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INTERROGATING FACTORS ENCUMBERING E-GOVERNMENT PROJECTS IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Across the global spectrum developed, developing and resource constraint states have embarked on a journey of public sector transformation through the adoption and implementation of e-government projects. E-government projects are viewed as vehicles of organisational capacity embedded with transparent, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness. In a bid to bring about transmogrification in the public sector, the Zimbabwean government has implemented a number of e-government projects. To this end, this research paper seeks to examine the factors that are hindering the success of these projects and offer remedial actions that can be adopted to guarantee project success.

Keywords: *E-government, Projects, Corruption and Political interference*

INTRODUCTION

Across the global spectrum developed and developing nations have implemented e-government projects for the advancement of their nations. This is because the advancement of e-government projects is critical for the development of countries in Africa and the rest of the world (Ojo, 2014 Gronlund & Horan, 2004). E-government denotes “the use of information technology, in particular the Internet, to deliver public services in a much more convenient, customer-oriented, cost-effective, and altogether different and better way” (Holmes, 2001, Ayo 2014, p. 76). Erkut (2020, p. 10) reinforce the above view by noting that, e-government entails “a process consists of the design and use of digital government, digital business issues, and digital democracy—this multifaceted process goes beyond the mere concept of providing government services digitally. It tries to change the nature of establishing and running a business as well as the democratic representation of people.” To this end, e-government projects denote the use of information technology in government programs aimed at strengthening public service delivery and entrenching viable democratic structures. The notion behind is that, national advancement and efficiency heavily relies on e-government project success (Dada, 2006). Successful e-governance projects culminate in national optimum efficiency which enables the nation to gain place in the competitive advantage realm by boosting its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Dunleavy et al, 2006, Myeong et al, 2014). While unsuccessful e-government projects result in national performance deficiency which can lead to the dysfunctional of the entire public sector.

Zimbabwe has implemented a myriad of e-government projects in a bid to bring about efficiency and effectiveness in public service delivery. However, many of those projects have failed due to a plethora of reasons (Gambanga, 2017, Chilunjika & Mutizwa 2019). Pragmatically, e-government project failure can be categorised in different dimensions for example inability to provide the expected project scope, inability to complete the project within the approved schedule, failure to fulfill project goals and objective as well as inability to attain project cost objectives (Chilunjika & Mutizwa 2019, Bakunzibake et al, 2019). Therefore, it is against this background that this research paper seeks to examine factors that are hindering the success of e-government projects in Zimbabwe and propose remedial actions that can be adopted to ensure project success.

Rationale of the Study

E-government projects have been viewed as a vehicle of efficiency and effective service delivery in the public sector (Zinyama & Nhema, 2016). E-government projects have played a crucial role in strengthening organisational capacity and optimal efficiency in the public sector. They have played a pivotal role in combatting market failure by enabling the state to have a crucial role in the supply of basic goods and services (Chilunjika & Mutizwa, 2019). In Zimbabwe, research which examines why projects fail have been done,



however the research has to be narrowed to e-government projects to generate robust examination and analysis of facts. Research on e-government projects are still burgeoning, mushrooming thereby making the present research worthwhile and timely as it exposes and generates much needed information to empower project administrators, academics and policy makers by giving them a timely and comprehensive findings. The research shall function as catalyst for further investigations of factors militating against e-government projects in Zimbabwe.

General overview of e-government projects

The concept of e-government has taken center stage in the global arena, having emerged in the late 1990s (Chen & Hsieh, 2014, OECD, 2015). Gronlund and Horan (2004) noted that the emergence of e-government is attached to the 1990s although governments across the globe were already using computers since their inception. Governments have embarked on a race to implement e-government as a panacea to inefficiency, ineffectiveness and poor service delivery (Dunleavy et al, 2006). It is viewed as a vehicle of organisational capacity embedded with optimum efficiency by fostering accountability, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency. Developed, developing and resource constrained states have embraced e-government projects to transform their public sector (Holmes, 2001). Successful e-government increases customer satisfaction, trust in the government, the attainment of policy goals and greater public participation (Weerakkody et al, 2006). Therefore, viewed from this angle there is a correlation between development, effectiveness, efficiency and organisational capacity with successful e-government projects (OECD, 2014, Alcaide–Muñoz et al ,2017, Kalu & Masri, 2018).

FACTORS HINDERING E-GOVERNMENT PROJECTS IN ZIMBABWE

Political Interference

Political interference embedded with rent-seeking and power retention tendencies have been at the core of e-governance project failure (Gichoya 2005). Several e-government projects have failed in the Zimbabwean public sector owing it to excessive political interference in project administration (Chilunjika & Mutizwa 2019). Political interventionism is embedded with enzymes which hinder project success (Babaita 2001, Ogohi, 2014). For example the clash between the then minister of Minister of Transport, Communication and Infrastructural Development Nicholas Goche and Nelson Chamisa the then Minister of Information Communication Technology brought devastating effects to e-government projects in their line ministry (Muleya 2009). The two ministers would issue conflicting directives to organisations that were under their ministries. A good example is that of Potraz, Telone and Netone. Muleya (2009) noted that Telone failed to complete the convergence project within the approved schedule as different directives were issued from the two ministers' offices.

In similar manner, Netone received conflicting directives on their equipment purchase for the refurbishment and upgrade of their network structures leading to the organisation's inability to attain project cost objectives (Muleya, 2009). All these interference were motivated by the need to administer the Interception of Telecommunications Act (Chapter 11:20) which enables the state to intercept and record individual and corporate communication. It goes without saying political interference in project administration in the Zimbabwean public sector is motivated by power struggles and has been a major impediment to development (Moyo et al., 2015). Zhou (2012) reinforces the finding and asserts that at the heart of State Owned Enterprises (SEPs) challenges is the ghost called political interference.

Conflicting Legal and Regulatory Framework

Moyo et al (2015) and Chilunjika & Mutizwa (2019) propounded that the legal structure that governs the public sector is distinguished not only by contradicting legislations but rather vague, ambiguous, confusing and conflicting with twofold goals which are meant to strengthen and promote extreme political interference in the operation of organizations leaving them with less autonomy from the government. An orthographic projection of the functions of Postal and Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) and Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) vividly depicts that there is fragmentation, confusion and



contestation in the regulation of electronic communication sector (Moyo et al 2015). A good example is that of POTRAZ which regulates electronic transmission of data and information the same function that is also done by BAZ yet the two institutions fall under different line ministries. BAZ falls under Ministry of Media, Information and Broadcasting services while POTRAZ under the Ministry of Information and Telecommunication Technology (ICT). This can be evidenced by the contention and confusion witnessed in 2017 when POTRAZ gave a greenlight to Econet Kwese project while BAZ on the other hand fought hard in the courts to have Kwese's license rescinded (Laiton, 2017).

To this end, such differences from government regulatory institutions are not beneficial to the nation as the hiccups in project implementation undermines the ease of doing business. The project could have made Zimbabwe competitive with other nations in the region in as far as Television Broadcasting is concerned. The project is classified as a failure due to conflicting regulatory frameworks that gave breathe to a bureaucratic culture which prevented the swift implementation of the project culminating in the project's inability to achieve the intended objectives and goals (Laiton, 2017).

Corruption

OECD (2015) and Mutizwa (2020) articulated that corruption has remained a major impediment to project success. The impetus of corruption has no respect for strategic planning and this can be evidenced by how they invaded the Netone base station building projects (Chilunjika, 2018, Chilunjika & Mutizwa, 2019). Netone initiated base station building projects which were meant to modernisation and refurbish its network systems thereby, strengthening its place in the competitive advantage realm. The project is said to have dismally failed as some tenders to construct base stations were being given to some companies in advance before the project had started (Mpfu 2016). The companies are however, said to have failed to fulfill their obligations culminating into project failure, according to Subusisiwe Ndlovu's audit report. The companies that are alleged to have been paid in advance include Masimba, Bopela and Essar, despite it being against the State Procurement Board regulations (Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act (Chapter 22:23) (Mpfu 2016). Ndlovu's report contained scintillating revelations as to why Netone projects were failing. The report also revealed that the then CEO of Netone Kangai ordered the installation of a base station at his sister's house Ms Joyce Kangai so that she can receive rentals from Netone (Manayiti 2016). A move meant to siphon money from the organization, leading to project failure because of personal interest that take precedence and neglect organisational goals.

Corruption brings more harm and stagnation to e-governance projects than success. This can be also be evidenced by the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STERM) program initiated by the then Minister of Higher and Tertiary Institutions professor Jonathan Moyo. The STERM program was an e-governance project which was meant to revolutionize the higher education and tertiary institutions by funding science and technology initiatives as well as giving scholarships to students in science department. The Auditor-General Report (2017) noted that the STERM program was wrapped with corruption and misuse of state resources with tenders being awarded to public officials without following procurement procedures. The report exposed corrupt activities among them AB Communications owned by former cabinet minister Supa Mandiwanzira which was paid US\$ 563, 945, Fuzzy Technologies which was paid US\$185, 840, Troika Design which was paid US\$270, 023, MOTEC Management Services US\$ 70, 000, Tsholotsho Rural District Council which was paid US\$ 19, 500 and Seven Bridges which received US\$169, 447.

The report also noted that some of the payments which were made from the Zimbabwe Manpower Development Fund (ZIMDEF) funds, which were meant for the STERM program include a donation of US\$ 20, 000 to the Zimbabwe ruling political party, ZANU-PF Conference, US\$29 ,000 for by-election T-shirts and US\$2, 985 for sports meeting. Thus the issuing of tenders to the above organisations was done through ministerial directive henceforth violating tender and procurement procedures which seek to ensure that procurement is effected in a manner that is transparent, fair, honest, cost-effective and competitive. The Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act (Chapter 22:23) in corroboration with section 315 of the



Zimbabwean Constitution seeks to provide for the fair and equitable treatment of all bidders, leading to procurement contracts that represent good value for money and robust assessment of institutional capacity. Therefore, taking into consideration of the above ministerial directive, the research noted that the directive defied logic and sought to promote self-aggrandizement which become the major impediment to program success.

Lack of Resources

Lack of resources has remained problematic in project scanning, adoption, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in Africa, as it is a common challenge that knows no boundary (Hanachor, 2012). The assertion of lack of resources impeding projects in Africa can be assessed using Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation (ZBC) digitalization project. The digitalization project was launched by the then Minister of Media Information and Communications Chris Mushowe in 2014 (Gambanga, 2017). The project was expected to end in 2018 however, as at 2020, the project has not been completed due to financial constraints. Vinga (2018) noted that Prince Sibanda the chairman of the Information and Publicity Parliamentary Committee beseeched the Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube to allocate US \$100 million for the completion of the digitalization project. Failure to complete the project on time would lead to obsolescence of the purchased equipment. The project delayed by three years after failing to meet the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) deadline of June 2015 to migrate from analogy to digitalization.

The ITU gave Zimbabwe a grace period by extending the deadline nonetheless, BAZ irresponsible for administering the project failed to complete the project due to resource constraints. However, an anatomy of the scenario demonstrates that there could be lack of political will which then manifest as lack of financial resources. Vunga (2018) reinforce this view by arguing that, the cost benefit analysis of the program projects suggest that upon completion, four million jobs would be created and earn more than US \$1.5 billion per year for content producers. Television channels are anticipated to broadcast 24 hours a day which translates to 288 broadcasting hours per day and 2016 broadcasting hours for the 12 stations (Vunga (2018)).

REMEDIAL ACTIONS WHICH CAN BE ADOPTED

Politics-Administration Dichotomy

The theory of politics-administration dichotomy is credited to Woodrow Wilson. In 1887, Woodrow Wilson wrote “The Study of Administration” which vehemently dismisses the linkage of politics and administration (Stillman, 1973). Wilson argued that the field of administration is a field of business and it is detached to the strife of politics as it lies outside the sphere of politics. Wilson noted that administrative goals are not the same with political goals despite the fact that politicians set tasks for administrators (Stillman, 1973). According to Wilson, politicians should just assign tasks to administrators and then allow them to implement. This is the only way the public sector can attain organisational optimum efficiency (Chilunjika & Mutizwa, 2019). Thus, the politics-administration dichotomy is sound and viable and this research uses the concept as a panacea to address problems that e-government projects are encountering due to political interference. The separation of politics from projects administration would result in project efficiency as there is likely to be less hurdles to deal with (Zhou (2012). It will also culminate in the minimisation of rent-seeking tendencies from politicians (Chulunjika & Mutizwa 2019).

Amalgamation of BAZ and POTRAZ Autonomy

The study recommends that BAZ and POTRAZ be merged into one institution to promote the ease of doing business and support e-government projects by eliminating parallel lines of regulatory command. The suggestion is not a new phenomenon as it will resonate with the proposed reforms in the Transitional Stabilisation Policy (2018-2020). This is because BAZ and POTRAZ at times participate in similar activities for example, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) (Moyo etal, 2015). This demonstration of the interconnectedness of the two institutions should be a compelling reason for such a merger to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in operations, and economy in use of scarce resources.



Adoption of Good Corporate Governance Practice

To deal with corruption, this study recommends the adoption of good corporate governance. This research suggests a focus on transparency, accountability, responsibility, integrity and whistleblowing as possible pillars that can be utilized to flush out the cancerous and malevolent effects of corruption in e-governance projects. The promotion of good cooperate governance in the public sector is likely to culminate in deterrence of unethical behaviour. Corporate governance should be backed by punitive measures.

Public Private Partnership (PPP) / Joint Venture

The adoption of PPP to curb resource constraints is another recommendation that could be implemented. PPP allows private organisations to bring in the much-needed resources for the success and completion of e-government projects (Gichoya, 2005). It is a remedial action that has been adopted and tested in many countries (Cheng etal 2015). This can be evidenced by how Singapore after its independence formed Government Linked Companies, a joint venture and partnership with the private sector to bring about transmogrification in its economy (Cheng etal 2015).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

E-government has been shown to improve public service delivery. This research examined the factors that have constantly hindered the success of e-government projects in Zimbabwe. The study highlights factors of corruption, lack of resources, conflicting legal and regulatory frameworks and political interference as main hindrances to successful implementation of e-government projects in Zimbabwe. The study proffers viable recommendations to create a pathway for the successful implementation of projects. While the study does not cover every factor, it functions as a springboard for further studies in dynamics that are hindering the success of e-government projects in Zimbabwe, Africa, and the rest of the world.

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