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E-Government and Malaysia: A Theoretical Consideration

ABSTRACT

This paper does not try to paint a bleak picture of e-Government initiative in developing countries or Malaysia in particular. Nonetheless, such limitations, if any, must not be left unnoticed. Indisputably, notions of “success” and “failure” are indeed highly subjective issues. The outcome of something as difficult and complex to achieve as government reform, or higher levels of civic engagement by means of electronic medium, may not be sensed immediately. These agencies must also be ready to transform mindsets, systems, and processes even if this may decrease their autonomy. Boundaries, silos, and counters will have to be torn down and done away as clients move online. Communications with the government via e-mails and other electronic channels will be made a mere routine norm, delivered to the public clients any time of the day across any time zone and in any continent. The implementation of a fully connected Malaysian government also requires empowering the government workforce. Bureaucratic agencies must focus their interest to empowering employees by providing them the tools to perform and deliver their duties better and from any workspace. Therefore, there is an urgent need to make human capital planning a strategic element in the agencies’ initiatives. An effective and fully connected Malaysian e-Government initiative poses challenges on how they might devise policies to spur and inspire local innovation and on how they might integrate which technology to achieve their objectives to a greater degree.

Key words: e-Government, Malaysian nation-state, Information and Communication Technology, bureaucratic reform, and effective management.

INTRODUCTION

The popularity of Information Technology (IT) in public sector is undeniably growing as it simplified and resourcefully accomplished many tasks. Nowadays, there is scarcely a desk in public sector offices that does not have a computer. However, strange paradox exists between IT’s quick and ready acceptance for ordinary office computers and software and an agonizing reluctance to speedily transform bureaucratic procedures with IT possibilities and e-Government. When analyzed exclusively in terms of technological factors, IT is fast developing at an ever accelerating rate. A specialized use of IT in public sector

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is e-Government. There is a common belief that e-Government can provide more open and competent service delivery than present manual administrative procedures. Throughout the world e-Government ideas are being implemented with the expectation that they will yield authentic reforms in the direction of good government, *per se*. The diversity of e-Government ideas is amazing as a remarkable range of administrative procedures have been suggested as possibly better accomplished with e-Government. Moreover, e-Government not only offers benefits such as fast, inexpensive, trustworthy, and reliable services to households and businesses but also presents the potential to reshape the public sector and restructure the relationships between citizens, businesses, and the government by permitting for open-communication, participation, and public dialogs in formulating national policies.

This paper applies classical Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy to analyze contemporary e-Government related research and literature (Weber, 1947; 1968; 1970; and 1978), in relation with on e-Government initiatives in Malaysia. Thus two main themes emerge from this very undertaking.

The first theme that emerges is that IT through e-Government initiatives is a tool for "reforming" bureaucracy. Secondly, somewhat conflicting in nature, the theme is that e-Government failure may be justified as a consequence of bureaucracy.

In the light of A. Jain (2004) and J.E. Fountain (2007), the paper presents illustrations of each of these two themes from e-Government literature. The review deduces that current e-Government research does not offer sufficient clearness on the issue of how e-Government and bureaucracy influence each other in reciprocal ways; and calls for future research undertakings into these thorny issues. However, A. Jain (2004) did not include e-Government initiatives in Malaysia in its analysis. Apparently, back in 2005, Malaysia e-Government initiatives had been ranked fifth in the world and the very exclusion warrants further rationalization.

Hence, the unique contribution of the our study is that it addresses, in the light of A. Jain (2004), the compatibility issue of Weberian theory of bureaucracy in explaining the success and failure likelihood of e-Government initiatives in Malaysia. Consequently, future researchers may want to reconsider bureaucracy as one of the vital factors determining success or failure of e-Government initiatives in Malaysia.

The researchers concur with N. Mohamed (2008) statement that measuring IT success is a difficult and highly subjective task, indeed. Even though this very paper is not an exhaustive analysis the success and failure of e-Government in Malaysia, it tries to highlight the importance of bureaucracy notion to the very issue. In other words, the paper acknowledges that there have been important transformation in public sector administration and, even more so, in the way administration is represented. Yet, it questions the fashionable ideas, that bureaucratic organization is outdated, and that there has been a definitive shift

from Weberian bureaucracy to market-organization or network-organization. In contrast to decades of bureaucracy bashing, the paper reasons that for those interested in how contemporary e-Government initiative in Malaysia is organized, functions and changes, it is advisable to reconsider and rediscover bureaucracy as an administrative form, an analytical concept and a set of ideas and observations.

Accordingly, this paper is ordered in the following way. The next section presents a detailed review of Weberian theory of bureaucracy. Part 3 covers the e-Government initiatives in Malaysia and it explores the both *success* and *failure themes* using a contextual analysis on e-Government concept, projects and programs, in general. Final part offers implications and concluding remarks for e-Government policy and directions for future research.

WEBERIAN THEORY OF BUREAUCRACY

“Bureaucracy” is frequently used as a derogatory slogan, as well as a critical label for all public sector administration, or any large-scale formal organization. Max Weber’s Theory of Bureaucracy describes it as a new organizational form that he noticed had started emerging in Western society during the second half of the nineteenth century (Weber, 1947; 1968; 1970; and 1978). According to Max Weber, in this particular type of organization, authority, and leadership were drawn from a rational framework. Authority was previously derived from either charisma or tradition. In an interesting case of charismatic authority, followers complied with gifted leaders out of loyalty, devotion, and total undying respect. However, traditional authority, on the other hand, subsisted due to historical reasons and people obeyed a person in power for the simple reason that the person was in a position of traditional power such as in the case of monarchical or other hereditary leadership positions such as the Kings, Emirs or Sultans.

Max Weber believed that authority in the new bureaucratic organizational form was more rational simply because leaders were valued and obeyed for subscribing to values such as logic, efficiency, and reason. Such organizations functioned on the foundation of legitimately developed laws, rules, and regulations which are subsequently derived their legality from the coherent, restrained, rationalized, and systematic calculation of optimum means to given ends. Max Weber hypothesized that bureaucratic action was generally oriented towards solving problems and that bureaucratic decision-making was steered by the objectives of competence, accessibility, and predictability. As a result, choices were more rational because they were put together “without regard to persons”, meaning that the decisions were unaffected by private, unfounded, and emotional elements.

Moreover, Max Weber pinpointed three principal features of bureaucratic organizations. *Firstly*, most bureaucracies possessed a formal and unambiguous hierarchical structure of power and authority. *Secondly*, most bureaucracies

retained a complex, rationally derived, and systematic division of labor. *Lastly*, most bureaucracies were regulated by a set of comprehensive, explicit, formal, and essentially established rules that were impersonally utilized in decision-making. Furthermore, all decisions and communications were chronicled in permanent files and these records were then applied to refine existing rules and develop another new one.

In addition, Max Weber also observed that bureaucracies required a separation of personal from official property, in which that bureaucrats were usually selected on the basis of their qualifications and not preferential treatment. They were appointed, and not be elected, and were compensated via a salary. According to Max Weber, the pure objective of bureaucracy was to maximize efficiency. He put forward that bureaucracies were indeed a range of technically efficient instruments of administration because their institutionalized rules and regulations permitted all employees to learn to execute their prescribed duties optimally.

In modern times, the term “bureaucracy” itself has appeared to acquire a negative connotation. Today, it is not regarded as complimentary to label an organization “bureaucratic”. As a matter of fact, it is a highly unfavorable label. This perception may be caused by several reasons. Though, it needs to be emphasized most organizations that are termed “bureaucracies” today are not exactly bureaucracies of the Weberian variety. These organizations may exhibit the features of Weberian bureaucratic forms, and hence may be considered “formally” bureaucratic. However, they would not be regarded as “substantially” bureaucratic institutions in the sense Max Weber had originally envisioned them. In fact, Max Weber regarded bureaucracy a remarkably efficient organizational form and according to him, among its numerous advantages was the impartiality entailed on the decision-making process and the perpetual administrative structure it facilitated.

However, on the other hand, Max Weber did criticize bureaucracy for its penchant to compel excessive controls on employees, placing them into what he aptly termed an “iron cage”. He also concerned that bureaucracies could become more prevailing than society instead of a means for serving society.

REVIEW OF THE THEORY

While Max Weber was essentially optimistic about bureaucracy, several organizational scholars have criticized various features of this organizational form since late 1940s. In order to understand why the term “bureaucracy” has come to attain a negative undertone in society today, some of the significant criticisms of bureaucracy will be duly discussed.

Robert K. Merton (1976) indicated that a fundamental failure of bureaucracy was its inclination to promote “goal displacement”. Excessive observance and submission to rules and regulations resulted in rules becoming ends in themselves and sometimes inhibited organizations from realizing their real objectives. Also, organizational members in bureaucracies often attempted to

utilize formal rules and procedures in inapt situations, for instance in unique state of affairs by treating them as mere routine, hence resulting in dysfunctional results. P. Selznick (1949) revealed the phenomenon of “sub-optimization” in bureaucracies such as delegation of authority created organizational sub-units pursuing goals that were poles apart from the stated goals of the organization. In a way, it could also be observed that highly bureaucratic organizations were resistant to change. A customary atmosphere of hierarchy, control, efficiency, and predictability meant that organizational members preferred self-continuity and rejected change. Thus such organizations were poor at innovating or at adopting new ideas.

A.W. Gouldner (1954) noticed that the “govern according to rules” culture in bureaucratic organizations caused the consequence of members following the minimum possible rules in order to get by. Hence, it was difficult to obtain much more than minimally acceptable behavior from fellow members. P.M. Blau (1956) suggested that in bureaucratic organizations, certain employees who knew how to “play by the rules”, would gradually and evidently become more powerful. In consequence, power will have a tendency to shift from the nominal leaders of these organizations, who did not necessarily know how to play by the rules, to employees who really did.

Apart from these major criticisms of bureaucracy, there have been a large number of studies that have scrutinized and criticized more specific aspects of bureaucracy such as political interference, inefficiency, failure in regional contexts, misuse of power, poor decision-making, corruption, job dissatisfaction, concentration of power, low creativity, managerial frustration, organizational conflict, and many other dysfunctions. Nevertheless, researchers have also found that bureaucracy works well in certain contexts and the very theory of bureaucracy has been employed in a variety of contexts to investigate and understand organization in society. For example, in A. Jain (2004), it has been used to rationalize the evolution of society in communist Soviet to describe the decline of the ancient Roman army and to appraise the advance of the British pottery industry during the industrial revolution.

In accordance with Max Weber, bureaucracy is one of the hardest social structures to wipe out, once it is fully established, and the idea of eradicating these organizations becomes increasingly utopian (Weber, 1947). On the contrary, predictions of the downfall of bureaucracy underline its failure to cope with bureaucratic pathologies, organizational humanism, technological determinism, or democratization (Gazell & Pugh, 1990). Such prophecy has not been particularly true because of ambiguities in the notion of the end of bureaucracy. Moreover, forecasters may have overrated the extent of environmental precariousness and underrated bureaucracy’s malleability (Gazell & Pugh, 1990). Also, many of these forecasts seem to draw from the idea that decision-making in bureaucracies is centralized and not decentralized. As a result, bureaucracies would fail as operating contexts generate pressures for decentralized decision-making.

Nevertheless, R. Mansfield (1973) stated that Max Weber (1947) never suggests that centralized decision-making typifies bureaucracy. He proposed that Max Weber's model of bureaucratic control entails decentralized decision-making.

Substantial empirical research supports this interpretation of decision making in bureaucracies as decentralized (Blau & Schoenherr, 1971; and Pugh & Hickson, 1976). Hence, demands for further decentralization are likely to nurture the development of the bureaucratic form. Indeed, the dramatic increase in the prevalence of bureaucracies since 1970 has been documented by J.A. Gazell and D.L. Pugh (1990). They contend that this expansion will likely continue for the rest of the century (Gazell & Pugh, 1990:827). However, alternatives to the bureaucratic form have increasingly emerged. These include flattening of organizational hierarchies through delayering, temporary structures such as adhocracies, task forces and project teams, as well as permanent structures such as quality circles and matrix forms (Gazell & Pugh, 1990). Other new organizational forms rely on flexible work systems, building in employee involvement through new technology, inventory control, job enlargement, self-managed teams and quality control. More recent forms rely on developing external networks through outsourcing and strategic alliances. These forms also develop internal networks of activities linked through information technology, emphasizing decentralized decision-making, and non-hierarchical forms of coordination and control (Clegg & Hardy, 1996). These new forms are likely to alter the bureaucratic model in several ways (Gazell & Pugh, 1990; and Clegg & Hardy, 1996). Flattened hierarchies, temporary structures, flexible work systems and networked activities are thought to decrease levels of task specialization as employees become engaged in a greater range of interconnected activities. Levels of vertical and horizontal differentiation are reduced by the removal of hierarchical levels, the redesign of work systems, and the emergence of internal networks. These new forms are expected to increase levels of decentralization as employees become more engaged in a greater range of activities and are provided with appropriate information.

E-GOVERNMENT IN MALAYSIA

Since the development of the www (world wide web), considerable attention has been focused on the adaptation of web-based technologies to the business environment, notably in the Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Consumer (B2C) sectors. More lately, new sectors have been gaining attention, including those that include government, such as Government-to-Business (G2B) and Government-to-Citizen (G2C). It is perhaps not surprising that governments, either whether they are local, regional, national or even supranational, have been slower to crawl into the web-enabled bandwagon.

Governments are traditionally more conservative entities, slower to change, and slower to adopt new initiatives, than operators in the commercial field (Marche & McNiven, 2003). Certainly, it is logical to inquire whether

governments really want to make the transition to e-Government. Nonetheless, a substantial e-Government movement is now building, with a number of national governments taking far-reaching measures to engage in radical transformation of their portfolios. Some commentators go so far as to describe this move as being little short of a revolution in the public sector, though such statements are as notable for their hyperbole and rhetorical intentions as for their representation of reality.

In 1997, the Malaysian Government launched the Electronic Government initiative, generally recognized as e-Government, to reinvent itself to lead the country into the Information Age. As far as Malaysia is concerned, the implementation of e-Government was initiated with the introduction of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1996. The implementation of e-Government in Malaysia presages the beginning of a journey of reinventing the government by transforming the way it functioning, revamping, and augmenting its service delivery. E-Government seeks to improve the expediency, openness, and quality of interactions with the public and businesses at large. Concurrently, it will enhance information flow and processes within the government, enhance the speed and quality of policy development, and enhance coordination and enforcement. This would allow the government to be more responsive to the needs of its citizens.

Essentially, e-Government is one of the seven flagship applications introduced in MSC. The main objectives of these flagship applications are to initiate and accelerate the growth of MSC, to improve national competitiveness, to create high value jobs and export growth, to reduce digital divide, and to make MSC a regional hub and test bed. The e-Government flagship initiative will be the basis for enhancing efficiency and service delivery to the public while fostering partnership between the government, citizens, and businesses. One of the government agencies, Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit (MAMMPU), has been entrusted to plan, implement and monitor the e-Government initiative. Re-inventing government services within government itself and to the public and the business is one of the key elements for a successful e-Government implementation in Malaysia. In other words, MAMMPU is totally accountable for the success or failure of these initiatives. Under the e-Government flagship, seven main projects were put forward as the core of the e-Government applications, namely Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS), Project Monitoring System (PMS), Electronic Procurement (eP), Electronic Services Delivery (eServices), E-Syariah, Generic Office Environment (GOE), and Electronic Labour Exchange (ELX).

N. Mohamed (2008) states that apart from these seven main projects under e-Government flagships, several government agencies has taken initiatives to commence online services for the public projects, aspired to increase the ease and efficiency of public service to the citizen (*rakyat*). Among others are, e-*Tanah*, Training Information System (e-SILA), Public Services Portal (myGovernment) e-Consent, e-Local Government (e-PBT), Pensions Online

Workflow Environment (POWER), e-Kehakiman, e-Filing, and Custom Information System (SMK).

M.A.R. Karim and N.M. Khalid (2003) clearly stated the e-Government vision is ingrained in the country's Vision 2020 (*Wawasan 2020*), which avers that by the year 2020, Malaysia will be a united nation with a confident Malaysian society, instilled with strong moral and ethical values, living in a society that is democratic, liberal and tolerant, caring, economically just and equitable, progressive and prosperous, and in full possession of an economy that is competitive, dynamic, robust, and resilient. This noble vision demands a "massive reengineering" of government functions on a grand scale. The vision for e-Government denotes fundamentally transforming how government operates and entails a new set of responsibilities for civil servants, businesses, and *rakyat*.

In the 2008 UN e-Government Survey, Malaysia was ranked 34th amongst the 192 United Nations member countries in its expediency of IT usage, per se. Nevertheless, this figure renders useless if the e-Government delivery were repulsively poor. This particular flaw is thoughtfully addressed in the realization of 1Malaysia concept. What has been done up to now by most public agencies is to create first stop online portals instead of one stop experience. If the Malaysians wish to attain a fully connected government, simple collation of information and service connected on a single portal is basically not good enough. Nowadays what is really needed is to integrate services from end-to-end, creating thus a seamless one-stop experience for the *rakyat* when he or she transacts with the government. That is the challenge for Malaysian bureaucracy to achieve.

Nevertheless delivering on the vision of Malaysian e-Government, within the 1Malaysia context, relies heavily on the readiness and capability of agencies to collaborate. The public service agencies must no longer consider themselves in isolation but rather as an integrated part of "one government, many agencies, and one delivery".

E-GOVERNMENT AS THE BUREAUCRACY AND AS ACHIEVEMENT

As discussed earlier, the key features of Weberian bureaucratic organizations are that they are hierarchical, maintain division of labor, and are governed by rules. Hierarchy results in vertical differentiation, while division of labor entails horizontal differentiation within an organization's structure.

An examination of contemporary e-Government research and literature through the lens of Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy results in the emergence of two major prevailing themes concerning the relationship of e-Government to bureaucracy. The first theme that emerges is that IT (Information Technology) can be a tool for "reforming" bureaucracy. The second, somewhat contradictory, theme is that e-Government failure may be explained as a consequence of bureaucracy. Each of these themes is discussed and illustrated in detail below.

In contrast to recent reformers who have diagnosed or predicted the necessary demise of a centrally organized and rule-bound public administration such as the e-Government initiatives, Max Weber argued that bureaucracy would be the dominant organizational form in the modern world. Several lines of thought are concerned, nevertheless. Max Weber considered the growth of bureaucratic organization as the predestined product of a long historical development towards rationalization of human organization and cooperation, but he denied that history abides to a general law of development and can be constructed in terms of “unilinear” evolution or “cycles” (Gerth & Mills eds., 1970). Max Weber considered bureaucratic structure as malleable, a rationally designed tool, deliberately structured, and restructured in order to improve the ability to realize externally determined goals. Yet when fully developed, the bureaucracy was crucial, powerful, and difficult to control or destroy even in the face of radical changes in society. Nonetheless, there would be changes in the control of bureaucracy and beliefs in its legitimacy would be modified through human deliberation, reason-giving, and political struggles. In sum, the dynamics of bureaucratization resulted from many forces and Weber wondered how far the development of bureaucratic organization was subject to political, economic and other external determinants or to an “autonomous” logic inherent in its technical structure (Weber, 1978).

Reformers are prone to consider change as a master-value, but the true challenge is twofold. *Firstly*, to clarify how malleable are administrative organization and practices, mentalities, cultures and codes of conduct, and what are the conditions under which administrative forms can be deliberately designed and reformed. Then *secondly*, it is to balance stability and flexibility. Democracies cherish order, continuity, and predictability as well as flexibility and change. Usually, there are attempts to balance the desire to keep the basic rules of government stable and the desire to adapt rules to new experience. Democratic institutions generate some degree of order and thus elements of rigidity and inflexibility. However, they are arranged both to speed up and slow down, learning from experience and adapting to changing circumstances.

Here, a distinction is made between administrative reforms meant at improving practical problem solving within fairly stable institutional and normative frameworks, and reforms aimed at changing such frameworks. Focus is on the latter, where an institution’s external relations, especially its pact with society, are at stake. Transformation from one institutional archetype to another requires de-institutionalization and a subsequent re-institutionalization (Eisenstadt, 1958; and Peters, 1999). The legitimacy of an institution’s mission, organization, functioning, moral foundation, ways of thought, and resources are thrown into doubt, and a possible outcome is the fall and rise of institutional structures and their associated systems of normative and causal beliefs.

The conservative government to e-Government transition process recommends governments a unique opportunity to augment not only their operational transparency, clarity of purpose, and responsiveness to

citizens (Marche & McNiven, 2003), but also their own internal efficiency and effectiveness, important concerns in times of economic downturn, and increasing public pressure for internal accountability. However, achieving transparency requires significant internal process redesign that hides the internal complexity of transactions (Marche & McNiven, 2003) from citizens who really do not care which department provides a particular service, or who they are paying, so long as they can get it. This transparency is likely to increase citizen empowerment, in which they will be able to access information of their own choosing, rather than merely accepting whatever explanation is provided, if any by the [in] competent authorities (Slevin, 2000).

Basically, there are both similarities and differences between .com and .gov, in which both bear closer attention. Individual Business to Customers (B2C), customers will have a general experience of the 24/7 world where they can do anything, any time, and anywhere. As citizens, it is likely that they will expect a similar level of service from e-Government – a one-stop shop service that is simple and capable of personalization (Thong, Yap & Seah, 2000). Achieving such a service needs changes in the way government functions, in which it requires significant inter-departmental cooperation. Citizens are more expected to develop loyalty towards those e-Government portals that are citizen-centric, which are designed to address their needs and wants.

A major difference between e-Government and e-Business do concern loyalty. E-Businesses have tried to develop customer loyalty with customer relationship management so as to support customers to return time and again to buy their services or products. As long as customers want to buy, they may indeed return. On the other hand, with e-Government, loyalty is rather different. E-Governments should encourage digital loyalty, for example, the preference of citizens to use digital services over other forms, for instance counter, mail, fax, telephone, since digital services should be much cheaper to provide. However, at the same time, since governments by definition work as a monopoly, they may realize that they may not need to spend extra effort to compete with other providers. That said, some government services such as the Post Office (not a government service in all countries) may well face private-sector competition in the form of courier and express parcel delivery firms, so it is unwise to assume absolute monopoly status. At a higher level, a government may also be contemplated to be in competition, for example investment or human resources, with neighboring governments, whether in nearby cities, regions or countries.

The first theme that emerges is that IT can and should be used as a tool for reforming the ills of modern bureaucratic organizations. According to this view, IT can be a driver and enabler of change and reform due to its boundary challenging nature, and governments can be reengineered and reinvented via IT to serve society better. This view holds that the key features of Weberian bureaucracy, for instance hierarchy, division of labor and rigidity of rules, have led to a situation in bureaucratic organizations where processes are

“stove piped” (highly inflexible) and information is held in “silos” (not shared properly); this has resulted in government bureaucracies being inflexible and unresponsive to the needs of citizens. This theme upholds that IT can foster improvements in collaboration and information sharing within government bureaucracies, and can thus make government flexible, responsive and efficient. Some illustrations of this theme are now presented.

The availability of technology was a driver as well as an enabler of change by making certain types of government functions more feasible and creating new expectations from them. In this case, it is claimed that e-Government can be a major contributor to reform and that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have underpinned reforms in many areas (Marche & McNiven, 2003).

C. Bellamy and J. Taylor (1998) justify such views that government can be reinvented via technology, on the basis of the “boundary challenging” nature of information technology. Additionally, IT enables new information flows that challenge past norms and capabilities. It further proposes that e-Government initiatives can allow public administration to go beyond its traditional hierarchical structures of accountability. J.E. Fountain (2007) marks that information technology in conjunction with the redesign of organizational process flows has diminished the amount of red tape and accelerated the delivery of government services for some members of the public. Meanwhile R.W.O. Okot-Uma (2003) posits electronic governance (e-Governance) presents an opportunity for governments to reinvent themselves, get closer to citizenry and create closer alliances and partnerships with diverse communities of interest, practice, expertise, conviction and inter-dependence within the context of national development agendas.

Therefore, if bureaucracy were to be seen as the unconditional catalyst for the success of e-Government initiative in Malaysia, several feasible off-the-shelf rationales may be emphasized by the government, such as: (1) The project allows a high level of collaboration between government in their interactions with IT vendors and has been considered a running success; (2) The e-Government initiative has made the government’s financial transactions much more transparent, increased positive collaboration between firms and agencies and sharply reduced corruption opportunities within the bureaucracy; (3) The e-Government initiative lets the *rakyat* to bypass what previously were complex bureaucratic procedures for reporting complaints; and (4) The e-Government initiative allows verification of the legal status of property, including businesses, homes and personal estates. Formerly, getting the required information took ages, whereas now it can be obtained immediately thus reducing search complexity for *rakyat*.

E-GOVERNMENT CHALLENGES

An ideal bureaucratic structure is presumed to be a factor to unity and coordination, precision and speed, predictability, obedience and loyalty,

impartiality, decrease of friction and of material and personal costs, knowledge of files and an institutionalized memory, and permanence across changes in government. Nevertheless, there is an obvious incongruity between the enthusiasm for organizational design and reorganization and the lack of systematic knowledge about organizational impacts. Notwithstanding decades of evaluation, there is modest perception of what consequences different forms are likely to have in different contexts (Wollmann ed., 2001). While it is acknowledged that it matters how public administration is formally structured, and that administrators are prejudiced by the rules and structural settings in which they act, up to date reviews have so far had little to say about the relationships between organizational structure and administrative behavior.

The nature of the relation is highly challenged. Formal structure can be highly important but also a façade, inundated by informal structures and external resource distributions (Bendix, 1962). Organizational structure is not the only factor at play and administrative organization can provide a framework rather than an “iron cage”, resolving administrative mentality, behavior, and outcomes. Formal organization charts and procedural manuals have unpredictable explanatory power and influencing formal organization can be a more or less precise instrument that gives diverse results in atypical contexts (Blau & Schoenherr, 1971; and Aucoin, 1997).

Perhaps, there has been little felt need to investigate assumptions about the consequences of administrative reform because many reforms have been driven by strong ideological convictions, or even a doctrinaire faith in what is the ideal organization and role of public administration in the economy and society. Hitherto, it is also complicated to identify the accurate effects of organizational structures and a weak factual foundation leaves room for strong ideological convictions. While it is commonplace to focus on the negative effects of bureaucratic organization, and since the main complaints are well known, interest is here turned to some potentially positive implications of bureaucratic organization.

Consider, for example, the impact of rules. Subjecting human conduct to constitutive rules has been portrayed as part of processes of democratization and civilization (Elias, 1982; and Berman, 1983). Rules tend to augment action capabilities and efficiency (March & Olsen, 2004). They coordinate many simultaneous activities in a way that makes them equally consistent and reduces uncertainty, for example by initiating predictable time-rhythms through election and budget cycles (Sverdrup, 2000). Rules limit bargaining within intelligible terms. They implement agreements and help shun destructive conflicts.

Rules offer codes of meaning that assist interpretation of ambiguous worlds. They symbolize collective and individual roles, identities, rights, obligations, interests, values, world views, and memory, thus constrain the allocation of attention, standards of evaluation, priorities, perceptions, and resources (March & Olsen, 2004). Rules, additionally, do not necessarily entail rigidity and inflexibility (March, Schultz & Zhou, 2000). Rules may lay down change

and they permit behavioral flexibility. For instance, in the European Union, with its compelling emphasis on legal integration and formal rules, altering patterns of attention, behavior and resource allocation have taken place within reasonably stable structural frameworks (Olsen, 2003).

Bureaucracy can also be positively linked to important economic, social, and political criteria. For instance, merit-based bureaucracy foster economic growth in developing countries and contribute to poverty reduction. Bureaucracy is associated with low corruption, partly because a longer time horizon makes quick returns in terms of corruption less likely (Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi, 2004). General rules and welfare services proposed to serve a special group or interest, generate trust in institutions of government and among citizens, when implemented in an impartial and uncorrupt way.

The sense that governments are in fact ill-prepared for these opportunities is stated by S. Marche and J.D. McNiven (2003), who remark that public administration has a general reputation for functional insularity. Also there is a tendency to not integrate service provisioning across government departments when responding to citizens' needs. It is suggested that the cause of this functional insularity is intrinsically associated with deeply entrenched practices and cultures (Marche & McNiven, 2003), as well as the inherent difficulties linked with integrating operational procedures and information systems, which may not be computer-based, among individual government agencies, departments and bureaus (Ciborra, 2003). Specific barriers related with the e-Government initialization process are many, including issues of citizen privacy and security, inefficiently skilled citizens and government employees, and the tendency for e-Government to replicate traditional government such in propagating the functional insularity (Marche & McNiven, 2003). Finally, there is the issue of access in which the digital divide between the haves and have-nots in society is still a huge one, and sadly many of the people who might stand to gain most from e-Government are the least connected, least educated, and least aware of how to do so (Accenture, 2001).

The second, somewhat contradictory theme that emerges is that e-Government initiatives have failed, or will potentially fail, because of the bureaucratic nature of government organizations. This view is skeptical of the capability of IT to solve the problems of bureaucracy; and according to this view, instead of fixing such problems, e-Government initiatives may themselves fall prey to these problems. This view explains past and current e-Government program failures as a result of existing bureaucratic structures, for example, structures caused as a result of the key features of Weberian bureaucracy namely hierarchy, division of labor, and rigidity of rules. Moreover, according to this view, bureaucratic reform may be necessary before e-Government initiatives can succeed. Some illustrations of this theme are now presented. J. Van Wert (2002) notes that the success of e-Government efforts is potentially challenged because bureaucrats want to hoard information, not collaborate, and want his or her organization to "shine" at the expense of another because

in a traditional sense, it's about ownership which leads to credit which leads to increased resources.

Similarly, S. Marche and J.D. McNiven (2003) assert that due to the way accountability is administered in government, it reinforces stove-piping of organizational procedures. They assert that public administration has a general reputation of functional insularity. This notion refers to the tendency to not integrate service provisioning across departments when responding to citizens' needs. In part, this aspect has been driven by deeply entrenched practices and cultures, supported by the tradition of ministerial accountability. In part, it was driven by the fact that it was administratively very difficult to integrate systems and practices between departments. The implication here is that in order to reform stove piping, the system of accountability may need to be changed before benefits from information technology can be realized.

D. Lazer (2002), in comparing public and private sectors, states that with survival less of an issue, and relative performance more difficult to measure, bureaucratic inertia is likely a greater barrier to adopting successful innovations in the public sector than in the private. A. Friedlander (2000) suggests that e-Government efforts may face problems in gaining acceptance in bureaucratic government organizations because they call for a new type of public servant, one comfortable in collaborative and horizontal relationships rather than one whose expectations and career path lie in hierarchical decision making structures and clean distinctions between policy discussion and program execution. Thus, by upsetting the status quo, e-Government efforts make themselves vulnerable to being undermined by key stakeholders.

F. Bannister and N. Walsh (2002), referring to the potential political problems faced by e-Government programs, write that throughout the 1990s, the technology and operational reach of an e-Government initiative had gradually extended beyond the organizational boundary of the initiative. As the initiative linked to more and more external systems the potential for political problems increased. Government agencies, not to mention its ministers, are protective of their territory and there was a growing risk that the initiative would be seen as infringing on their territory. Thus, e-Government initiatives may face resistance due to their potential for upsetting the existing status quo.

D. Jellinek (2003) reiterates these views and writes about e-Government initiatives that there are various internal tensions that make these projects incredibly difficult to properly define, let alone achieve, and the largest set of problems is that of actually getting different departments and agencies to work with each other, to share information, and even budgets in pursuit of better services for the citizen. Moreover, there is an age-old rivalry to overcome between departments used to fighting each other tooth and nail for a chunk of the overall government spending pot. Government departments are used to working as separate units, answerable only to their responsible minister.

There are potential legal problems with watering down these clear lines of responsibility, not to mention problems with data protection law.

Skepticism about e-Government's potential to reform bureaucracy extends to the government too. For example, F. Li (2003) asserts that there is a gap between the rhetoric about the potential of e-Government and the reality on the ground. In particular, public sector organizations involved appear to be more skeptical about the ability of IT to break down barriers within and between organizations than those who advocate e-Government as a solution to this problem. S. Murray (2001) implies that it is becoming clear that the process of putting public services online is about much more than IT. Indeed, it demands fundamental changes in the public sector's traditional structures and practices and in the relationship between the state and its citizens.

As a result, our final illustration of this theme is that poor governance cannot be cured by any *e-elixirs*. All computers and internet access will not negate corrupt, bloated bureaucracies or ineffective public institutions. A. Jain (2004) restates that political elites and entrenched bureaucrats, particularly in places where government jobs have high profit margins, may choose to resist.

Consequently, according to A. Jain (2004), if bureaucracy were to be the unconditional bane for the embarrassing failure of any e-Government initiative, several realistic and sensitive *raison d'être* may explain such predicament, namely:

First, the rational and transparent processes were not utilized for selection of other project personnel. In fact there were concerns about interference, self-interest or cronyism from government officials in the proposal or procurement process. *Second*, there are political antagonisms between various groups of public officials. *Third*, there was a lack of bureaucratic commitment to the e-Government system which included deliberate neglect and denial of the system's value, coupled with a level of arrogance about their own petty importance. *Fourth*, there was a lack of understanding and support for the project within the steering committee, leading to resistance to actually opening channels of communication with the public. *Fifth*, it is instigated by some aspects of the e-Government application threatened the privileges of public administrators such as high ranking bureaucrats or diplomats. For instance, the promoting videoconferences meant reducing overseas travel. *Sixth*, there was resistance to the e-Government project and to new ways of working within the individual initiatives and other parts of the system. *Seventh*, the e-Government project system attempted to change bureaucratic processes too radically, when most senior staff, who may be suffering from the infamous *Comfort Zone Syndrome*, was unsympathetic to such changes. And finally, *eighth*, the e-Government initiative tried to introduce a fundamentally different set of working practices and conflicted directly with both the traditional culture and the self-interests of at least some senior figures in the department, who were reluctant to alter their working patterns to incorporate the initiative.

IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

In general, this review may be rhetorical or at least satirical in nature. Thus, rediscovering Max Weber's analysis of bureaucratic organization enriches our understanding of such questions and its relevance to Malaysian e-Government initiative. The plain argument is not that Mr. Weber always offers authoritative answers but much more has to be understood about the mechanisms by which public sector administration approaches the ideal-type bureaucracy, what triggers the emergence, growth and decline of bureaucratic organization, and the repercussions of such changes. Nonetheless, Max Weber calls attention to vital issues and dilemmas and presents stimulating lines of thought. In particular, this is true when we embrace bureaucracy as a whole institution and not only an instrument. Also we may review the empirical studies in their time and context, and not only at Max Weber's ideal-types and predictions. Lastly, we take into account the political and normative order bureaucracy as a part, and not only the internal characteristics, of "the bureau".

This paper does not try to paint a bleak picture of e-Government initiative in developing countries or Malaysia in particular. Nonetheless, such limitations, if any, must not be left unnoticed. Indisputably, notions of "success" and "failure" are indeed highly subjective issues. The outcome of something as difficult and complex to achieve as government reform, or higher levels of civic engagement by means of electronic medium, may not be sensed immediately. These agencies must also be ready to transform mindsets, systems, and processes even if this may decrease their autonomy. Boundaries, silos, and counters will have to be torn down and done away as clients move online. Communications with the government via emails and other electronic channels will be made a mere routine norm, delivered to the public clients any time of the day across any time zone, and in any continent. The implementation of a fully connected Malaysian government also requires empowering the government workforce. Bureaucratic agencies must focus their interest to empowering employees by providing them the tools to perform and deliver their duties better and from any workspace. Therefore, there is an urgent need to make human capital planning a strategic element in the agencies' initiatives. An effective and fully connected Malaysian e-Government initiative poses challenges on how they might devise policies to spur and inspire local innovation and on how they might integrate which technology to achieve their objectives to a greater degree.

In a skeptical mind, it is easy to overlook positive elements, which often arise as a result of certain skewed perceptions and slanted attitudes. The following limitations of the study are acknowledged: (1) The study examined only the perspective of Weberian Theory of Bureaucracy as an organizational theory, in explaining e-Government initiative, without considering competing theories; and (2) The research approach only identified generalization of the theory onto e-Government initiative in a broad perspective. The study does not attempt to study the probable variability that exists among PMS, ELX, GOE, e-Services, e-Procurement, and HRMIS, in details.

In conclusion, this review gives a brief overview of one of the reasons so many e-Government projects succeed or fail in developing countries. Normally, the major problem is perceived to be the gaps that exist between the design and the reality of the whole system. In actual fact, the topic of e-Government is still pristine, and perspectives are quite likely to transform over time. There is scope for further research in both the areas of success and failure of e-Government in developing countries, particularly Malaysia. Therefore the Weberian Theory of Bureaucracy and e-Government initiatives in Malaysia are indeed the factors to be reckoned with in this particular issue, *per se*.

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In 1997, the Malaysian Government launched the Electronic Government initiative, generally recognized as e-Government, to reinvent itself to lead the country into the Information Age. As far as Malaysia is concerned, the implementation of e-Government was initiated with the introduction of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1996.