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eGOVERNMENT, ADMINISTRATIVE SIMPLIFICATION AND REGULATORY REFORM:

THE DUBAI EXPERIENCE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In its efforts to support Dubai's tremendous growth in the past decade and to attract foreign direct investment that will achieve its vision, Dubai Government plays a key role in setting the appropriate regulatory environment, while continuously enhancing its service delivery for businesses and citizens.

This paper describes two successful government initiatives, Dubai e-Government and the Dubai Government Excellence Program, both examples of good governance, which aim to improve the quality of service provision to the residents of Dubai and to provide an attractive investment environment to promote economic growth.

Dubai eGovernment was established to launch Dubai's digital transitioning to an eGovernment. Its objective is to provide government services "through innovative channels and in a customer-centric manner".

Dubai Government Excellence Program was initiated to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the government departments' performance in their service delivery to their constituents. It aims to effect major improvement in the departments' performance by focusing on self-assessment and continuous improvement. Dubai Government Excellence Program provides a baseline and supporting criteria for development in order to assess the departments' performance.

The key elements of success for Dubai eGovernment and Dubai Government Excellence Program have been the commitment, the continuous drive and the personal involvement by Dubai's top leadership.

Both initiatives, though different in their goals and objectives, emphasize the steps Dubai is taking towards enhancing, in a sustainable way, its economic and social development through good governance practices. In their different approaches, the initiatives involve reform, and hence change. In order to effect change successfully, the two initiatives incorporated capacity building elements at the individual as well as the institutional levels. Ultimately, through achieving their respective goals, both initiatives are promoting accountability and transparency in the public sector.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Dubai has undergone tremendous transformation, fuelled by the vision to become a 'hub of hubs' between leading cities of the world; a city of choice in the knowledge economy. The underlying driver for success in Dubai has been, and will continue to be, visionary leadership, supported by a strong and effective government, and the political will to make innovation the only convention in each new project. The partnership between the effective public sector and entrepreneurial private sector has lead to landmark accomplishments that are multiplying in scale with new projects launched.

In its efforts to support growth and attract foreign direct investment for the achievement of its vision, Dubai Government plays a key role in setting the appropriate regulatory environment, while continuously enhancing its service delivery for businesses and citizens.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the status of, and steps Dubai is undertaking towards enhancing, in a sustainable way, its economic and social development through good governance practices. By delineating two successful government initiatives, Dubai e-Government and the Dubai Government Excellence Program, this paper will outline successful mechanisms Dubai has used to achieve good governance through promoting better accountability and transparency.

DUBAI EGOVERNMENT[1]

The Dubai eGovernment initiative is a critical success factor in achieving Dubai's ambitious vision of becoming an economic hub through good governance. Prior to the Dubai eGovernment initiative, Dubai Government provided its services through traditional means. Businesses and individuals had to apply for government services by compiling and submitting a set of documents and applying directly to various government departments. Furthermore, some government services required several interactions with multiple departments before the services were concluded. Hence, the users of government services were faced with bureaucracy, leading to delays and frustrations.

In trying to achieve its vision of becoming a leading business hub as a diversified and modern city, Dubai Government decided to simplify its regulations and service provisioning by leveraging on ICT and modern technology. Consequently, it announced, in 2000, a major strategic initiative called "Dubai eGovernment", which has the following goals:

- To simplify and streamline government services by utilizing technology as a key enabler.

[1] This section is based on extracts from a paper written by Dr. Okan Geray and Mr. Mahmood Al Bastaki from Dubai EGovernment entitled "Dubai eGovernment Initiative: Concept, Achievements and the Future Pillars of Success". The full paper is available upon request submitted to Dubai School of Government (www.dsg.ae).

- To achieve a customer-centric approach for government services provisioning by increasing effectiveness and efficiency.
- To innovate new government services and join-up existing government services by exploiting new potentials arising from eGovernment.
- To modernize and standardize internal government processes regarding procurement, finance and accounting, and human resources.

Administrative simplification and process re-engineering
By its very definition, eGovernance ensures a significant level of administrative simplification, reduced red-tape and reform of the public sector. This in turn leads to significant cost savings in terms of time, salaries, paperwork, etc. As such, the eGovernment initiative in Dubai, which was initially based on re-engineering administrative procedures, is at the core of its public administration reform and development.

Although the reengineering process is being driven mostly by the government departments themselves, Dubai eGovernment formed a team of specialists in business process reengineering to provide support and consulting services to the various departments, as needed. The team, while overseeing the process, also ensures that it is in compliance with global standards.

Improving efficiency and services
Providing eServices in Dubai resulted in improved efficiency of service delivery to the customers. eService applications are accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, from anywhere in the world. Furthermore, they are processed in a faster, more efficient way, as the system is linked to a central database containing all information required, thus eliminating manual verification, data entry and approvals. The electronic applications are characterised by a high level of accuracy due to the decrease in human error. Currently, 81% of the 1,900+ government services have been migrated to on-line channels and are at various stages of being fully electronically-enabled.

Promoting transparency and equity
Transparency is one of the fundamental aims of an eGovernment. The migration towards an eGovernment is a major step towards fighting corruption and hence building trust between the government and citizens. Using eServices and therefore eliminating contact with civil servants abolishes the possibility of discrimination by social status or rank, leading to greater equity.

Conditions for success
Key success factors in the case of Dubai eGovernment have been: leadership, political will and commitment (at all levels, but especially at the highest level), as well as availability of financial resources to fund the undertaking.

Another key pillar of success in Dubai eGovernment has been the achievement of an appropriate balance between *centralization* and *decentralization* of the services e-enablement process. The actual eService enablement and processing (rules and

regulations, approvals, etc.) have been decentralized since they constitute the core business of government departments. However, the synergistic (common) parts of an eService (e.g. payment, customer support, etc.) have been centralized. The government departments have utilized the centralized common aspects of eServices during their implementation,, provided to them through a single centralized entity with well-defined common or synergistic tools. This resulted in: standardization, best-practices sharing, cost savings and reduced time-to-market.

Other key enablers were: Dubai eGovernment's strategic partnership with the private sector through outsourcing specialized tasks for better quality results; and Dubai being receptive to eGovernment because of its fertile IT environment.

User-focus
The benefits of an eGovernment are: choice, convenience, easiness, accuracy, responsiveness, trust, and value for money – all geared towards the customer. Dubai eGovernment's definition of eGovernment is "a mechanism for the provision of government services through innovative channels in a **customer-centric** manner". Its core principle, its vision, is to "ease the lives of people and businesses interacting with the government…".

Dubai eGovernment is in the process of selecting a tool to provide e-consultation for the constituents of its various services. Currently, some government departments involve their customers during the service design stage and discuss with them their requirements. Dubai eGovernment is working towards formalizing this dialogue through on-line systems to promote and facilitate interaction and exchange of ideas between the departments and the public. This will result in the government continuously improving the quality of the services it provides, as well as an increased e-adoption by the customers.

Access
In order to ensure that the electronic services provided to the public are being used, electronic awareness needed to be created. Dubai eGovernment anticipated the need for improving e-literacy rates early and has launched the e4all initiative in 2002. e4all aims to increase the awareness and willingness of the public at large, including government employees, to enhance their e-skills in order to enhance e-literacy in Dubai. Several awareness initiatives have already been launched under the e4all umbrella. These include: eLearn (electronic learning without classrooms), eEmployee (train government employees on computer use), eCitizen (training the public on the use of computers and internet), and e4all Magazine (spreading awareness on the e-services available).

Constituents' engagement through consultative mechanisms
Dubai eGovernment has piloted customer feedback sessions successfully for implementing some of its eServices. Starting in 2005, Dubai eGovernment will provide various tools for on-line policy-making. These tools aim to engage customers in the implementation of Dubai eGovernment services. Constituent engagement will include pre and post implementation activities. That is, the citizens and businesses will participate

both before and after an eService is implemented. Dubai eGovernment intends to increase customer satisfaction, trust and quality of its eServices. Constituent (customer) feedback will ensure identifying customer expectations and bridging such gaps. Public participation will also play a key role in administrative simplification and public reforms. Dubai eGovernment desires to open a communication channel with its customers and to establish the public participation as a relationship based on partnership in the future.

Monitoring and evaluation
Dubai eGovernment has already conducted customer satisfaction surveys with government departments, semi-government and NGOs in order to evaluate its progress. It is currently unifying the evaluation process between both public (individuals and businesses) and government departments.

The performance indicators set by Dubai eGovernment (to be implemented soon) to monitor and evaluate its progress in reaching its objectives are:

- e-enablement: percentage of on-line services
- adoption rate: on-line versus off-line services provided
- quality: rating of on-line services

Dubai eGovernment plans to perform customer satisfaction surveys, assessments and focus groups at least twice per year.

Challenges

Dubai eGovernment is a large scale and complex change initiative. Such multi-dimensional complexity, mixed with local cultural aspects presented unique challenges for Dubai in undertaking this initiative. The challenges have been categorized into four main categories:

- **Customer expectations**: services that are high-performance, continuous, multi-channel, multi-lingual, consistent, secure, and offering a one-stop-shop.

- **Process**: innovation and the need for process simplification and reengineering to cut through bureaucracy and red-tape.

- **People**: need for strong leadership; need for new/enhanced skills.

- **Technology**: rapidly changing, short life-cycle, not fully matured; need for inter-communication of systems.

Achievements

Dubai eGovernment's initial target in April 2000 was to "conduct efficiently and effectively 70% of all government services through innovative channels by 2005". In the four years since, Dubai has made impressive progress, and its government departments have delivered hundreds of transactional and informative e-services for the public.

By late 2004, more than 1,600 of the 1,900+ services have been migrated to on-line channels resulting in an 81% e-enablement ratio. The transactional on-line services offer varying degrees of activities today: some only offer information about the service; others offer electronic form downloads; while the remaining offer the complete process on-line, excluding or including electronic payment of fees.

Dubai eGovernment has achieved an eServices rating of 48% for all government services. The overall eServices rating is a weighted average of the e-enablement stage of each and every service in Dubai Government. The well-defined stages of an eService are: information only; forms downloading; partially on-line (requires off-line interaction); complete without payment; and, fully on-line (complete with payment).

In 2001, the UN ranked Dubai 21st worldwide (out of 190 countries evaluated). In 2003, it was ranked by Rutgers University 18th eCity worldwide and 1st in the Arab World.

Some of the services already introduced by Dubai eGovernment include:

- **ePay**: a highly secure on-line payment service that allows registered users to pay for public utilities or fines using the eDirham card issued by the Ministry of Finance and Industry, or by major credit cards. Payments can be done anytime from anywhere in the world. Today, individuals can pay their utility bills, inquire and pay their traffic/parking fines, register their vehicles, renew their health cards, book properties, reserve hotels and inquire flight departures and arrivals on-line.

- **askDubai**: a centralized customer care services to augment government eServices through various channels, such as call center, internet chat, e-mail and fax. It aims to provide a single point of contact per channel for all the government services.

- **mDubai**: a push and pull mobile messaging service provided over a unified platform for all the government entities.

- **eIntegrate**: a centralized service that enables exchange of data and information among the government entities in a workflow fashion.

- **eHost**: a centralized synergistic tool that enables government entities to host their own web sites and portals in the shared infrastructure of Dubai eGovernment. It also provides a sophisticated Content Management System with various tools to be utilized by government entities.

Lessons learnt

During the course of design and implementation, Dubai eGovernment has experienced and observed some key lessons for success. These lessons are useful in guiding similar complex initiatives, as well as managing future challenges that could face Dubai eGovernment. These lessons could be generalized to other similar contexts as well.

The main lessons leant in undertaking such an initiative are:

- Establish clear leadership and government commitment.
- Provide clear vision and direction.
- Build momentum through quick-wins.
- Plan prudently, act fast and decisively.
- Pursue synergies.
- Conduct community outreach programs.
- Establish a flexible, robust and scalable infrastructure.
- Leverage on international benchmarks.
- Strike a good balance between planning and execution.
- Leverage on strategic alliances and strategic outsourcing.

Next steps

The Dubai eGovernment initiative has achieved regional and global recognition in a short time frame. Needless to say, there still exist several challenges for Dubai eGovernment on its road to future success. The Dubai eGovernment's strategic agenda items adhere to the main guiding principles of e-enabling a vast majority of public services and achieving customer focus and adoption, while capturing inherent synergies in eService provisioning.

Five main strategic agenda items for Dubai eGovernment have been formulated to achieve the vision set by H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum, Dubai Crown Prince and UAE Minister of Defense. These are:

- E-enablement of 90% of the government departments' services by mid 2007.
- Implementation of eService quality guidelines in all government departments.
- Implementation of a virtual Dubai Government by joining up administrative boundaries through electronic integration and data sharing.
- Implementation of targeted marketing campaigns for customers.
- Implementation of synergistic tools to achieve expedited implementation and cost savings.

DUBAI GOVERNMENT EXCELLENCE

The Dubai Government Excellence Program (DGEP) is another successful initiative that is achieving better public governance in Dubai's government departments. DGEP was initiated with a vision to achieve world-class government performance in Dubai. It aims to effect major improvement in the performance and services of government departments and institutions by focusing on self-assessment and continuous improvement based on the Dubai Government Excellence model (a business excellence model developed and tailored for the Dubai Government).

Since its inception in 1998, the DGEP has instilled a mindset of excellence in the employees of the Dubai Government. It has concentrated on customer service and

process efficiency, and has been a prime driver of change. After six years of operation, the program, with its main tool being the DGEP model, has effected positive changes.

The DGEP model was developed after benchmarking with international business excellence models (Malcolm Baldridge, EFQM and the Deming Prize). It adopted the basic elements of these models and tailored a model for driving excellence in the Dubai Government. It consists of ten main criteria, built around the foundations of excellence as identified by world class organizations in the public and private sectors (customers, human resources, strategy and planning, leadership, process management and simplification, innovation, eGovernment, resources, society, and performance indicators).

In supporting the drive for excellence, the DGEP team supports government departments in applying the model by providing the training required, the infrastructure for excellence, and an annual ceremony where winners, selected for their excellent performance, are rewarded.

Achievements

In 2004, a study[2] was conducted to assess the impact of the DGEP on the performance of the government departments in Dubai and improve the performance of the program. As a measurement system, the study managed to gauge the perception of main stakeholders in terms of the effects of the DGEP since its inception.

The components of the study, based on the components of the Dubai Government Excellence Model, were: leadership, strategy and planning, innovation, information technology (eGovernment), human resources, process management and simplification, customers, resources, and society.

The overall results of the study showed that the majority of customers and employees indicated a positive impact of DGEP, which was credited as being responsible for much of the progress in the operation of the government departments. All departments indicated the DGEP was one of the key drivers of positive change within their respective organizations. Employees, leaders, and customers all attributed it with the roles of a change catalyst, a motivator, and a guiding framework.

Lessons learnt

As a measurement system, the study determined the perception of main stakeholders in terms of the effects of the DGEP since its inception, providing important lessons and insights, such as:

[2] A study on the impact of DGEP was conducted and its findings published under a paper written by Dr. Yasar Jarrar and Mr. Nabil Al-Youssuf. The paper, “Measuring the Impact of Business Excellence Models: the Dubai Government Case Study”, is available upon request submitted to Dubai School of Government (www.dsg.ae).

- Overall, the level and style of the Dubai Government management systems has improved in the last five years. However, there are still variations in performance and ability between departments. Knowledge and best practice exchange between the government departments are crucial for overall development.

- Departments that are committed to leadership excellence through training, self-appraisal and teamwork are shown to have a more proactive and adaptable leadership. Leadership is seen as the key success factor in improvement of the department's performance and thus the continuous education and development of leaders at all levels is a major cornerstone in the future of Dubai.

- People management and HR systems remain an issue, and there is a clear need to re-focus the attention on people who work in the government. Specifically, performance measurement, is an area where more attention must be focused. A main criticism from the government employees is that they are not kept informed of how well their management thought they were doing, either as individuals or as a department; nor did they, in many departments, expect performance to be rewarded.

- There is a strong drive to simplify procedures, especially by the use of information technology, but there is still evidence in some departments of long decision chains and bureaucracy. Process improvement and waste reduction are areas that would require a push by DGEP through providing guidance, knowledge and tools.

Next steps

Although the study points towards the fact that the culture of excellence and customer focus have set in, the next step is to focus on results and to provide support with knowledge and tools for deployment.

Another important 'step' is the realization that, even though the Dubai Government is going in the right direction, much work remains to be done, and continuous improvement is necessary.

CONCLUSION

The Dubai eGovernment and the Dubai Government Excellence Program are examples of good governance practices aiming to improve the quality of service provision to the residents of Dubai and to provide an attractive investment environment to promote economic growth.

Both initiatives, though different in their goals and objectives, emphasize the steps Dubai is taking towards enhancing, in a sustainable way, its economic and social development through good governance practices. In their different approaches, the initiatives involve

reform, and hence change. In order to effect change successfully, the two initiatives have incorporated capacity building elements at the individual as well as the institutional levels. Ultimately, through achieving their respective goals, both initiatives promote accountability and transparency in the public sector.

Overall, the fast-paced developments in Dubai and its accelerated growth have been critical drivers of positive change for government employees. However, the influence and attention of H.H. Sheikh Mohammed, and the continuous support and personal involvement by Dubai's top leadership have really been the key elements for success.

In conclusion, Dubai's success in its digital transitioning to an eGovernment and its Government Excellence Program offer a number of lessons that could be transferred to other Arab countries interested in setting up similar programs.