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Beyond Organizational Motives of e-Government Adoption: The Case of e-Voting Initiative in Indonesian Villages

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Abstract

Motive is an important underlying reason an organization engages in a particular behavior, which includes initiating a particular information systems adoption. Adoption motives, however, are situational, urging motivational studies to be contingent on the context. The purposes of this paper are therefore twofold: (1) reflecting on the case of Indonesian e-voting initiative, to examine the local government's motives behind e-government adoption; (2) to identify emerging themes that might have influenced the process of e-voting adoption in several Indonesian villages. Qualitative data were collected from five government leaders at both municipal and village levels in a municipality that have previously conducted village e-voting elections. This study found that performance-related rationalities, i.e. cost-savings, reducing service delivery-time, are the main drives for e-voting adoption in this case. Although instances of motives belonging to technological and strategic clusters have also been recorded, none of the leaders responded to operation-related motives. This might be due to the simplistic interpretation of e-voting as merely a replacement for paper-ballots, while its broader implication to democratic values and election best practices have been largely ignored. Moreover, it was evident from the study that the decision to adopt voting technology in this case has been significantly influenced by political interests, where strong cases of leadership further accelerated the adoption process. The strong determination exhibited by higher level leaders has put significant pressures on the lower level authorities to implement e-voting, which might have conflicted with their own organizational strategy, socio-cultural norms, and citizen preparedness. This study is important to identify context-based rationales behind e-voting initiatives in Indonesia and the results are relevant to assist Indonesian government in the development of other e-government strategy in the future. This paper further emphasizes for a broader strategy which takes account of the risks of impairing democratic values and generating conflicts during electoral processes.

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1. Background

Failures to adopt information technology have often been referred back to the higher level of system complexity [1], [2], which most of the time requires a significant amount of investment to ensure a smooth transition [3]. Although such cases are common across organizations, failures of IT seldom come from purely technical origin and they might therefore have only partly explained the lower level of success of information systems adoption [4]. Many attempts, thus, have been made to incorporate organizational factors while introducing IT innovations e.g. organizational size [5], resources [6], knowledge barriers [3], project team competence [7], project plan [8]. Some have even suggested to go further back to the “chartering phase” of IT process [9] – that is the stage, before adoption commences, where the decision of an organization to be either engaged or not in an information systems project is made [10]. Motives in this case have had a considerable share as they are rooted in the strategies of organizations [11] and considered to be closely tied to implementation objectives [12]. They are “reasons or preoccupations that initiate organizations to enter into a search process for an answer to a problematic situation, a need for improvement or change, or to a competitive threat” [13]. Study of motives in information systems, therefore, allows a better understanding of information systems adoption [14] and ICT acceptance behaviour [15]. Motivational study questions the rationale of initiating technology-adoption projects in the first place, which may prove to be the focal point for the success of those projects later on.

Motives of e-government adoption

IT management in public organizations possesses distinct features that separate it from the one in the private sector [12]. In terms of resources, for instance, rather than relying on market mechanisms, technological changes in public organizations are most of the time controlled by government through budget allocation, and thus can hardly be free from political interference. The public sector is also deemed to be under significant pressures to provide a higher level of transparency and accountability to the public, which often results in rigid hierarchical and bureaucratic processes [16]. Nevertheless, discussions on technology adoption have been predominantly circling around the concept of technology acceptance [17] for both public and private sector firms, i.e. following the traditions of DOI [18] and TRA [19]. Such practices expect adopters to benefit from technology and have their needs satisfied from using it [20]. Expectation, despite being different for each group of users [21], is therefore largely viewed as the motivating force that preoccupies users’ mind and leads them to using technology. At institutional level, government organizations are often obliged to confront familiar problems lingering in information systems engineering projects carried out by the private sector, i.e. high costs, obsolescence of legacy systems [22]. Although cost-based arguments have recently been questioned [23], they are believed to be steps ahead of technology- and operation-related expectancies [24], e.g. achieving IT integration, providing centralized management tools, and yielding better connectivity to external partners among others. Performance-related terms such as efficiency [24], [25] and cost reduction [22], therefore, are very often associated with the main expectations towards e-government and still considered the primary motives for e-government implementation.

Other instances of expectancies that drive governments to embrace technological innovation have also been recorded. Deakins and Dillon [26] reported that information accessibility and improved communication constitute the larger share of government’s intention to develop a website in New Zealand. In the context of European countries, Schedler and Summermatter [25] suggested that e-government motives can be classified into strategic and pressure-related groups. Strategic rationale can be instantiated as image promotion, rationalization, and contributions to information society among others; while pressure-related motives respond to changes in the internal and external environments of political/administrative systems, such as customer requirements, obsolescence of legacy systems, and business best practices. Furthermore, Al-Mamari *et al.* [27] have attempted to introduce institutional theory [11] – coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphic nature of firms while looking at motives from the perspective of the government of Oman. The needs for conformity with international standards, being *on par* with other public organizations, and public appreciation have been identified as relevant motives behind e-government adoption. They also included rationalities related to service quality, i.e. improving responsiveness, reliability and credibility, and courtesy and communication practices; and to information quality, such as generating added values. However, despite the excellent contributions made by the previous studies mentioned above, this paper (1) looks for overarching themes that explain organizational motivations. This way, rather than trying to explain motives in terms of coercive, mimetic,

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