DIGITAL GOVERNMENT: PROBLEMS OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract- This paper will outline the importance to Thailand's future of the adoption and improvement of digital management in government. With the advent of the AEC, Thailand will, essentially, be competing with other regional nations for skilled labor. Within this context, the adoption of a transparent and innovative system of digital government will help make Thailand a good place to work, and will help prepare skilled Thai laborers to compete on the AEC job market. These innovations carry a certain degree of risk, and limitations of government technology, stiff competition from the private sector, lack of coordination, and lack of technological literacy hold the potential to derail any such efforts. In order to succeed, Thailand will need to adopt a holistic strategy and attempt to reach benchmarks set by successful digital innovators such as Singapore and the United States. If these efforts are successful, Thailand has the potential to become a major regional hub for digital innovation and investment.

Keywords- AEC, ASEAN, Digital Government, Digital Management.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

Our lifestyle is fundamentally tied into the growth of digital systems. Information technology improves and changes constantly. In the future, economic decline and corruption may be precipitated by inaction in improving and refining digital technology. As the world grows increasingly digitized, both governments and private enterprises are compelled to modernize their operations and adopt some form of digital management. Digital policy in government is particularly important, because it applies the power of information technology to the improvement of economic and social areas. Digital technology can help the country develop in any department, and is, as such, very important.

In order to develop the economy of communications, it will be increasingly necessary, in the future, to concentrate on developing a system of digital government. The objective in developing digital government should be to cover as many areas as possible, and to build an infrastructure that is large enough and stable enough to be used. The cost of access shouldn't be too high, so developing an affordable infrastructure should also be a priority. The structural foundation of digital government is the convergence of information technology, telecommunication, and broadcasting.

Towards this end, the Prayuth government has adopted a policy of encouraging and supporting the digital economy. This policy was announced on September 18, 2014. The growth of the digital economy is also one of the infrastructural goals of the country, because the digital technology can help the economy of the country develop and be competitive in the world. Digital government will help develop the people and the economy at the same time. The Thai government has adopted five strategies for digital government: hard infrastructure, soft infrastructure, service infrastructure, digital economic promotion, and digital society.

Big businesses, although big, are not always successful, because they don't improve their digital strategy. For example, Kodak and Nokia both used to be the leading innovators of the camera and cell phone business, respectively, but did not improve their digital products as much as their competitors, and were unable to compete as a result. Maintaining a good website and a social media presence is also important. Where businesses can fail, so can countries, and with ASEAN establishing the AEC in the near future, it is more important than ever for the Thai government to adopt a strategy of digital innovation and development.

II. POTENTIAL PROBLEMS IN THE ADOPTION OF DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

Although digital technology is very important, most countries in the world, including Thailand, still are not able to develop their own digital technology. This has caused problems in developing countries, because every country needs to improve digital technology before they improve in other areas. One very important area to which governments pay little attention is the support of private companies. These private companies could, in turn, help the government develop and improve its digital technology. In the past, digital technology was never part of government policy, and was the sole domain of businesses. As such, there are at least four major potential problems facing a government that wishes to step up its digital strategy.

1. First, government organizations rarely make use of cutting edge hardware. The manner in which

they endeavor to improve is not along the same path as private companies.
2. Second, because private companies and organizations continually work to improve digital technology, the government never has a good security system to protect itself.
3. Third, when the government works, they never let private companies freely compete with the government. When the government provides a service to the people, lack of understanding of management always leads to problems. Because the government is not a private company, it cannot make money by servicing people. Digital technology should theoretically make the customer experience easier, but in practice, it often does not change anything.
4. Finally, people who are unable to use digital technology, due to poverty, geographic location, or physical ability, are unable to use digital government services. Adoption of digital technology often differs from region to region. For example, a hospital or a school in a rural area will never have the same technological facilities as a hospital or school in a large city.

Because the government does not know how to manage digital technology well enough, any efforts to adopt a policy of digital government will carry a number of risks, and could potentially be derailed by any of the factors listed above.

III. FACTORS IN THE SUCCESS OF DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

When adopting a strategy of digital innovation, it is important to set standards for success. A number of such criteria exist, some established by governments, others established by private companies, and others proposed by researchers.

A 2014 Accenture study, which found Singapore to be a world leader in digital government, provides a very useful rubric for the success of digital government. This study used three criteria. the first criteria, "citizen service delivery experience," is a measure of the extent to which government services are "citizen-centric" and focused on communication, with an emphasis on social media presence. The second criteria, "citizen satisfaction," is the extent to which citizens "believe governments are meeting their needs and providing quality services." The third criteria, "service maturity," is a measure of the government's digital presence. Based on these three criteria, Singapore scored 7.4 points out of ten, the highest score in the ten-country study.

Singapore's success was no accident. From the beginning, their main focus of development has been electronics, computers, and technology, and the stated goal of the Singaporean government is to make the country the global leader in digital technology. Also, the government of Singapore supports the development of high technology products, and the development of a high-skilled labor force in the industrial sector. As such, workers from Singapore are among the world's best and most skilled laborers, and are in high demand in all job markets. They try to do this, because normally they have to hire the laborers from other countries, because their own country is very small. Due to this highly skilled workforce, Singaporeans will likely be able to work anywhere in ASEAN under AEC, while non-Singaporeans will be unable to compete in the Singaporean job market.

In addition, the Singaporean government has been conducting an active and ongoing digital government improvement program since 1980 (Singapore eGov). This program began with the Civil Service Computerization Program (CSCP), a concerted effort to automate civil service infrastructure and establish IT infrastructure and data hubs. The CSCP lasted until 1999, and has since been followed by a succession of 4- and 5-year programs, each aiming to further the digital integration of government services, and improve the government's media presence.

The US government, in outlining its digital government strategy, uses a similar criteria to that outlined by Accenture. The US strategy revolves around four principles. The first of these is the "information-centric approach," which advocates focusing on structured data rather than final presentation, thus allowing agencies to present data to the public in a consistent manner. The second principle is the "shared platform approach," emphasizing the sharing of digital resources, both between government agencies and between the government and the public. The third principle, the "customer-centric approach," mirrors the "citizen-centric" emphasis of the Accenture criteria, and advocates allowing customers to "find what they need and complete transactions with a level of efficiency that rivals their experiences when engaging with the private-sector." Finally, the "platform of security and privacy," the last principle, mandates the maintenance of "safe and secure, yet transparent and accountable" digital government services (EOPOTUS).

Both the Singaporean model and the US model emphasize the importance of treating the citizen as a customer, and the importance of effectively sharing resources between different organizations. Singapore's approach offers the most important lesson, as Singapore is generally considered to have the best digital technology in ASEAN. Between organizations, differences in technology make it difficult to work together, and this can cause problems. Singapore can work fast and cover everything, but the other nine countries in ASEAN

still struggle to keep up. As such, Singapore prefers with Europe, the USA, and Australia instead of the countries in ASEAN. In order to move closer to the global technological standard, government organizations should make use of online communication.

Strategies and criteria designed for private businesses can be applied to government enterprises as well. Bharadwaj et al (2013) identify four "themes" around which to base criteria for digital business strategy. These themes are the scope, scale, and speed of digital business strategy, along with the sources of value creation. While Bharadwaj and colleagues have private businesses in mind, their themes apply just as well to government enterprises. Jeffcoate et al (2002), describing the best practices for the adoption of e-commerce, advocate an understanding of the enterprise's market position, a concrete set of objectives, and the identification of a set of "critical success factors" by which to measure success. Again, while Jeffcoate et al are specifically referring to private-sector activity, their conclusions nonetheless apply to government enterprises as well.

The main objective of digital management should be to spread access to digital technology to every corner of the entire country. Given the popularity of social media in Thailand and in ASEAN in general, and the widespread adoption of social media, even in poor and remote regions, Thailand is certainly ready to adopt a more intense and aggressive digital innovation strategy. Such a strategy would likely improve citizen involvement in government.

In developing digital technology, a three-part strategy is important. First, you need to improve the technology which your country has access to. Second, you need to improve people, and their ability to use technology. However, the most important thing is to determine how to manage the use of technology by the people. In the plan to develop the country's digital infrastructure, each department of the government, as well as the private sector and society in general, must have a plan to adopt new digital technology. In this endeavor, the government will serve lead the development of digital security and information technology. Also, they will have to support private companies who want to run digital businesses.

IV. BENEFITS OF DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

The most basic benefit of adopting a digital strategy, for both private and public enterprises, is the ability to "deliver better services to customers at a lower cost – whether an agency is supporting the warfighter overseas, a teacher seeking classroom resources or a family figuring out how to pay for college." (EOPOTUS).

If improvement of digital infrastructure is successful, it will significantly lower cost of access to digital technology, to a price that could be afforded by the majority of the people. Secondly, people in the country can have greater ability to use public services no matter how far away they live, or how much money they have. A third benefit would be to increase the abilities of SMEs engaged in digital business to improve themselves, and be competitive in the country and internationally.

Digital technology will also help improve the government's ability to convey information to the people. When people need to use government services, it will be fast, readily available, and can be used by anyone, regardless of physical location or social status. Also, people would be able to get necessary information by themselves, without relying upon a government official. This will save money, energy, and time, and allow citizens to focus more time on their careers and on contributing to society. For example, Thai people living abroad should be able to continue to renew their ID card without visiting the embassy, and farmers in rural areas should be able to complete necessary paperwork without leaving their farms and traveling into the nearest city.

The most important benefit, however, is the improvement of the country's human resources. In other words, the improvement of peoples education and personal development. If the physical infrastructure of the country is not developed enough, and there is not enough money to develop affordable transportation, digital infrastructure can provide an alternative means of improving communication with remote parts of the country. This, in turn, has a positive effect on education in rural areas.

In the future, Thailand could potentially become a hub for investment in digital technology businesses, and possibly become an ICT center and cooperate, on an equal level, with other countries in ASEAN and the wider world. In order to remain competitive in the future business world, everything will have to be digital.

CONCLUSIONS

While it is easy to get discouraged when comparing Thailand to the likes of Singapore, these are nonetheless the benchmarks which Thailand should strive to meet. The advent of the AEC means that it's critical that Thailand not only aim to stand out from the surrounding ASEAN nations in matters of government, but to attempt to be a regional leader. In order to do this, improvement of digital technology, and the adoption of a policy of digital government, is necessary. It will assist in the political, economic, and

social development of Thailand, and will pave the way for long-term success in the AEC.

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