

Managing the Implementation of E-Government in Malaysia: A Case of E-Syariah

Muhd Rosydi Muhammad

Department of Information Systems, Kulliyah of Information and Communication Technology,
International Islamic University Malaysia

Abstract: Governments worldwide are increasingly engaged in the national e-government initiative as it is perceived to be an enabler for the improved transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of services delivered to citizens and businesses. Failure of the governments to fulfill basic requirements and perform its duties in supporting the initiative has been coined as one of the factors that hinder e-government to accomplish the promise of a more transparent, efficient and effective public service delivery. Thus, this exploratory research aims at understanding on the strategic key implementation tasks of government in managing the successful e-government implementation, particularly in Malaysia. Case study approach was adopted by the means of semi-structured interviews with 14 of the Malaysian public sector officials responsible for the implementation of E-Syariah. Results from the empirical case data confirm the existing six government's key implementation tasks as discussed in the literature, and two key tasks emerged from the case study – inculcating sacred value and awareness, and instilling ICT value among staff. This provides governments with a good insight of basic managerial responsibilities in deploying e-government projects. Further, the identified key tasks can be the focal point for government officials to consider in their efforts to support successful implementation of e-government.

Key words: e-government, managerial task, Islamic value, Syariah, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

E-government is perceived to be an enabler for improving transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of services delivered to citizens and businesses (Gil-Garcia and Pardo, 2005; Yildiz, 2007; Al-Saber *et al.*, 2007). The most commonly cited reason for the deployment of ICT in the public sector is the promise to change related governmental structures and processes with the aim of improving the quality of its services delivery (Naz, 2009). Due to this advantage, many countries have embarked on the e-government initiatives in recent years. However, scholars and practitioners continue to argue that e-government has not yet accomplished the promise of a more transparent, efficient and effective delivery of public services.

Literature indicates that barriers for the successful deployment and implementation of e-government are attributed to the failure of a government to fulfill basic requirements supporting the initiatives (Gilbert *et al.*, 2004; Akman *et al.*, 2005; Al-Saber *et al.*, 2007). Mofleh *et al.* (2009) affirm that governments in the developing countries fail in their duties to provide resources such as funding, infrastructure and necessary legislation. However, problems in the developed world are found to be management-related such as lack of the necessary coordination, evaluation and lack of promoting use of e-government (Seifert and Petersen, 2002). These works provide evidences on the influential role of government towards the success of e-government implementation. Inability to rigorously address this issue may contribute to the problematic implementation e-government initiatives (Heeks, 2002).

As governments worldwide are heavily engaged in e-government initiatives, more research to understand key managerial tasks for e-government should be conducted. Outcomes from such research could benefit the governments in deploying the e-government projects (Aldrich *et al.*, 2002). This paper aims to study the key tasks for managing the implementation of e-government in Malaysia. In particular, it attempts to explore the role of these key tasks in the successful implementation of the E-Syariah system.

Key Tasks For E-Government Implementation:

Strategic roles and tasks undertaken by the government are crucial towards the success of e-government (Jaeger and Thompson, 2003), which implies that incapability of the government to carry out its tasks would lead to the failure of these initiatives. Literature indicates that government needs to establish adequate access to ICT infrastructure in order to facilitate the implementation of e-government system. Availability of reliable ICT infrastructure supports fast internet connection; providing a better communication network between government agencies and bringing electronic communication closer to citizens (Bhatnagar, 2004). Establishing reliable ICT infrastructure is a considerable challenge that government needs to take up when embarking on e-government initiatives particularly in developing countries (Chen *et al.*, 2007).

Corresponding Author: Muhd Rosydi Muhammad, Department of Information Systems, Kulliyah of ICT, International Islamic University Malaysia, P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
E-mail: mrosydi@iiu.edu.my

Government must also allocate a considerable amount of its financial budget for ICT expenditure to ensure that e-government projects are sufficiently funded. Ndou (2004) argues that availability of sufficient funding is critical to support the development of required infrastructures for e-government, including networks and training programs. In the case of developing countries, they require additional funds to be invested for e-government, particularly in the establishment of their telecommunication infrastructure (Chen *et al.*, 2007). Sufficient budget is also opined to influence the sustainability of these initiatives (Rose, 2004).

Further, government must have a well-coordinated ICT planning that serves country's needs and capabilities. The strategic ICT planning needs to be aligned to economical, political and social criterions of the country (Koh *et al.*, 2006). For this to be a reality, it requires a high level of collaboration between government agencies and departments (Kamal, 2006). Lack of coordination would cause conflicting goals for e-government initiatives which can further complicate the overall effort of the initiatives (Kuk, 2003). This involves the need for marketing strategy to promote e-government applications and services to the public especially to the rural and urban public. Tools could include road shows and advertising through strategic collaboration between organizations, including the association and other relevant government agencies, in order to portray the right picture to potential prospects.

Moreover, government needs to closely monitor progress of the e-government systems in order to evaluate its performance and measure impacts of the initiatives (Irani *et al.*, 2005). Heeks and Bailur (2007) suggest that the task could be performed through conducting website content analysis to determine the government websites' level of maturity and usability. Also, government can establish benchmarks for the performance of the projects in order to identify best practices and compare their projects with other countries (Gupta and Jana, 2003).

Another challenging task for government is to regulate relevant laws and policies that would enable a supportive environment for the implementation of e-government systems. Andersen and Dawes (1991) assert that developing appropriate government-wide ICT policies and standards can provide an adequate framework for e-government initiatives to be successful. In relation, the success of e-government initiatives is found to be highly reliant on government's role in ensuring a proper legal framework for the online transactions (Gil-Garcia and Pardo, 2005).

Provision of adequate ICT knowledge and skills to government officials is also argued to be a significant task to support the implementation of e-government initiatives (Furuholt and Wahid, 2008). A common method for government workforce to gain necessary ICT skills and knowledge is through comprehensive, structured and technically-oriented training (Gupta *et al.*, 2008). Such efforts are argued not only to improve their skill and knowledge, but also to encourage users to support and trust e-government.

Overview Of E-Government Initiatives In Malaysia:

The Government of Malaysia established a well-known mega project of Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1996. This project is considered as a long-term ICT strategic initiative (1996-2020) aiming to spur the growth of ICT in Malaysia, as well as to ensure that the country is moving in tandem with the rest of the world in embracing the ICT revolution. It houses seven flagships of high-technology projects namely Electronic Government, Smart School, Telemedicine, Multipurpose Smart Card System, Research and Development Cluster, e-Business and Technopreneur Development.

E-government flagship basically aims to create a virtually paperless administration with a primary objective of shifting towards widespread use of electronic and multimedia networks in the government sector. It heralds the beginning of a journey of reinventing the government by transforming the way it operates, modernizes and enhances its service delivery. Furthermore, the initiative seeks to enhance the convenience, accessibility and quality of interactions with the public and businesses at large. Simultaneously, it will improve the flow of information and processes within the government, accelerate the speed and quality of policy development, coordination and enforcement. In short, the vision of e-government initiatives in Malaysia focuses on effectively and efficiently delivering services from the government to the people of Malaysia, enabling the government to become more responsive to the needs of its citizens. Under this e-government flagship, seven high-technology projects are identified to be the core applications for e-government initiative in the country namely Human Resources Management Information Systems (HRMIS), e-Procurement, Generic Office Environment (GOE), Project Monitoring System (PMS), e-Services, Electronic Labor Exchange (ELX) and E-Syariah.

E-Syariah was introduced – in phases – at Syariah court offices in Malaysia between years 2005-2007. The main objective from its implementation is to improve administration and management at the court offices, in a pursuant for provision of quality judicial services to the public. Further, it also aims to enhance the process of monitoring and coordinating judicial tasks performed at court offices throughout the country by the central agency – Department of Syariah Judiciary Malaysia (DSJM). Through consultation with DSJM, it generally shows that the implementation of E-Syariah has brought in positive impacts towards the administration and management of judicial-related tasks and services at the court offices (e.g. lower number of backlogged cases; accelerate process of case registration; reduce case redundancy; easy access to preceding court cases etc.). Moreover, E-Syariah is linked to several other e-government applications (e.g. IRIS) with an objective to

promote a better inter-agency communication through timely information dissemination and streamline flow of processes. Figure 1 illustrates the system architecture for E-Syariah.

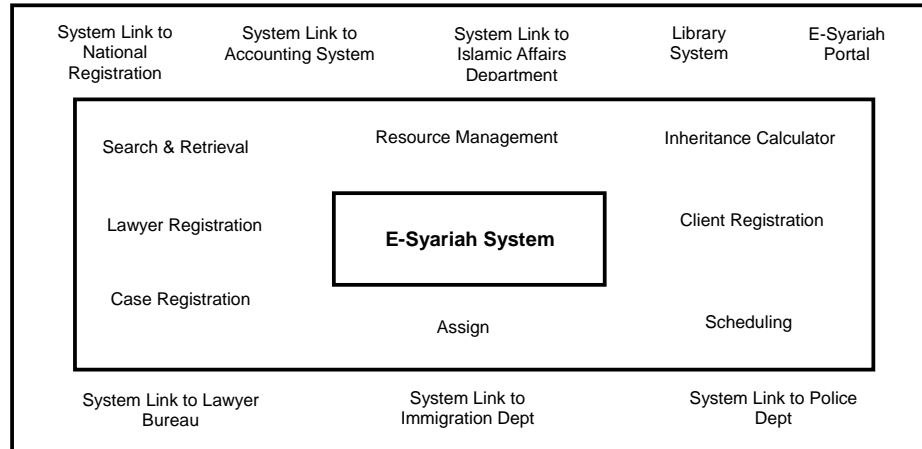


Fig. 1: System Architecture of E-Syariah

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Interpretive case study method was chosen for this study as it fits the exploratory nature of this study which primarily aims at exploring the key implementation tasks supporting the success of E-Syariah implementation. The empirical investigation was conducted through visit to Department of Syariah Judiciary Malaysia (DSJM) and court offices in one of the states (thereafter referred as State ABC) in Malaysia. Data was primarily gathered via 14 semi-structured interviews with management and judicial staff of the court offices. The interviews were tape recorded in order to ensure accuracy of data analysis. However, some of the interviews were not taped on the request of the interviewees. Even though this procedure has the disadvantage of not being completely faithful to the exact words used by the informants (Walsham, 1995), it provided the researcher with an opportunity to create a more comfortable environment for the interviewees during the interviews. In these occasions, written notes were taken and transcribed immediately after the interview. Through these 14 interviews, a high degree of saturation was achieved, thus, the sampling size was considered appropriate. In addition, the data gathered from these semi-structured interviews were supplemented by observational data, informal conversations and review of related documentation. This is typical in case study research as evidence from two or more sources of data will converge to support the research findings (Benbasat *et al.*, 1987).

Hermeneutics method was adopted as a mode of analysis which enables the researcher to interpret and makes sense of the collected data and draw meaning from them (Borland, 2002; Myers, 2004). The researcher iteratively read through the entire transcripts in order to identify issues and satisfied that no issue appeared during the interviews was omitted. It thus allowed the researcher to look for and confirm themes arising from the transcripts. Following this process, findings were generated in order to develop an understanding on the key implementation tasks for successful implementation of E-Syariah at the Syariah court offices in Malaysia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results from the empirical case data confirm the expected six (6) government's key implementation tasks as deliberated in the literature review. In addition, two (2) new tasks emerged from the case study namely (i) inculcating sacred value and awareness, and (ii) instilling ICT value among staff. The following sub-sections discuss the identified key tasks for managing the successful implementation of E-Syariah.

Inculcating Sacred Values and Awareness:

Self-connection to Islamic values and awareness is found to be vital in facilitating the implementation of E-Syariah. It was mentioned that: "The individual has an important role [in the implementation of E-Syariah]. If they don't have the spirit...thinking of what they are doing is part of their responsibility to Islam, we won't get the utmost results. Yes...we are working towards fulfilling the objectives of E-Syariah implementation, but, in the context of Syariah, we need to have such awareness or feeling that we...even cannot see it, we always under God's monitoring system...this will motivate us to a good...in fact, a better output from the [E-Syariah] implementation" [Court Registrar: State ABC]. This remark was supported by a Court Administrator [State ABC]: "If a person has a strong connection to Islam...he will have a better understanding on the concept of

work in the religion, then he will surely try to carry out his responsibility as staff [at the court office] in the best possible manner”.

In addition, inculcating Islamic values among staff is regarded to be a “value-added” factor that contributes to the successful implementation of E-Syariah as implied by the Director [DSJM]: “We have good policies and laws to support E-Syariah implementation. But...as Muslims, we need a value-added factor that can encourage staff to be the best in carrying their jobs. By inculcating the right values which are Islamic values, we can actually create self-regulation, self-awareness among staff. Hence, they are not only doing a normal job...indeed they are carrying out a form of ibadah”. On the same note, Head of IT Division [DSJM] said “I have instilled into my staff, there is a reason why we are here, it could be another person...but Allah has placed you here...at this court office, because there is something that He wants to give to us ...the opportunity for us to contribute to the improvement of Syariah judicial processes, to uplift the image of Syariah judicial institution and to help our people”

Relating to this study, Islamic values would relate to beliefs, conceptions and end-states that are desirable and preferable from the Islamic perspective. In this sense, the meaning of a person believing and doing something desirable and preferable in Islam is actually to obey the Islamic message and teachings, i.e. what is desirable and preferable in the concept of working in Islam is accomplishment with excellence. However, multi-racial and multi-religious nature of Malaysian society may require the understanding of Islamic values to be extended and viewed in a more universalistic perspective. In this view, an understanding of Islamic values can be more defined when it is likened as a form of sacred values (Atran and Axelrod, 2008; Sheikh *et al.*, 2012). According to Atran and Axelrod (2008), sacred values are independent of any material goal or purpose, and even though the values often have a religious basis, some of them are transcendent (e.g. fairness). Hence, to be considered sacred, it is not necessarily have to be related to religious teachings. In this sense, the concept of Islamic values would also be applicable to other societies in a more universal way if it is viewed as a form of sacred values that has relation to the concept of sacredness and God. This in turn would manifest the universal character of the Islam that is suitable for all mankind and societies (Al-Ashqar, 1982; Al-Alwani, 2001). Therefore, it is necessary to accordingly “sacralize” Islamic values and to understand the notion in a universal way (Saidin, 2012).

Instilling ICT Values among Staff:

The case study informed that the top management heavily communicated with judicial staff on the significance and advantages of adopting E-Syariah to support their daily routine of judicial processes at the court offices. This is reflected from the interview with the Court Registrar [State ABC]: “*we work hard to establish positive perception towards the potentials and values of E-Syariah and how it can help us to efficiently improve our tasks at the court offices*”. He added that “*I spent about six months, day in day out, to do brain washing of the judicial staff. The aim was to increase their awareness on the significance of E-Syariah to improve judicial service delivery*”. The main purpose from this task is to increase the awareness and create a good perception among judicial staff towards the value of E-Syariah in materializing the vision of e-government initiative in Malaysia. This supports finding of Scherlis and Eisenberg (2003) who opine that government needs to focus on establishing awareness on the value of ICT in order to stimulate the ICT supply chain in response to the demands and needs of the public, business and government sector. Further, Kamal (2006) suggests that certain perceived technology factors could affect the adoption of ICT innovation in the government sector. The factors are relative advantage, compatibility, complexities, functionality, reliability and usability of ICT, and technological potential for integration.

This key task is found to be pertinent for the government to influence and change the nature of people’s feeling and thinking – known as *hibatus* (Bourdieu, 1984). It was claimed that judicial staff’s *hibatus* has positively changed in a direction which indicated their acceptance towards the use of E-Syariah to better accomplish judicial tasks at the court offices. This is noted by the Court Registrar [State ABC] that staff “*became more receptive and indicated their willingness to uptake E-Syariah in their daily activities at the court offices*”.

Building Appropriate ICT Infrastructure:

The case informed that having an adequate level of ICT infrastructure is significant to support SJMS at the court offices. Due to this awareness, the establishment of appropriate ICT infrastructure became the priority as the “*benefits of the system [SJMS] cannot be realized without a good and reliable access to technological infrastructure*” [Head of IT Division, DSJM]. On the same note, Head of IT Unit (State ABC) made clear that “*without the right and proper [ICT] infrastructure, no Shari’ah court offices can really grasp the potential benefits of this web-based [SJMS] system*”. These responses implied that the task of building appropriate ICT infrastructure facilitates the successful implementation of SJMS which supports the conclusion of Basu (2004)’s study that failure to provide sufficient ICT infrastructure impedes the implementation of e-government systems. Further, it also resonates the finding of Escobar’s (2007) work that countries focusing on providing sufficient

support for technical requirements of e-government will move quicker and easier towards achieving successful e-government initiatives.

Allocating Sufficient Funding:

The interviewees indicated that adequate financial support is important as it could either enable or delay the implementation of E-Syariah. Seeking budget approval for the E-Syariah project was among the earliest tasks carried out by DSJM in order to support “kick-off” of the project. Reversely, lack of funding is claimed to be a hindrance for successful implementation of E-Syariah as stated by the Head of IT Division [DSJM]: “...some government agencies were facing a limited or shortfall of funding, had inadequate ICT infrastructure to support networks and applications in their e-government projects...and as a result, their [e-government] systems were more likely to be poorly implemented”. It echoes findings of the previous studies (e.g. Hussein *et al.*, 2007; Weerakkody *et al.*, 2009; El-Haddadeh *et al.*, 2010) that adequate financial resources are significance in facilitating government organizations to succeed in their ICT-related projects.

Further, it was informed that the government has been very supportive in providing funds in order to stimulate the adoption and implementation of E-Syariah at the court offices; where RM40 million was allocated for E-Syariah implementation. Head of IT Division (DSJM) explained that there were two main initiatives carried out from this budget; IT infrastructure and IT training. This support the finding of Ndou (2004)’s work that sufficient financial assistance helps government organizations to arrange for ICT training courses for its staff and build capable ICT infrastructure for an e-government system. On the same vein, Montagna (2005) posits that using ICT in public administration requires sufficient financing in order to improve employee’s ICT capabilities, to construct ICT infrastructure and to organize ICT training.

Provisioning of ICT skills and knowledge:

The case informed that “E-Syariah implementation becomes a successful e-government initiative due to many factors, and one of them is due to our concerted effort to equip our officers with appropriate ICT skills and knowledge” [Director, DSJM]. This statement implies the awareness of the government to provide necessary and sufficient ICT skills and knowledge to the civil servants in order to ensure the successful implementation of e-government systems. This finding is very consistent with literature (e.g. Weerakkody *et al.*, 2009; El-Haddadeh *et al.*, 2010; Al-Busaidy, 2010) suggesting that government sectors with staff who are well-equipped and well-trained with ICT skills and knowledge are better prepared to deal with e-government initiatives.

In addition, the need to provide sufficient ICT skills and knowledge has always been a priority in E-Syariah project as admitted by the Head of IT Division [DSJM] “ICT Division at DSJM has been arranging quite a number of training sessions, seminars and workshops for all staff. We try our best to motivate, provide and ensure our staff to continuously improve their ICT knowledge”. He further noted that “lack of ICT skills and knowledge results in the inability, incompetency and reluctance [among staff] to operate E-Syariah”. In this sense, level of ICT competency among staff should be equipped with necessary skill, knowledge and resources to deliver needed services at the point of contact. Only by this training, they will be able to carry out their ICT-enabled tasks precisely and efficiently (Ebrahim and Irani, 2005).

Monitoring of E-government Implementation:

It is evident from the case that continuous monitoring of e-government enabled DSJM to ensure “...smooth running of E-Syariah and objectives of its implementation can be realized. At the same time, it also enables us to minimize the potential risks and problems as we are able to identify them in advance throughout the [monitoring] process” [Chief Registrar: DSJM]. Further, interviewees admitted that continuous monitoring task is one of the key factors allowing E-Syariah to support chain of judicial processes at the court offices. The top management believed that the success of the E-Syariah could be delayed without proper monitoring and efficient evaluating activities. The task is argued to be more pertinent in the context of nationwide implementation of E-Syariah. In his research, Bhatnagar (2004) suggests the task of evaluating e-government was one of the strategies for successful implementation of country-wide e-government initiatives. It also resonates findings of Kunstelj and Vintar’s (2004) and Irani *et al.*’s (2005) that the task of monitoring and evaluating e-governments implementation has become an important or even essential activity in the development and implementation of e-governments. Considering that E-Syariah is a relatively new e-government initiative in the context of Malaysia, monitoring and evaluating task is seen to be critical in order to ensure that its success will not be interrupted.

Regulating Laws And Policies:

The case informed that all e-government initiatives in Malaysia are supported by legal and regulatory framework that in particular, helps to create right environment for the implementation of E-Syariah. This is in line with Ho and Ni’s (2004) study that the entire process of e-government implementation requires a clear

description of policy, structure and responsibilities. It is also found that the laws and policies have “forced” the staff to deploy E-Syariah in performing their routine judicial tasks at the court offices. This is evident from the interviews where court administrators generally stated that “if not because of the policy [of the government] asking us to use E-Syariah, many of us are surely still relying on the previously paper-based processes”. Chen *et al.* (2007) state that regulating legal environment is feasible to increase the use of e-government systems, especially in the context of developing countries where resistance among the government officials to turn off traditional methods of working and learn new ones are relatively high.

Establishing ICT Planning:

Process of establishing ICT planning for E-Syariah were jointly performed by related government agencies at both local and central levels. Registrar [State ABC] informed that “...central agency [MAMPU] helped us [at the state level] to produce our institutional ICT strategic plan that enables ourselves to effectively deploy E-Syariah to realize the strategic objective of the government”. Moreover, interviewees also admitted that this collaborative effort was a good approach, as it helped the relevant agencies to align their ICT plans. This resulted in the establishment of a standard set of ICT strategic planning adopted by the court offices. On the same note, Weerakkody *et al.* (2008) suggest in their study that aligning between central and local government plans and strategies has been among the strategic tasks of the UK and Norwegian governments in supporting their successful e-government initiatives.

Conclusion:

This study provides evidences indicating the influential role of government’s key managerial tasks towards the successful implementation of the e-government. The findings enrich the existing literatures on the e-government, particularly on the two emerging “human-related” key tasks. These “human-related” key tasks may imply the importance of people-related factors in determining the success or failure of e-government initiatives (Wood-Harper *et al.*, 2004). It is suggested that human-related issues should be given more attention by the Malaysian government for successful e-government initiatives.

It is also interesting to note the role of government in changing user’s perception towards the use of e-government by instilling knowledge about ICT values and inculcating Islamic values among the public officials. Sadat (1978) state that “change should take place first at the deeper and perhaps more subtle level that the conscious level...”. Moreover, Rokhman (2010) asserts that religious values and motives have important impacts in shaping good attitudes (e.g. commitment, dedication, competitiveness) of organizational members. For this reason, government officials in the public sector should leverage their understanding of what makes religious values so compelling in managing human-related issues in e-government projects.

Furthermore, this study equates the concept of Islamic values with sacred values in an attempt to extend its understanding to a more universalistic perspective. In this sense, the concept of Islamic values would also be applicable to other societies in a universal way if it is viewed as a form of sacred values that has relation to the concept of sacredness and God. This provides an interesting avenue for future research to explore the potent force of the sacred values and their influential impact on the success of e-government implementation.

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