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TOWARDS eGovernment: A PRIMER

WRITTEN BY: KIRK HENRY, CEO iGovTT

Given his experience and expertise in information communication technologies ICT, our CEO Mr Kirk Henry received a request from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago's (CBTT) Payments System Council to submit an article for its March 2020 newsletter issue. The Payments Council was formed in 2002. The theme of the Council's March edition is "Securing Payments," and with this in mind, Mr. Henry wrote his submission: *Towards E-Government: A Primer*.

Being at the helm of the National ICT Company Ltd, (iGovTT), a leading ICT transformation company, whose primary business is the provision of ICT consulting and support services for Government, as well as the provision of value-added ICT support services to Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Mr Henry was the best choice to speak on the issue of which, in no doubt, is quite relevant to our current situation.



The United Nations defines e-government as, "the focused use of ICT to more effectively deliver services to citizens and businesses..., with the goal of achieving public ends by digital means."

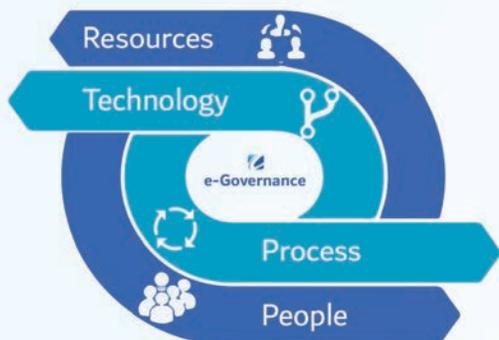
This definition recognizes that the utilisation of ICT in Government operations should therefore not be viewed as an end in its own right and must be predicated on creating value within the Government to citizen value chain. In general, the value chain associated with e-government is segmented into three discrete categories.

1. Government to Government (G2G) refers to the sharing of data and/or management information systems between government Ministries, Departments and Agencies. This forms the bedrock for any sustained information sharing and/or interoperability goals in e-government and provides a means for significantly improving the ability of government to efficiently deliver services to citizens. The goal of G2G is ultimately to support e-government initiatives by improving communication, enhancing inter-institutional data access and risk optimised data sharing.

2. The Government to Business (G2B) stream of activity is squarely focused on the activity and associated relationships between a range of public and private non-governmental entities. G2B activities revolves around those e-services that are provided to businesses generally in support of commercial activities. The goal being to improve or reduce the friction associated with the conduct of business thus increasing efficiency with the ultimate goal of increasing underlying production across all business sectors.

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3. Government to Citizen (G2C) represents the most well-known aspect of e-government and is primarily focused on the relationship between citizens and government and the provision of government services and/or information. A robust and comprehensive G2C portfolio provides citizens with simple and secure and transparent access to government information and services instantly and conveniently via multiple channels.

The question now becomes where does Trinidad and Tobago sit with respect to its progression along the continuum of e-government development? Let us consider this question against the backdrop of the well-known Gartner Group e-government 5 level maturity model.

Gartner Group's E-Government Maturity Model

LEVEL 1 — Initial (E-Government)

At this level, the focus is on moving services online for user convenience and cost savings, but data and its uses are siloed and extremely limited.

LEVEL 2 — Developing (Open)

Level 2 which does not have to precede to level 1 is characterized by public-facing programs intended to promote transparency, citizen engagement and the leveraging of data. A good example of a government operating at this level is the Copenhagen data Exchange.

LEVEL 3 — Defined (Data-Centric)

At this level the focus moves from being reactive to citizen demand or need to adopting a forward looking or proactive posture through the use of data analytics to uncover opportunities for service delivery and value creation.

LEVEL 4 — Managed (Fully Digital)

Governments operating at this level are characterized by their commitment to fully data-centric approach to improving its operations. The emphasis is on open data principles and integration and interoperability between departments and agencies are the order of the day. This is predicated against the pre-requisite supporting legislation and/or operating regulations to ensure that citizen concerns around data privacy and security are more than adequately handled.

LEVEL 5 — Optimizing (Smart)

The pinnacle of e-government maturity that is driven and supported by policymakers. At this stage, the entity is a learning organisation with digital innovation underpinned by open data principles with the associated processes deeply embedded deeply across its establishment.

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Trinidad and Tobago arguably sits at level 1 in this model as there is a focus on moving more and more services online with the goal of improving citizen convenience and reducing the cost associated with providing the service. Good examples of this include services such as the BIR's e-tax filing system, facilitated by iGovTT's ttconnect ID that acts as a portal for an array of services such as GATE, Government live chat, TTBizlink and most recently it's online payment facility for documents from the Ministry of the Attorney General's Civil and Company Registry's. Additionally, the Courtpay system recently rolled out by the Judiciary are good examples of activity characterized by entities at level 1.

The next stage in our development must begin to focus on the notion of interoperability and the benefits to be derived from the sharing of data at the system level. Ministries Departments and Agencies must therefore devote some attention to the notion of Data Governance activities to facilitate innovation through data sharing that will inevitably result in the breaking down of the natural silos that often exist throughout the government environment.

Overall Trinidad and Tobago by all accounts is in the midst of a "Renaissance Period" as it relates to the use of technology in the provision of government goods and services at all levels of government. The challenge still remains to ensure that as execution occurs, an attendant level of coordination and governance emerges across all entities and actors. This



is currently being managed through the Ministry of Public Administration who, through its published National ICT plan, has been championing this cause, as this coordination will be required to support the identification of crosscutting issues and the creation of appropriate inflight strategies to address them.

In general, the anecdotal experience has been that successful e-government initiatives are introduced not through a single major initiative or the "boil the ocean" approach but rather through small, achievable chunks which snowball into greater success and delivery credibility.

As I often tell the team at iGovTT we must, **"If we are to succeedThen design big and implement small in a rapid fashion.....then Repeat Until!"**