Web 2.0 in Next-Generation Government and Governance
A Middle East Point of View

Authors
Shukri Eid Atari
Martin Stewart-Weeks
Joan McCalla

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Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG)

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This document discusses the potential impact of Web 2.0 tools in government and governance in the Middle East, using cases from around the region. To do so, we briefly describe the Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group's (IBSG) global point of view on the topic, and then discuss how different challenges, demographics, and cultural dynamics affect the potential role of Web 2.0 tools in the Middle East.

Introduction

Many governments in the Middle East are vocal about the main values and drivers behind their national agendas. For example, *Bahrain Vision 2030* talks about fairness and openness, *Qatar Strategy 2030* includes social development and personal freedoms, *Dubai Strategy 2015* addresses quality social services, and *Saudi Arabia 2020* stresses modernization of governance. Many of these featured values are consistent with the attributes of Web 2.0: communication, collaboration, transparency, and empowerment.

There are significant opportunities and risks for governments contemplating more robust adoption of Web 2.0 tools and capabilities. Events in Tunisia, Egypt, and other Middle Eastern countries in early 2011 have demonstrated that Web 2.0 and social media are swiftly coming of age in the Middle East. While the role of technology in fueling social movements is complex, the reality is that a significant segment of Middle Eastern citizens is already conducting frequent interactions using tools such as Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and online video.

Middle Eastern governments now have a major opportunity to engage their citizens in two-way communications using the interactive tools and technologies of Web 2.0. Governments can streamline service design and delivery, improve policymaking and regulatory reform, and create opportunities for better engagement by and with citizens. The open, transparent, and collaborative qualities of Web 2.0, however, are rarely straightforward for governments. In particular, the capabilities and culture of Web 2.0 raise complex issues of control, accountability, and authority. Middle Eastern governments exploring these technologies face the same kinds of challenges and opportunities as their counterparts in other parts of the world. The main difference may be the degree to which the values of openness and collaboration drive adoption and experimentation by the government. For any country, different governing models and prevailing culture will impact how these new tools are used and spread.

While all governments are in the early days of experimenting with Web 2.0 concepts and tools, government adoption of Web 2.0 in developed countries is part of an explicit aspiration toward "next-generation" government and governance. That is not always the case in the Middle East.

In this region, most of the initial experimentation with Web 2.0 concepts and tools is focused on general interaction with the public as an alternative communication channel. Internal collaboration and empowerment are not as evident at the moment, but may drive adoption

of Web 2.0 concepts and tools in the future. Cisco IBSG believes that Middle Eastern governments can realize immediate benefits by first implementing Web 2.0 capabilities internally, to gain operational efficiencies and employee productivity. They can also use these tools to improve the quality and relevance of policymaking and government services in a way that makes a real difference to the general population.

The extent to which governments in the Middle East decide to facilitate self-organization and grouping, open dialogue, and direct public opinion in service design and policymaking will significantly influence how Web 2.0 capabilities will be used in the region.

Web 2.0 in Government and Governance: Global View

Web 2.0 is more than a set of new technologies. It represents a fundamental shift in the nature of the Internet and our relationship with it—and with each other. No longer just a way to distribute and access information and services, the web is now allowing people to come together and do things in new ways. The power of Web 2.0 is in participation, enabling users to be creators as much as consumers. Social media such as blogs, wikis, forums, and social networking sites make it dramatically easier for people to find each other and collaborate. When applied to interactions between the public sector and citizens, Web 2.0 facilitates the kind of next-generation governance that Cisco IBSG has called "The Connected Republic."[1]

"Web 2.0 is a set of technologies and applications that enable efficient interaction among people, content, and data in support of collectively fostering new businesses, technology offerings, and social structures."

Forrester Research
"How Social Technologies Can Kickstart Innovation," September 2010

Web 2.0 enables new ways to collaborate within and across organizations and geographies—by voice, online, or video. It provides creative new ways to access, understand, and use digital information to create new knowledge and value. The underlying values of Web 2.0 are communication, collaboration, transparency, and empowerment. Therefore, adoption and use of Web 2.0 technologies, and the nature of Web 2.0 applications, will inevitably depend on the context of those values at the individual, organizational, government, and even regional levels.

The public—especially the young "millennial" generation—is increasingly using social media daily to fulfill that most human of all desires: to belong to a community within which it is possible to share experiences, seek out new information and opportunities, and engage in conversation and debate. The world has taken notice, pushing Web 2.0 into the mainstream. Private sector companies commonly tap into social media to target and recruit new staff or to solicit ideas for new products and services. Not-for-profit organizations use social networking to increase volunteerism and participation. And academic institutions use Web 2.0 tools to enable new collaborative models of teaching and learning.

Most significantly, an emerging "public purpose" sector is employing these technologies to bring together people, ideas, skills, and resources from governments, the private sector, and

civil society to tackle common challenges. These may be a one-time, highly focused issue, such as designing a local park or improving community safety, or ongoing problems such as youth unemployment or energy conservation that are beyond the ability of any one government or organization to resolve.

Governments, too, are beginning to adopt Web 2.0 technologies and applications to help provide better services, improved efficiency, and greater effectiveness, while exploring new models to strengthen inclusiveness and civic engagement, and to create a more resilient society.

Many governments are introducing internal tools (often in the experimental stage) to enable peer-to-peer collaboration across government organizations and communities of interest. This allows good ideas to emerge from anywhere in the organization, resolves problems faster, makes knowledge available more broadly, and breaks down barriers between organizations working on related topics. Some governments are using Web 2.0 to encourage public input and discussion on priorities, service improvements, and policy options, often leading to better results and a more informed and involved citizenry. Governments are also making databases publicly available in digital form for use by individuals, small businesses, and others who may have an interest in the data, or who may combine that data with other data for greater understanding and knowledge.

These advances are altering the balance between centralized, top-down government systems and smaller, more distributed processes capable of faster, more agile adaptation to rapidly shifting conditions—what we have described as a changing relationship between the "center" and the "edge."[2] Individuals increasingly are seeking opportunities to define and influence the world in which they live, work, learn, and play. Governments, meanwhile, see the value of engaging employees and the public more widely to develop new ideas and to approach challenges and opportunities as social issues to be addressed collectively. While the public will continue to look to government for good governance, quality public services, and solutions to the problems of growth, sustainability, inclusion, and resilience, there is growing recognition that these challenges cannot be met by governments operating in isolation.

Governments around the world face enormous pressures and obstacles. In addition to high public expectations for improved services and better outcomes, along with severe financial pressure (and often growing public skepticism), governments are confronting large, systemic, intractable challenges that cross boundaries and are influenced by factors far beyond the ability of any one government to control. Unfortunately, for the most part, governments seek to address these 21st century challenges using 19th century, industrial-era structures, processes, and tools. As a result, much work is being done globally to harness the concepts, technologies, and applications of Web 2.0 to explore and develop effective new models of government and governance, for today and the future.

Web 2.0 in Government and Governance: Middle East View

The Web 2.0 applications being introduced by governments around the world represent a range of options that Middle Eastern governments may wish to explore in their own jurisdictions. These may be internal applications and tools to improve processes within the government, or they may help improve interactions with clients, partners, and the broader public.

A. Collaboration and Governance Within the Public Sector

As elsewhere in the world, public sector organizations in the Middle East are structured around rigorous definitions of roles, responsibilities, processes, and business rules. While this suggests that public sector organizations may find it difficult to operate in a collaborative, Web 2.0 style where everyone can contribute (sometimes without being asked), it also indicates that the public sector may have much to gain from such attempts. In the Middle East, as in some developed countries, the potential of Web 2.0 for collaboration and empowerment has a greater chance of being realized initially *within* the government.

Acceleration of Reform

Change toward collaboration and empowerment in the Middle East public sector can be driven by the far-reaching reform agendas being adopted across the region. In Bahrain, the government is pursuing more than 140 reform initiatives. The progress of these depends on priority-setting, focus, barrier removal, coordination, and monitoring from top leadership. Web 2.0 can facilitate the work of oversight bodies that ensure alignment at management, executive, and leadership levels.

This ambitious reform agenda is not unique within the region. Many governments face the task of maintaining the momentum of broad-ranging reform programs while keeping track of progress. This common challenge calls for significant change in governance practices to "create a new balance between command-and-control and frontline empowerment and collaboration."[3]

Collaboration and Peer Support

In a previous paper,[1] Cisco IBSG argued that the possibilities for Web 2.0-enabled collaboration within the public sector are virtually limitless, provided that governments actively facilitate peer-to-peer interaction. Web 2.0 applications can allow individuals in different teams and departments to share ideas and information as they work together on joint initiatives.

Peer-to-peer collaboration can also mean connecting individuals who have similar roles in different organizations. In Bahrain, we found that groups organized around such principles are likely to be focused on government-wide processes such as budgeting, or on enabling cooperation among groups such as human resources, finance, or engineering. Sometimes it is the practitioners themselves who embrace the opportunities for self-organization. Because collaboration is always difficult, it is helpful if governments actively promote and facilitate such collaboration among government workers.

Encouraging new types of collaboration should be an important priority within the public sector. While process and accountability will remain essential, governments should use opportunities offered by modern technology to enable employees to share more information and ideas within and across teams and organizations. Greater collaboration will encourage the best thinking to come forward, including ideas from front-line staff, and will enable one group to learn from the experience of others. This is likely to increase employee engagement and job satisfaction, which translates into increased client satisfaction.[4] We believe that a more integrated, innovative, and collaborative public sector will promote a platform for more active social innovation, fueling a steady cycle of reform and renewal.

Playing to the Trends

An indirect effect of such initiatives will be improvement in public sector employees' ability to use modern technologies, and in their collaboration skills and work habits. This will contribute to their private-sector employability, a key target in countries where the public sector employs anywhere from 30 percent to more than 80 percent of the indigenous workforce.[5] Adoption of Web 2.0 technologies and principles also will attract a younger workforce. This new breed of younger government employees is accustomed to using Web 2.0 tools in their education and private lives, and wants to bring this culture of openness and collaboration to the workplace. In addition, the use of such technologies will enhance governments' ability to engage innovative younger citizens, who represent more than half the population of some countries in the region.

"Even though a more open and collaborative government using Web 2.0 tools faces many cultural barriers and risks, the effectiveness, productivity, and behavioral benefits significantly outweigh these risks.

The impact of Web 2.0 in creating a more open and transparent public sector is testing governments all over the world. This will undoubtedly be true in the Middle East as well, where governments are more likely to begin by empowering public servants with a wide range of information, and by creating circles of professional and functional support among government employees. Even though this will challenge the current culture of disseminating information on a "need-to-know" basis, the effectiveness, productivity, and behavioral benefits significantly outweigh the risks. Because internal deployment can be more easily controlled and managed, the public workforce is an attractive first target for exploring and adopting these new, interactive capabilities.

B. Interactions Between Government and the Public

The next step will be to use Web 2.0 technologies to improve communication, public participation, and delivery of needed public services. This, in turn, will result in greater public empowerment and government transparency.

Communication

Some Middle Eastern governments have realized that they need to go where their constituents are in order to engage them proactively. A number of Arab leaders have created Facebook accounts, including the kings of Jordan, Saudi Arabia (KSA), Bahrain, and Morocco, and the presidents of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, and Lebanon. Almost every major public figure has a Facebook page, including former presidents and presidential hopefuls. Like political leaders in other parts of the world, however, they often use these accounts more as a means to appear modern and to obtain and demonstrate support, rather than as a means of real, two-way communication.

It is also possible to watch some YouTube channels for a number of regional figures, such as Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan (see Figure 1), along with government departments such as the Bahrain e-Gov Authority, ICT Qatar, and many in the Iraqi government.

These alternative methods of communication are important ways governments can deliver messages and build awareness more effectively. They also can enable governments and citizens to participate in conversations on public issues, and to test and enhance various narratives[7] in social networking channels.

Figure 1.   Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan Uses Her YouTube Channel "To Foster Values of Tolerance and Acceptance, and Increase Cross-Cultural Dialogue."

Source: YouTube, 2010

Despite these advances, governments continue to be challenged in meeting the expectations of constituents who are familiar with Web 2.0 capabilities and expect to engage in two-way communication. Like many government leaders around the world, Middle Eastern leaders and cabinet ministers are still experimenting with this dimension: their attempts to post views on government portals and forums, and to receive notes and questions from citizens, remain ad hoc at best. And, they may have concerns about raising the expectations of their audience in terms of the scope of discussion, extent of change expected as a result of the dialogue, and their own ability to respond to even the few posts and questions they currently receive from the public.

This probably explains why on Twitter, where continuous, near-real-time interaction is the norm, we can find a presence for newspapers, commercial enterprises, industry associations, think tanks, and universities from the Middle East, but little involvement from government leaders.[8]

There are no known attempts by Middle Eastern governments to establish a presence in virtual worlds such as Second Life due to lack of user mass on this channel[9] and the effort required to provide an attractive experience there. As a result, there is no formal government presence in the Second Life lands of Arabia, Jordan, UAE, KSA, or Egypt.

Communication is largely one-way, with few exceptions. The ruler of Dubai has set time for real-time dialogue with citizens and residents in the emirate. Several cabinet ministers in Bahrain interact in discussions around predefined subjects in an e-government portal (see Figure 2). Even though these attempts remain limited in scale and impact, they are a positive step.

Figure 2.   A Cabinet Minister in Bahrain Invites Two-Way Communication on the eGovernment Portal.
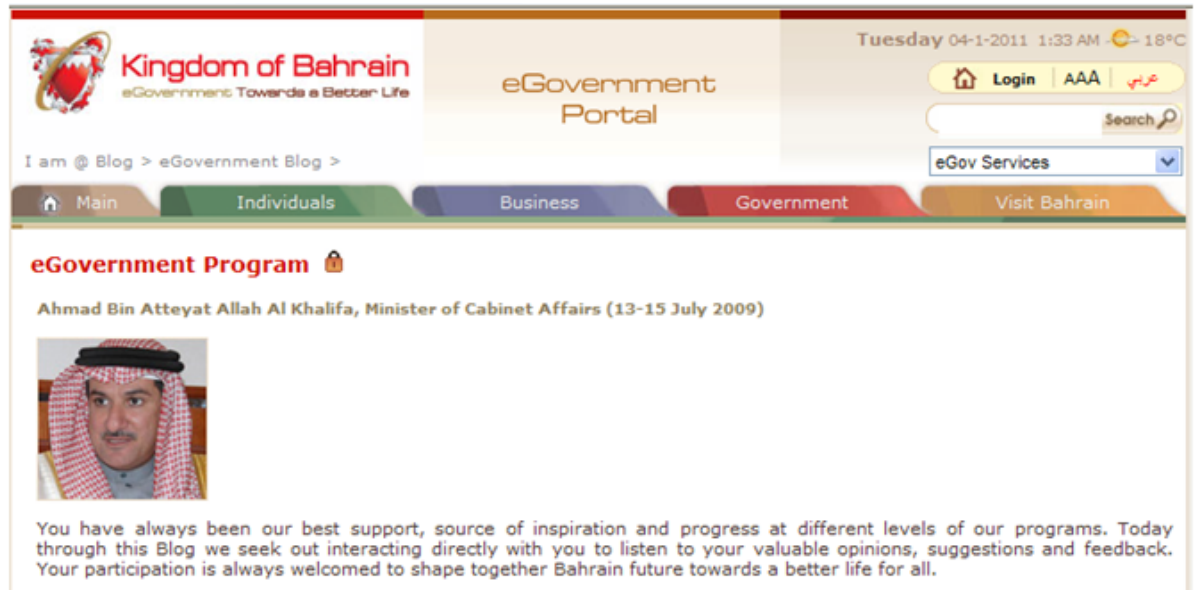
Source: Kingdom of Bahrain eGovernment blog, 2010.

Public Participation

Effective citizen participation is dependent, among other things, on an environment where an empowered public and an open government transparently exchange information and feedback on a range of subjects of mutual interest. These can include public services, daily activities and decisions, policymaking, and other national interests.

When it comes to facilitating public contributions to policymaking, examples of Web 2.0 usage in the Middle East—and elsewhere—are scarce. A range of potential tools in this category could be used in conjunction with traditional, paper-based processes. These tools could be used, for example, to poll public opinion, seek feedback on options, or encourage public discussion on proposed new legislation. The UAE government has posted articles online about a new proposed labor law, inviting comments from citizens. Such examples are exceptions in the Middle East, however, and it is often unclear how public comments influence the outcome.

Limited public policy debate on Web 2.0-enabled social networks reflects social, political, and technical challenges for both government and citizens. From the government side, laws and policies are seen as sensitive areas traditionally assumed to require tight control. Democratic processes and legislative or consultative councils are relatively new in many Middle Eastern countries. Considering that debate on laws and policies within such bodies has been tense, it is unlikely that governments will proactively extend this debate to the public.

In the longer term, as governments in the region explore alternative engagement models, Web 2.0 technologies hold great potential for opening up citizen participation in key issues of social and economic development. Middle Eastern governments interested in making proactive attempts to stimulate citizens' contributions to public debate cannot ignore Web 2.0.

Services Delivery

Government departments in several Middle Eastern countries are increasingly engaging the public to collect their feedback on e-government programs in general, or on a specific e-service. Activity in such portals is currently limited by the low uptake of e-services in most countries in the region. Even in countries with higher e-participation, such as Bahrain, this is an aspect that needs to be further developed.[10]

> Using Web 2.0 tools in public discussions improves service quality and lifts the level of familiarity and confidence in these tools.

Web 2.0 also has the potential to help governments market their e-services more effectively. Many government officials with whom Cisco IBSG interacts believe that merely increasing public awareness about available services will improve overall satisfaction with the government. In addition, greater uptake of services will increase use of underlying government resources, bringing valuable efficiencies to government operations. Such efficiencies can range from better use of government service centers to increased use of public transportation.

While it is currently unlikely that Middle Eastern countries will use Web 2.0 to target wide debate on the more sensitive issues of public affairs, it is quite plausible that they will use these tools in the short term to discuss such matters as government services selection, scope, delivery, and quality.

It is in the area of services design and delivery that other countries, including the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, have been able to increase effective engagement with citizens, businesses, and community organizations. In these countries, such public dialogue has stimulated public input on municipal services and facilities, and on associated budget allocations.

With increasing public participation, regional governments might have the chance to further engage more skilled users in improving e-services through access to co-production tools, and to expand the use of government services and data through user-friendly application interfaces.

Introducing Web 2.0 tools and capabilities in the context of citizen services will not only improve service quality and satisfaction—it can also help lift confidence in the tools themselves, both within the government and among the public.

Public Empowerment

Although often conducted in isolation, discussion on public policy is beginning to show up in communities across the Middle East. Governments need to decide whether and how they want to take part in, and benefit from, these embryonic activities.

Without easy access to government information, it is difficult for citizens to be proactive about positively influencing certain aspects of their daily lives, or about engaging in a mature dialogue on national interests, public issues, and policy options. In most countries where Web 2.0 tools are becoming more widespread, a central element of reform is to make more government data easier to find and use by ordinary citizens. There have been attempts in the Middle East to provide statistical data and socioeconomic indicators, for example, but they are usually provided in rigid formats by statistics centers or population registry organizations for use by specialized analysts, professionals, and academia rather than the general public. Missing is access to public information presented in a friendly, usable manner and supported by tools for analyzing, reusing, and "mashing-up" information. Such easy-to-access information invites broader use by the public, and can inform their choices about living locations, health services, schools, and social services.

Several geographic information systems exist in Bahrain, and there is direction from the government to use this platform more often to disseminate useful information through both the web and active mobile channels. As this paper was being developed, the Government of Bahrain was considering publishing clusters of its census results online for easy public access. Potential uses of such databases by citizens and businesses, as well as by government organizations, are limitless. For example, they can help community groups identify useful resources in their neighborhoods, enable entrepreneurs to identify new business opportunities, and guide investors in making good location decisions.

Despite continuous growth, Internet connectivity[11] in most Middle Eastern countries remains relatively low. This may be due to limited access, high costs, and the level of education about, or comfort with, the Internet. Some, therefore, may argue that those who use the Internet and participate in Web 2.0 forums are the wealthier and better educated, and hence may not represent the wants, needs, and opinions of the general population.

Regardless of the extent to which such electronic forums represent the population mix, they undoubtedly extend public reach and the opportunity for involvement compared to other channels. A large and growing number of people are using these tools, including Facebook,[12] which introduced an Arabic language interface in March 2009. In this environment, governments have the opportunity and responsibility to remove barriers to citizen participation, and to help raise the level of discourse in Internet-based public debates.

Transparency

In developed countries, calls for transparency typically are part of ongoing reform efforts, driven by claims for legal rights, a need for functional "checks and balances," or to ensure that taxes are used effectively. In many countries, one of the drivers for increased transparency is strengthened accountability to taxpayers regarding how resources are being used and results achieved.

As in other regions, transparency is a controversial subject in the Middle East, with both domestic and external pressures for change. Corruption and the need for government

accountability regarding resources and public funds immediately come to mind when transparency is discussed in the region. Transparency is also becoming an increasingly important requirement of foreign investors. Cisco IBSG believes that Web 2.0 can help Middle Eastern countries increase transparency and demonstrate government accountability for operational performance and services delivery.

Web 2.0 tools can support governments in providing information about service metrics, as well as sharing citizens' feedback on such services. This provides an effective incentive to improve services and show that government supports such improvements.

This pressure to improve effectiveness can be extended to other parties outside the government as part of existing campaigns for customer rights and consumer protection. For example, many governments in the developed world hold companies accountable by making their inspection records public and exposing businesses that violate health and safety regulations or hide essential information from consumers. By complementing penalties with public "naming and shaming," governments can create stronger incentives to improve performance.

Another driver of transparency is the need for public understanding of the complexities surrounding government processes so citizens can more effectively engage in public discussion. In the previous subsection, we argued for governments to share information to improve citizens' daily lives and decision-making processes. But governments should also help educate people on the constraints and difficulties governments face in prioritizing services and development projects. Making relevant information available to the public can have a big impact on how citizens feel about public sector organizations and decision makers.

It is neither difficult nor expensive to provide easily accessible and usable information to the public. Many government departments have existing databases that include records pertaining to business location, environment, housing, expenditure patterns, traffic flow, and other information potentially useful to individuals, communities, or private entrepreneurs. Web 2.0 tools can help provide wide access to data in formats that enable users to create "mashups" of data from multiple databases for easy analysis of trends and correlations. Governments in the region can begin by easing access to—and improving the presentation of—information that is open and available to the public today, such as aggregate data sets regarding education, health, and demographics.

Significant risks and obstacles may initially limit the benefits of providing the public with greater information access: low connectivity rates contributing to skewed representation, lack of political maturity and innovation, and government reluctance to respond to pressures for improved performance and accountability. Governments, however, can take real steps to educate the public, promote innovation in the use of information, push public officials to remain productive, and reach out to their constituents to start building trust.

C. Platform for Social Innovation and Self-Help

In addition to enhancing interactions within government, and between government and the public, Web 2.0 also introduces opportunities for empowerment and social innovation on the personal level, for self-organized groups and communities, and in the wider society.

Social values of cooperation and the use of collaboration tools in the region are not yet translated into collective action in "real life," but still hold great potential for cultural change.

Co-Production and Personalization

E-government programs have largely focused on automating traditional government services for the convenience of residents and businesses. While they have had various levels of success in engaging users, they have not yet achieved their full potential for driving more radical change in the ways governments provide services, develop policies, and engage with citizens and business.

Such programs face the challenge of meeting continuously changing customer expectations. Feedback loops and surveys can help these programs keep up with expectations and improve services. An innovative, complementary approach enables users to co-create their own services; extract, mash-up, and present data and applications in ways that suit their requirements; and personalize the ways services are designed and delivered.

Many municipal and social services that impact people's day-to-day lives are ideal candidates for co-production. For example, the city of Chicago, Illinois (U.S.) used "crowdsourcing" for ideas on how to improve public transportation ridership, and the "FixMyStreet" website in the United Kingdom enables residents to report practical problems like potholes, broken streetlights, graffiti, and other local issues.[12]

Initiatives such as these will lead to more innovative services that cross organizational boundaries, potentially helping evolve the definition, categorization, and scoping of government services. Most important, co-production is an approach that allows governments to enrich their services design and development capabilities through the innovation of their constituents.

Citizens should also be able to customize or personalize the ways services are delivered. One approach gives users the opportunity to decide how they will consume government-provided personal financial entitlements and public services to meet their individual and family needs. A promising regional example in innovative services design and delivery is Silatech, a Qatari initiative for youth development and employment in the Middle East and North Africa. Silatech services will offer youth the chance to select from different providers to obtain skills development, job placement, business development, and other services. In addition to creating a much more scalable model and market opportunity for youth employment services, this initiative will push private service providers to compete on service quality and efficiency.

Communities and Self-Help

Citizen and resident empowerment can also mean encouraging self-help, which could lead to better outcomes—not only increasing customer satisfaction, but also reducing

operational expenses on the government side. There is an opportunity in the Middle East to use Web 2.0 tools and capabilities to encourage communities to address issues they care about (such as graffiti, out-of-order public facilities, or community recreation), and to help create their own solutions.

For example, individuals with chronic health conditions could use Web 2.0-enabled communities to "talk" to each other to address common issues and share information. This will help revive the deep sense of "takaful," or solidarity, among people. This value is generally practiced socially among relatives and friends, but not extended to the wider society through a technology-enabled platform.

Many governments around the region are also exploring ways to understand and address the needs of community groups within society. Web 2.0 offers an opportunity to reactivate the sense of community and shared interest. We expect Web 2.0 technologies to be at the heart of the forward-looking strategies driving many community-centric development projects. For example, based on our work with the Government of Bahrain, we believe that two-way communication, empowerment, and public participation will help leaders redefine and segment user communities, understand their aspirations and needs, and design services and delivery models to meet those needs more effectively.

Self-Organization and Volunteer Work

While the principles of cooperation and solidarity have deep historical and religious roots in the Middle East, they are often exercised more in the social and family context as a means of charity and doing good than they are as a means of support and collaboration in the professional context.

In the Middle East, attempts to self-organize are often looked on with suspicion, as they typically involve sensitive social matters with political ramifications. Government responses to such attempts have often discouraged people from forming interest and action groups. While this can be a barrier to using social networking for creating day-to-day value, it points to the role that, over time, Web 2.0 can play to encourage cultural change in the region.

Social networking and self-organization of communities of interest or geographical communities could become a foundation for strengthening communities, promoting social innovation, and fostering creative problem-solving. Governments that support such efforts will be able to tap into the pool of energy, innovation, and resources that an engaged and organized public domain can offer.

Another opportunity lies in voluntary work. It is widely observed that platforms for voluntary work in this region remain limited, undermarketed, and elitist to some extent. Web 2.0 and social networking tools can spread participation in voluntary programs in the form of technology-enabled, self-organizing networks.

Future Outlook: Opportunities for Change

As we have seen, Web 2.0 is about active participation and self-empowerment. In the public sector, this can mean empowered employees, citizens, and communities.

The potential for using Web 2.0 for more radical changes, however, depends on many other political, social, and economic factors, including having a more open and transparent

government, a more enabled and empowered public, and a more vibrant and social innovation domain.

Governments around the world, and to some extent in the Middle East, are debating their roles in public services and policymaking, and in government's relationship with the public. The future potential for Web 2.0 in the public sector rests on the progress and results of such discussions.

The potential of Web 2.0 will also depend on the extent to which e-government efforts successfully expand beyond merely automating existing government services and begin using Web 2.0 and social networking to facilitate national initiatives around health, education, employment, youth development, entrepreneurship, and other national priorities.

> Public access to the network will decide the extent to which the Middle East can build extensive, representative, informed, and enabled communities.

Governments will indicate their openness to adopting these new opportunities for reform by their willingness to alter internal processes, adopt Web 2.0 to foster group collaboration, and develop employees' skills to use such tools more effectively. It will also be helpful for governments to move toward greater transparency, both to aid public empowerment and participation, and to hold themselves and other parties, such as businesses, appropriately accountable.

Conclusion

Web 2.0 describes a set of tools and capabilities that both enables and relies on a whole culture of openness, participation, and empowerment. It has the potential not only to bring operational efficiencies, customer satisfaction, and collaboration, but also to change the structures and processes of public governance and policymaking.

In the Middle East, many governments have become outspoken about medium- and long-term strategies for their countries, and about their support of improved governance. Concepts of collaboration, transparency, accountability, empowerment, and innovation feature prominently in most of these strategies.

Although many citizens in the region are already using Web 2.0 technologies, this is less true of governments, and to date, many of the region's Web 2.0-based initiatives have fallen short of the real, two-way communication that can deliver benefits to society and governments.

Potential gains in the Middle East from adopting Web 2.0 tools and, more important, from embracing the underlying principles of openness and collaboration are considerable. Governments can start with internal programs to make information and support more easily available to government employees. With that foundation, another early step could be to facilitate self-organized peer-support and collaboration groups within and across government agencies. Such initiatives will contribute to more efficient work processes and introduce better ways to collaborate for more effective policy, program, and service outcomes.

There are still few attempts to use Web 2.0 to engage the public. A practical step in this direction would be to use the tools available today to disseminate government information to

the public to support their decision making. An extension of this will be to gradually allow the public to co-produce services and have more say in how they are delivered. More broadly, Middle Eastern governments now have a major opportunity to use the interactive tools and technologies of Web 2.0. to enable broader and deeper engagement with and by citizens.

Web 2.0's momentum, particularly in the area of social networking, suggests that the relevant question today is not *whether* regional governments should adopt Web 2.0, but where and how such adoption should begin. The opportunity in the Middle East is not only to achieve broad objectives within each country's social and political context, but also to gradually change those contexts to achieve even more far-reaching results for the region's citizens and communities.

For more information, please contact:

Shukri Eid Atari
Director, Cisco IBSG Emerging Markets
seid@cisco.com
+971 4 390 7984

Martin Stewart-Weeks
Director, Cisco IBSG Public Sector
msweeks@cisco.com
+61 2 8446 5341

Joan McCalla
Director, Cisco IBSG Public Sector
jmccalla@cisco.com
+1 647 502 5825

About the Next-Generation Government and Governance Program

Cisco's Internet Business Solutions Group, through its Global Public Sector Practice, is developing a new "next-generation government and governance" (NG3) program. The purpose of program is to explore and define how to govern well in the "Connected Republic" of the future.

In particular, the program will:

- Collaborate with public leaders in different jurisdictions to brainstorm, design, and prototype new ways of governing well, including new methods of working, new workplaces and work styles, and improvements in environmental impact
- Demonstrate how the "network as a platform" creates new tools, capabilities, and cultures at the heart of the new public sector
- Link people and projects in different parts of the world into an informal community to share ideas and examples of successful (and unsuccessful) change

The business of governing well in an increasingly connected, complex age is becoming more difficult, *and* more important. Every dimension of government and governance is being tested, questioned, challenged, and more or less reinvented.

The NG3 program will operate at the intersection of four ideas:

1. Creating public sector and public administration organizations and institutions that demonstrate resilience (the ability to react to unpredictable change), emergence (the capacity to anticipate trends, risks, and opportunities, and to develop early, effective responses), effective compliance, and optimal performance

2. Integrating the habits, practices, and insights of social innovation and entrepreneurs into the business of governing and the search for better ways to design services, develop policy, and run public institutions

3. Creating effective, large-scale innovation tools and methods that produce ambitious but practical innovation strategies, and new innovation tools and methods for economic resilience, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion

4. Experimenting with new ways of using the power and potential of networks to enable and accelerate communication and collaboration for shared "public purpose" outcomes

The program will focus on four areas of work: (1) innovation in policy development, (2) social innovation and co-production, (3) service redesign, and (4) agency transformation (new workplace and work-style culture and tools for public sector agencies). The program involves contributions from a number of leading thinkers and innovators in this sphere.

Endnotes

1. For a more complete discussion of the impact of Web 2.0 in the global public sector, please see "Realizing the Potential of the Connected Republic: Web 2.0 Opportunities in the Public Sector," Cisco IBSG, March 2009 (available at http://www.cisco.com/web/about/ac79/docs/tl/Government20_pjv2_031209FINAL.pdf).

2. "Government at the Edge: The Emergence of a New Public Sector," Martin Stewart-Weeks, Public Sector Leaders Conference, Sydney, June 2009 (video and slides available at http://vimeo.com/5331108); and "Government at and with the Edge: Technology and the 'New Synthesis,'" Martin Stewart-Weeks, paper to the Singapore Roundtable of the New Synthesis project, September 2010 (summarized in the conference report at the following URL: http://nsworld.org/sites/nsworld.org/files/NS6_RT_Report_4.pdf pages 31-33).

3. Creating this new balance between command-and-control and frontline empowerment is one of the areas that the IBSG Public Sector team is currently addressing with public sector partners in our multi-year Next-Generation Government and Governance program, described on page 16 of this document.

4. "People, Service and Trust: Links in a Public Sector Service Value Chain," article published in the Canadian Government Executive, by Ralph Heintzman and Brian Marson (available at www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rp/pstc-eng.asp), June/July 2006.

5. A 2010 report by the International Bank of Qatar found that the public sector employs 88 percent of the indigenous workforce in Qatar, 85 percent in UAE, and 82 percent in Kuwait (see www.arabianbusiness.com/594452-at-88-qatar-tops-public-sector-jobs-rankings).

6. Percentage of population under 24 years old in selected Middle Eastern countries: Bahrain, 44 percent; Egypt, 52 percent; Jordan, 54 percent (http://data.un.org/ , 2010).

7. The concept of creating narratives on public issues is discussed in "Public Media 2.0: Dynamic and Engaged Publics," Jessica Clark, Director, Future of Public Media Project, American University Center for Social Media, February 2009 (www.centerforsocialmedia.org/future-public-media/documents/white-papers/public-media-20-dynamic-engaged-publics).

8. Interestingly, a few embassies of Middle Eastern countries are present on Twitter. Examples are the KSA and UAE embassies in the United States.

9. Regional Second Life avatars from the Middle East constitute around 1 percent of the world's total. Source: Institute for Intelligence Studies, Mercyhurst University, December 2007.

10. The 2010 United Nations E-Participation Index ranks regional countries as follows:

Country	Ranking	Country	Ranking
Bahrain	11	Oman	76
Jordan	22	UAE	86
Egypt	22	Qatar	6
Lebanon	45	KSA	102
Kuwait	53	Syria	157

Source: United Nations e-Government Survey, 2010

11. Internet and Facebook users as a percentage of population in Middle Eastern countries:

Country	Population 2010 (Est.)	Internet Usage	Facebook Users
UAE	4,975,593	3,777,900 (75.9%)	1,709,620 (34.4%)
Turkey	77,804,122	35,000,000 (45%)	N/A
KSA	25,731,776	9,800,000 (38.1%)	2,575,740 (10%)
Kuwait	2,789,132	1,100,000 (39.4%)	547,620 (19.6%)
Qatar	840,926	436,000 (51.8%)	412,220 (49%)
Lebanon	4,125,247	1,000,000 (24.2%)	1,024,140 (24.8%)
Syria	22,198,110	3,935,000 (17.7%)	30,000 (0.1%)
Jordan	6,407,085	1,741,900 (27.2%)	1,061,080 (16.6%)
Oman	2,967,717	1,236,700 (41.7%)	172,540 (5.8%)
Egypt	80,471,869	17,060,00 (21.2%)	3,359,660 (4.2%)*
Bahrain	738,004	649,300 (88%)	235,100 (39.1%)
Yemen	23,495,361	420,000 (1.8%)	119,840 (0.5%)
Iraq	29,671,605	325,000 (1.1%)	270,560 (0.9%)

Source: Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics (2010), http://www.internetworldstats.com/; source of Facebook number for Egypt: Spot On Public Relations: Middle East & North Africa Facebook Demographics, May 2010.

12. Government Technology, August 2009 (www.govtech.com/e-government/Crowdsourcing-Helps-Chicago-Chamber-of-Commerce.html); mySociety.org (www.fixmystreet.com), 2010.

More Information

Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG), the company's global consultancy, helps CXOs from the world's largest public and private organizations solve critical business challenges. By connecting strategy, process, and technology, Cisco IBSG industry experts enable customers to turn visionary ideas into value.

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