of those solutions to achieve the intended outcomes.

The UAE is observing 2015 as innovation year. In November 2014, Dubai Innovative Strategy was approved. It envisions Dubai to be the world’s most innovative city in three years. It involves 20 initiatives in 10 sectors to be implemented over the next three years. The sectors are: Renewable energy, Transport, Education, Health, Technology, Water and space, Hospitality, Economy, Tourism, and Government services.
6.0. Public Service Quality and Happiness

The UAE’s leadership realized early on people’s needs to be fulfilled, concerns to be addressed, and objectives to be realized in an evolving era of globalization and technological innovation. The Vice President and the Prime Minister of the UAE, Sheikh Mohammed Al Maktoum rightfully captured governments’ essence in his book – as means to an end, ought to deliver on public promises: creating values that match people’s hopes, outcomes that can instill common happiness amongst citizens (Al Maktoum, 2013). In his closing speech at the Dubai Government Summit in 2014, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid laid down his vision to make people happy: "I would like, at the close of the Summit, to welcome the guests of the UAE and all participants in the Summit; I tell them: it is the summit of support, the summit of people of energy. I am happy that our country has one work team - the biggest and best team whose students are real men, employees are leaders; our goal in the UAE is to make hope, life and future, and make people happy." His statement “In the race for excellence, there’s no line” sums up in the broadest sense, not only explicit excellence models’ improvement needs, but the generic driver in public sector development (Nuseirat, 2008).

The city of Dubai already has a plan to install “happiness meter” as an interface to greet the city’s visitors and residents at every service and experience touch point, with live analysis provided to the city’s key decision makers and leadership – the Executive Council of Dubai. Already, in entities like Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA) such a device helps customers to provide their level of happiness and satisfaction with DEWA services. Through mPay (Dubai Smart Government Mobile Payment Portal), customer happiness on nine services from the Government of Dubai are measured through smart phone technology.

The Emirates Identity Authority has announced that it has amended one of the corporate values enlisted in its strategic plan 2014-2016 from ‘focus on the customers’ to ‘making the customers happy’. It also fixed a daily indicator to measure the happiness of its customers and their satisfaction about its performance and services. The Emirates ID said it has begun to develop the mechanisms for measuring the happiness of its customers on a daily basis in terms of an integrated online system that allows them to evaluate the services and performance. This will help the process of constantly improving the level of services offered to the customers, as their feedback gets instantly transmitted to the leadership in real time (One1Info, 2015).

7.0 Smart Government Challenges

For the UAE, the thrust of the smart government reform was to take advantage of technology as a tool to connect people closer to government and to facilitate the delivery of integrated public services through smart phone application. The two-year reform journey (June 2013-May 2015) has shown remarkable success in terms a smooth transition from eGovernment to mGovernment. Subsequently the country has set new milestones to achieve further results between now and 2018. However, there have been a few concerns at the policy level: (i) a number of public organizations have failed to pull alongside other champion entities; (ii) a somewhat low usability by the government clients including citizens and businesses; and (iii) the mobile services and apps have not been fully integrated yet.

Adequate monitoring and motivation may inspire the organizations, who have trailed behind, to improve their infrastructure, organizational modification to comply with smart institutional set-up. To increase citizen participation and provide citizen-oriented services, there is a need to offer easy access to mGovernment information in alternative forms (e.g. awareness, community-based voluntary activity, citizens participation campaigns). Wireless and mobile networks,
infrastructure, as well as software and apps need to be developed and provided through integrated platform. To build customer trust on data security and safety, legislation on data protection, spelling out the rights of citizens and the responsibilities of the data holders, may be initiated. The above-mentioned issues need to be addressed by the TRA and Smart Government Departments of the Emirates in a collaborative manner to ensure that the UAE’s smart government policy agenda makes steady progress in the coming years.

8.0 Conclusion

Based on a simplified conceptual framework on the evolving relationship between eGovernment, smart government, innovation and service quality, this exploratory research aimed to examine the smart government journey, its pitfalls and future challenges. The implementation of the first phase of smart government in the UAE has shown astonishingly good results in achieving a high level transformation status from eGovernment to smart government. This will potentially inspire the governments across the Emirates to continue to deliver public services through the mobile platform. This good practice (and good model) can also inspire countries in the Middle East and North African region to appreciate and follow similar trail to improve their public service record and to satisfy their citizens. In fact, the UAE is a case that brings hope globally, not least in the Arab world.

Despite the progress made, citizens’ adaption to smart life is somewhat low and thus it needs to be given policy attention. Also, the apparent disparity in resources and motivation between some Emirates compared to other “leading edge” Emirates needs to be bridged. And most importantly, all IT-based mobile services should be integrated on a platform. Now that the development of ICT infrastructure has been undertaken, the reformers’ onus should be on improving the level of awareness and confidence amongst the citizens to build their trust and inspiration to engage in a vibrant citizen-state interface. Through these approaches, the UAE government will be able to improve the rate of usage on smart government platforms.

The UAE’s leadership has well-responded to the NPM and post-NPM (i.e. smart governance) reform paradigms in a timely manner. It inspired reform emphasizing on service quality, efficiency and excellence and is now focusing on mobile-based smart services. The leadership vision, smart governance and citizen engagement will together make the case of smart society a reality.

References


