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E-Governance and Public Service Management in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

The study investigates the application and impact of e-governance on Public Service management in Akwa Ibom State. The population consisted of officers on grade level 14 and above in the Akwa Ibom State Public Service, including directors, permanent secretaries and political office holders, numbering 1,602. The simple random sampling technique was used in selecting a sample of 160 respondents: 96 males and 64 females, for the study. Two null hypotheses were formulated based on the variables of the study. These were tested at 0.05 alpha level, using the independent t-test analysis. Data collection was done with the use of a structured instrument tagged "E-governance and Public Service Management" (EPSM). The calculated t-values were greater than the critical t, leading to the rejection of the two null hypotheses. It was, therefore, concluded that the application of e-governance in Akwa Ibom State Public Service does not significantly impact upon Public Service delivery in the State. It is recommended among other things that a committee should be set to effect full implementation of e-governance and e-government in Akwa Ibom State; every Ministry/parastatal in the State Public Service should be directed to build its own website and make effective use of such; ICT equipment should be distributed evenly in all ministries/parastatals in the State Public Service; training workshops should be organized regularly for public servants on the application of ICT equipment for enhanced service delivery and members of the public should be encouraged to avail themselves of the benefit of e-governance made available by the Public Service.

Introduction

Governments around the world are increasingly using information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve the performance of Public Service management and, with that, to fundamentally change public

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administration and service provision. There is an emerging awareness that ICT-enabled reform efforts can bring about institutional changes to the structure and functioning of the public management system and its external relationships with citizens, businesses and other organizations. Such reform efforts as the e-governance has brought to bear key public management concepts, such as accountability, good governance, public value, performance measurement, transparency, Public Service delivery, public participation and multi-stakeholder collaboration, intended to facilitate Public Service management. This study investigates the extent of application and impact of e-governance in Public Service management in Akwa Ibom State.

E-Governance, e-Government and the Public Service

Governance refers to the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs, including articulation of citizens' interests and exercise of their legal rights and obligations (OECD, 2003). It is the machinery for the management of a country's Public Service. Public Service is a term used in describing services provided by government to the citizens, either directly (through the public sector) or by financing private provision of services. The term is associated with a social consensus (usually expressed through democratic elections) that certain services should be available to all, regardless of income. Even where public services are neither publicly provided nor publicly financed, for social and political reasons, they are usually subject to regulation going beyond that applying to most economic sectors. Public services are considered so essential to modern life that for moral reasons their universal provision should be guaranteed and they may be associated with fundamental human rights (such as the right to water). In modern, developed countries the term public services often include broadcasting, education, electricity, fire service, health care, military, police service, public transportation, housing, telecommunications, town planning, waste management, water services, public information and archiving, such as libraries, social services and environmental protection.

E-governance is, therefore, understood as the performance of governance via the electronic medium in order to facilitate an efficient, speedy and transparent process of disseminating information to the public, and other agencies, and for performing government administrative activities (Garson, 2006). It is aimed at effective and efficient Public Service delivery. E-governance, which subsumes e-government, is generally considered as a wider concept than e-government since it can bring about a change in the way citizens relate to governments and to one

another. E-governance brings forth new concepts of citizenship, both in terms of citizens' needs and responsibilities. Its objective is to engage and empower the citizens.

On the other hand e-government, also known as digital government, refers to how government utilizes ICT and other telecommunication technologies to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector (Jeong, 2007). E-government, an abbreviation for electronic or online government, entails digital interaction between a government and citizens (G2C), government and businesses/commerce/e-commerce (G2B), between government agencies (G2G), government and religious movements/churches (G2R) and government and households (G2H) (Satyanarayana, 2004). It is the application of information and communication technologies for delivery of government services, exchange of information, communication transactions, integration of various stand-alone systems and services between government and citizens, government and business, as well as office processes and interactions within the entire government framework (Nixon and Rawal, 2009). It is the use of a range of modern information and communication technologies such as internet, local area networks, mobiles, etc., by government to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery and to promote democracy.

As reported by Kaylor *et al.*, Eck (2006) e-government entails the use of technology to enhance the access to the delivery of government services to benefit citizens, business partners and employees. Its focus is on:

1. The use of information and communication technologies, and particularly the internet, as a tool to achieve better governance (OECD, 2003).
2. The use of information and communication technologies in all facets of the operations of a government organization (Koh and Prybutok, 2008).
3. The continuous optimization of service delivery, constituency participation and governance by transforming internal and external relationships through technology, the internet and news media (Brown, 2009).

While e-government has traditionally been understood as being centred around the operations of government, e-governance is understood to extend the scope by including citizen engagement and participation in governance. As such, in line with the OECD definition of e-government, e-governance can be defined as the use of ICTs as a tool to achieve better

governance (Garson, 2006). Through e-governance, government services are made available to the citizens in a convenient, efficient and transparent manner.

Effective and efficient operation of e-governance involves periodic training of government officials and employees on the application of ICT facilities aimed at making public servants thorough with e-governance applications and becoming responsive to technology-driven administration. E-governance enhances efficiency, transparency, and citizens' participation in governance resulting in good governance, trust and accountability, citizens' awareness and empowerment, citizens' welfare, democracy and nation's economic growth (Garson, 2006). E-governance focuses attention on improved service delivery mechanism, enhancing the efficiency of production and emphasizing the wider access of information.

Implementers and drivers of e-governance initiative agree that the biggest challenge of deploying e-governance is not technology but change management. Change management is important not only in terms of cultural change but also in terms of changing operations, processes and workflow that the automated environment introduces. E-governance is implemented to enhance good governance. Good governance is generally characterized by participation, transparency and accountability. The recent advances in communication technologies and the internet provide opportunities to transform the relationship between governments and citizens in a new way, thus contributing to the achievement of good governance goals. As observed by Becker (2009), e-governance increases the broad involvement of citizens in the process of governance at all levels by providing the possibility of online discussion and enhancing the rapid development and effectiveness of pressure groups. E-governance enables the government to provide better services thus making governance more efficient and more effective. Besides, e-governance lowers transaction costs and makes government services more accessible.

E-governance facilitates:

- *e-administration* – improving government processes and internal workings of the public sector through ICT-executed programmes;
- *e-citizens* – making information widely available to citizens with the aim of increased transparency and accountability, providing information about the political process, about services and choices available;
- *e-services* – giving the citizens a greater choice, faster delivery and improved efficiency of services, and

- *e-democracy* – improving accessibility of citizens to their elected members and creating a vision for partnership in the decision making process (Kushchu and Kuscu, 2006).

Risks and Benefits of e-Governance

Risks

There are many considerations and potential implications of implementing and designing e-government. These include disintermediation of the government and its citizens, impacts on economic, social and political factors, vulnerability to cyber attacks and disturbances to the status quo in these areas (Singel, 2008).

Hyper-surveillance. Increased contact between government and its citizens goes both ways. Once e-government begins to develop and becomes more sophisticated, citizens will be forced to interact electronically with the government on a larger scale. This could potentially lead to a lack of privacy for civilians as their governments obtain more and more information on them. In a worse scenario, with so much information being passed electronically between government and civilians, a totalitarian-like system could develop. When the government has easy access to countless information on its citizens, personal privacy is lost (Lyman, 2006).

Inaccessibility. An e-government site that provides web access and support often does not offer the “potential to reach many users especially those who live in remote areas, are homebound, low literacy levels, and those on poverty line incomes” (Becker, 2009).

False sense of transparency and accountability. Opponents of e-government argue that online governmental transparency is dubious because it is maintained by the governments themselves. Information can be added or removed from the public eye.

Benefits

It is convenient and cost-effective for businesses, and the public benefits by getting easy access to the most current information available without having to spend time, energy and money to get it. E-government helps simplify processes and makes access to government information more easily accessible for public sector agencies and citizens (Singel, 2008).

Democratization. One goal of e-government is greater citizen participation. Through the internet, people from all over the country can interact with

politicians or public servants and make their voices heard. Blogging and interactive surveys allow politicians or public servants to see the views of the people they represent on any given issue. Chat rooms can place citizens real-time contact with elected officials, their offices or provide them with the means to replace them by interacting directly with public servants, allowing voters to have a direct impact and influence in their government. These technologies can create a more transparent government, allowing voters to immediately see how and why their representatives at the centre are behaving the way they do. This helps voters better decide who to vote for in the future or how to help the public servants become more productive. A government could theoretically move more towards a true democracy with the proper application of e-government. Government transparency will give insight to the public on how decisions are made and hold elected officials or public servants accountable for their actions. The public could become a direct and prominent influence in government legislature to a degree (Schrier, 2008).

Speed, efficiency and convenience. E-government allows citizens to interact with computers to achieve objectives at any time and any location, and eliminates the necessity for physical travel to government agents. Improved accounting and record keeping can be noted through computerization, and information and forms can be easily accessed. On the administrative side, there is easy access to find or retrieve files and linked information can now be stored in databases as against hard copies stored in various locations. Individuals with disabilities no longer have to be mobile to be active in government and can work in the comfort of their own homes (Satyanarayana, 2004).

Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for this study. This was because of the need to gather information regarding the variables under study in order to test the hypotheses. The population consisted of officers on salary grade level 14 and above in the Akwa Ibom State Public Service, including directors, permanent secretaries and political office holders, numbering 1,602. The simple random sampling technique was used in selecting a sample of 160 respondents for the study. Two null hypotheses were formulated based on the variables of the study. These were tested at 0.05 alpha level, using the independent t-test analysis. Data collection was done with the use of a structured questionnaire tagged "E-governance and Public Service Management" (EPSM). The instrument was duly validated and pilot-tested with a reliability coefficient of 0.69.

Data Analyses and Results

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female senior civil servants and political office holders regarding the application of e-governance in the Akwa Ibom State Public Service.

Table 1

Weighted mean and t-test of the responses of male and female senior civil servants and political office holders regarding the application of e-governance in the Akwa Ibom State Public Service

S/N	E-governance Indices	Mean		t-value	Remarks
		Male	Female		
1.	My Ministry/parastatal has a website.	3.8	3.8	1.14	NS
2.	Operation of the website is officially assigned to a specific body.	3.4	3.3	1.06	NS
3.	The website is updated regularly.	2.4	1.3	2.37	S
4.	ICT equipment are provided for use in the offices.	1.1	2.4	3.42	S
5.	Training workshops on e-governance are regularly organized for the staff.	1.9	2.8	2.58	S
6.	ICT and computer training are regularly organized for the staff.	2.2	1.0	2.71	S
7.	Most businesses in the Ministry/parastatal are carried out electronically.	2.8	1.7	2.33	S
8.	E-payment is adopted in all financial transactions in the Ministry/parastatal.	2.2	2.9	2.61	S

$N_1 = 96$; $N_2 = 64$; $df = 158$; $t_{-cri} = 1.96$; Average $t_{-cal} =$; S = Significant; NS = Not Significant.

Table 1 indicates a significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents in six out of the eight identified e-governance indices in the

Public Service, with t-values greater than the critical t-values of 1.96. The null hypothesis was, therefore, rejected. However the responses of the officers were different regarding items 1 and 2 with calculated t-values less than the critical t.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female senior civil servants and political office holders regarding the impact of e-governance in the Akwa Ibom State Public Service.

Table 2
Weighted mean and t-test of the responses of male and female senior civil servants and political office holders regarding the impact of e-governance in the Akwa Ibom State Public Service

S/N	Impact of e-governance in the Public Service	Mean		t-value	Remarks
		Male	Female		
1.	The official website is used in disseminating information concerning the Ministry/parastatal.	2.8	2.1	2.91	S
2.	Members of the public can easily access the website.	2.8	2.7	1.28	NS
3.	Members of the public carry out business with the Ministry through the official website.	2.2	3.0	2.85	S
4.	E-governance has impacted greatly on Public Service delivery in the Ministry.	2.1	2.9	3.01	S
5.	Complaints are often received regarding the website.	2.6	2.5	1.37	NS
6.	Elected/appointed public office holders can be contacted with ease by members of the public.	2.4	1.3	2.75	S

$N_1 = 96$; $N_2 = 64$; $df = 158$; $t_{-cri} = 1.96$; Average $t_{-cal} =$; S = Significant; NS = Not Significant

Table 2 shows a significant difference in the mean responses of the male and female respondents regarding the impact of e-governance on

public service delivery in Akwa Ibom State. The t-values in four out of the six identified items were greater than the critical t-values leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. However, two of the six items had t-values less than the critical t.

Discussion of Findings

Data analysis in hypothesis 1 indicates significant difference in the mean responses of male and female senior civil servants and political office holders regarding the application of e-governance in the Akwa Ibom State Public Service. The average t-value was less than the critical t, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. By implication, the two groups of respondents do not agree regarding the application of e-governance in Public Service management in Akwa Ibom State. However, a careful analysis of the responses reveals that e-governance is partially embraced in the service. Some of the ministries effectively operate their websites while some do not. E-payment is effected in certain financial transactions, especially salary payment. This reduces the burden and suffering of the workers as they can access their money at will. E-governance, according to Garson (2006), focuses attention on improved service delivery mechanism and enhances the efficiency of government. The application of e-governance has been accredited with general improvement in service delivery, participation in governance and effective administration (Becker, 2009).

The result of data analysis in hypothesis 2 shows a significant difference in the mean responses of senior civil servants and public office holders regarding the impact of e-governance on public service delivery in Akwa Ibom State. The average t-value was greater than the critical t leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Although the respondents could not agree regarding the impact of e-governance on public service delivery in all aspects, certain areas were actually impacted by e-governance in the Public Service. ICT equipment are provided in some offices and the official website of the ministries and parastatals are accessible to members of the public. Besides, salaries are paid electronically. E-governance enables the citizens to have direct contact with their elected/appointed officials. This is in line with the assertion of Schrier (2008) that the public can become a direct and prominent influence in government as a result of the introduction of e-governance.

Conclusion

On the basis of the data analysis, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. E-governance is not effected in every sector of the Public Service in Akwa Ibom State.
2. E-governance does not impact significantly on public service delivery in Akwa Ibom State.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the results of the findings and the conclusion drawn:

1. A committee should be set to effect full implementation of e-governance and e-government in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Every Ministry/parastatal in the State Public Service should be directed to build its own website and make effective use of such.
3. ICT equipment should be distributed evenly in all ministries/parastatals in the state Public Service.
4. Training workshops should be organized regularly for public servants on the application of ICT equipment for enhanced service delivery.
5. The public should be encouraged to avail themselves of the benefit of e-governance made available by the Public Service.

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