Digital Government in Developing Countries

Pointers to Success

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Digital Government...

...can be very useful

- Can assist government in realising its objectives
- Can improve effectiveness and help achieve efficiencies

BUT

- It is not an end in itself
- Some projects can be too demanding in terms of cost and personal skills required

Ask These Key Questions at the Outset

- Do we have the technical expertise to implement this sort of project?

- Do we have the technical expertise to run this sort of project?

- Do the intended users have the capacity to use the project fully or can they be readily trained and kept up to date with the necessary skills to benefit from the project?

- Is a project complexity and cost justified by a realistic assessment of key benefits

Governments should be primarily concerned with providing good services and engaging with their electorates in the most cost-effective way

Digital technology *may* have a role in that process

Possible Government Uses of Digital Technology (1)

- Publishing details of service availability, policies, plans and budgets online to inform citizens

- Using the internet to offer health advice & providing professional contact when personal visits are difficult to arrange

- Offering learning materials online for students of all ages

- Providing safety and security advice online including the use of chat rooms and receiving citizen concerns about criminal activity and other public dangers

Possible Government Uses of Digital Technology (2)

- Using the internet to explain their tax liabilities to tax payers and enabling them to complete tax declarations

- Using the internet to offer smallholders advice on farming practices and market prices

- Redesigning administrative practices to improve effectiveness and/or efficiency and/or transparency

Benefits from utilising the internet and other digital approaches do not necessarily need hugely complex and expensive technology

If governments do not have sufficient staff with the necessary technical skills then major digital systems may never be properly configured and the client may be left with a partially implemented system

In these circumstances more modest ambitions are appropriate

Digital Government Change Project

Must Do's #1: Before committing

- Identify the key benefits sought from the project

- Make a thorough assessment of the internal resources (skills, knowledge, staffing commitments and budgets) required to support the reform process

- Identify ways of redressing administrative deficiencies including improvements in the recruitment and training of in-house staff and encouragement of local firms to upgrade their ability to support these developments

- Consider the options by which change can be achieved

- Assess all the costs and benefits of the options

Digital Government Change Project

Must Do's #2: At commencement

- Ensure the necessary management and decision-taking processes are in place

- Find the right people to fill the roles created

- Prioritise work to maximise initial benefit

- Develop a sound strategy for project sustainability

- Ensure all key benefits have success measures and each has someone responsible for its realisation

Digital Government Change Project

Must Do's #3: During the project

- Monitor and evaluate progress

- Ensure issues are brought to the attention of people with the seniority to address them and that corrective action is taken

- Celebrate successes

- Learn from the implementation programme and adapt the approach as necessary

- Apply technological advances where they offer clear advantages

- Apply a relentless focus on benefits realization

Digital Government Change Project

Must Do's #4: After project completion

- Maintain a relentless focus on benefits realization
- Ensure the strategy for project sustainability is implemented

Remember!

There is no need for the state to do everything: the private sector may provide relevant services on a commercial basis

That a challenging reform agenda demands a flexible approach, cool judgement and realistic timescales

Implementers must avoid being found friendless and trapped by unachievable expectations

About PFM Connect

PFMConnect is a consultancy that has been created formed from a network of experts in the fields of public financial management, economics, governance, digital technology, change management, civil engineering and climatology.

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An archive of articles on public financial management and digital government can be found under 'key posts' at http://blog-pfmconnect.com.

About the authors

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