



كلية دبي للإدارة الحكومية
DUBAI SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

Cross-agency Collaboration in the UAE Government

The Role of Trust and the Impact of Technology

Produced by the Dubai School of Government
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All comments, criticisms and suggestions are welcome.

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Contents

Executive Summary	6
Introduction	9
About the Survey.....	9
Government Sector Employees in the UAE	11
Beyond the Rhetoric of Collaborative Government	13
The Notion of Trust and Concepts of Collaboration	16
Construction of Trust within the UAE Public Sector	17
Perceptions and Drivers of Collaboration within UAE Government	21
Impact of ICT on Collaboration in Government	25
Information Technology and Government Transformation	28
Conclusions: Towards Public-Public Collaboration in the UAE Government	31
Case Study 1: Enhancing Trust in Government through ICT – The Case of e-Voting in the UAE	34
Case Study 2: Dubai e-Government: The Infrastructure of Collaboration.....	35
References.....	36



Executive Summary

A new wave of innovation is fostering cultural, organizational and technological changes, with collaborative approaches taking center-stage in transforming society, business and government. The increased usage of information and communications technology (ICT) in government has spurred the promise of a collaborative governance model. The benefit of this less traditional approach is primarily derived from the tremendous possibilities of cross-agency information and knowledge sharing inherent in technologies themselves—possibilities which challenge the rigidly hierarchical and silos-based culture which predominates in the public sector. However, the potential gains sought from a collaborative governance model are hindered by the fact that openness to knowledge and information sharing rarely been the standard approach in governing.

Over the past decade, many local and federal UAE government entities have witnessed a cultural and organizational shift from the traditional “silos mode” of governance into a “competitive mode,” where government entities compete in a race for excellence. Despite the positive change it generated, this cross-government competition enforced a strong perception of information, knowledge and experience as the main sources of competitive advantage.

The Dubai School of Government, supported by Cisco Systems, Inc., conducted a national survey to explore concepts pertaining to collaboration in the context of the federal and local government institutions of the United Arab Emirates. The survey probed perspectives of UAE citizens working in the public sector, specifically examining the impact of trust on collaboration in the UAE government and exploring enablers of and barriers to better collaboration in government.

Our findings strongly suggest that the prevailing competitive approach in the UAE government reduced the level of trust among competing individuals and institutions. Consequently, this had a negative impact on the flow of information, ideas and knowledge between local and federal government entities in the UAE, hence reducing levels of collaboration within government and ultimately limiting potential cross-government innovations.

The key benefits of a collaborative governance model include removing hierarchical channels of filtering, hence increasing the free flow of information, ideas and knowledge between cross government agencies. In turn, this rewiring of information flows should unleash new forms of innovation in governance, reduce the cost of informational government transactions, increase efficiency on a cross-government level rather than a departmental level, and ultimately increase trust within government and with society.

Moving forward from the current competitive mode in governance towards a collaborative mode, where a true “public-public” partnership is nurtured, requires another shift in cultural orientation. The role of trust in such a cultural shift cannot be overemphasized. The key prerequisites for this change to take place include the following:

1. Fostering a comfortable level of “political trust” between society and government, where government decisions are viewed with credibility
2. Achieving a threshold of “technological trust” within the public sector and reaching a certain national-level of overall social acceptance of technology in day-to-day government work

3. Reforming the “social trust” dynamics in society to enable members of the work force to view their peers and colleagues as members of a larger group working toward shared objectives, regardless of the cultural and societal affiliations

The UAE’s technologically-savvy society, young population and high political trust in the government could make the new shift realistically achievable in the country. However, personal and institutional barriers to enhancing social trust in the UAE society presented in our findings may cause the third prerequisite to be the hardest to achieve.

According to our findings, “technology,” “leadership,” “trust,” “regulations” and “incentives” are respectively perceived as the five top interconnected enablers of collaboration in the UAE government by public sector employees.

Information technology has the capacity to make trust transmittable among social communities. As has been proven in the private sector, it can provide the power to infuse this cultural shift throughout government and make collaborative governance a realistic *modus operandi* by bringing down the cost of forming trust relationships and reducing the time needed to decide with whom to collaborate and share information both within the government and with the private sector.

This report is intended to provoke thought leadership discussions in the public sector in the UAE and the wider region, and not to provide simplistic prescriptions for such a cultural shift. Key findings of our survey provide evidence that this shift could be achieved in the context of the UAE government, and possibly in the wider region that shares most of its fundamental cultural norms with the UAE:

- Trust within the UAE government is constructed through a complex combination of societal and cultural factors, namely “loyalty,” “competence,” “reputation” and “integrity.”
- A strong competitive in-group culture exists within different UAE government entities, forming cultural and organizational gaps between different local and federal government departments.
- The most important enabler of better collaboration in government, according to our survey, is information and communication technology. ICT, “leadership,” “trust,” “regulations” and “incentives” are perceived as the five key interconnected enablers of collaboration in the UAE public sector.
- Paradoxically, a majority of government employees view information and ideas as sources of power while acknowledging the need to share information and ideas for better collaboration in the public sector. This suggests that “information sharing” requires an incentive system within government. Otherwise innovation and collaboration will be hindered by employees opting to withhold information and ideas if no value is gained in return.
- Collaboration and sharing of information between different government departments increased when cross-agency electronic government projects were introduced in the UAE.
- Enhancing cross-agency trust within government requires developing and selecting government leaders who can promote the culture of information and knowledge sharing.

- Key barriers to collaboration among UAE public servants include “losing ownership of ideas,” “losing control of information,” “undermining managerial hierarchy” and “lack of ideas recognition.”
- Overcoming barriers to collaboration within the UAE government requires introducing a combination of soft and hard measures, with custom designed approaches to change management. These include organizational “carrots” in the form of formal appraisal systems that incentivize collaboration and sharing of information and knowledge, as well as regulatory “sticks” in the form of information freedom acts that mandate a culture of information openness both within government and between government and citizens.
- Achieving healthy levels of “social trust” among the public sector workforce requires developing locally-grown systems to overcome existing cultural and societal sources of mistrust in the UAE.
- Given the public’s high levels of “political trust” in government and social acceptance of technology, the futuristic vision of the UAE government, the relative youth of public sector organizations and the ubiquitous presence of ICTs in UAE society, collaborative IT applications (such as those made available under the Web 2.0 umbrella) can accelerate achieving the objectives of “collaborative governance,” where a true “public-public” partnership is nurtured. However, a social impact assessment of such social networking technologies within the UAE government context is required to assess risks and implications beforehand.

Introduction

A new wave of innovation is fostering cultural and technological changes on a global scale, with collaboration playing a critical role in transforming society, business and government.

Over the past two decades, government leaders worldwide have been striving under different banners to develop governance models that contribute to societal and public sector development. Utilizing a variety of approaches—such as “whole-of-government,” “joined-up-government,” “networked-government,” “horizontal government” and “connected government” initiatives—public sector leaders have sought to transform government increasingly through collaborative approaches. Today, governments are still

struggling to build the foundations of their future governance strategies with an emphasis on cross-agency collaboration.

The increased usage of information technologies in government has spurred the promise of a less centralized and more collaborative approach. This promise is primarily derived from the tremendous possibilities of cross-agency information and knowledge sharing inherent in technologies themselves—possibilities which challenge the rigidly hierarchical and “silos-based” culture which predominates in the public sector, and which offer the potential of harnessing collaboration and trust to increase knowledge sharing, enhance efficiency and lower government costs.

About the Survey

In April 2008, the Dubai School of Government, sponsored by Cisco Systems, Inc., conducted a survey to explore concepts pertaining to collaboration in the context of the United Arab Emirates government, and to probe perspectives of citizens working in the public sector. It specifically examined the impact of trust on collaboration in the UAE government, and explored enablers of and barriers to better collaboration.

The anticipated outcome of this research is two-fold: first, to shape a better understanding of the local culture of collaboration and the impact of trust among government employees and to shed light on the elements required to establish better collaboration in the UAE public sector.

Second, the study aims to identify emerging enablers of collaboration in the public sector, and specifically the potential impact of information and communications technology (ICT).

Overall, this research aims to contribute to shifts in common thinking in the traditional public sector institutions in the UAE, to start a thought leadership discussion, and to offer perspectives on the linkage between the current state of collaboration in government and the potential roll of ICT in bridging existing gaps. Governments in the region sharing similar culture and seeking to maximize the positive impact of collaboration should be able to benefit from the insight gained through this research.

Survey: Sample and Approach

Through a combination of structured, Web-based questionnaires and phone interviews, the research probed perceptions of 114 UAE citizens working in the government on collaboration, trust and technology in the UAE public sector. The first part of the survey identified key perceptions of collaboration, aiming to clarify a better understanding of the notion among UAE government employees. The second part aimed to identify key enablers of and barriers to collaboration in the UAE public sector. More specifically, it explored the role of trust, as well as the role of systems and regulations, in enabling or preventing collaboration within the UAE government. The final section of the survey examined the potential role of ICT as an enabler of better collaboration in government.

The survey respondents were randomly chosen, and were proportionally distributed throughout the seven emirates with regards to the size of the government workforce and gender balance in government entities in each emirate. The largest group of respondents included employees in local government entities (59%), while 36% were federal government employees and 5% worked in semi-government entities. Academic attainment of respondents varied, with 69% holding college degrees, 6% with a master's degree or higher and 24% with a high school diploma or a lower-level degree. While the respondents were given the option to answer the survey questions in Arabic or English, the majority chose to respond in Arabic. Moreover, a focus group meeting was also conducted with a group of seven employees in the UAE Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in Dubai. This meeting contributed to clarifying and contextualizing the overall picture, and adding anecdotal evidence to our findings.

Government Sector Employees in the UAE

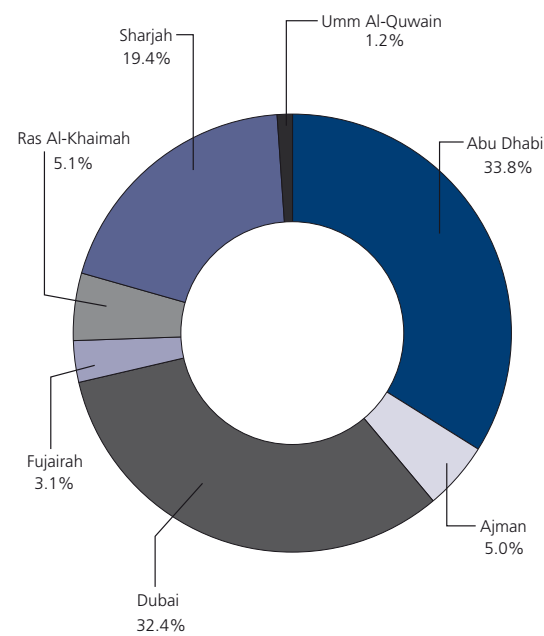
The United Arab Emirates is a federation of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah and Umm Al Quwain. The federal government constitutes a Council of Ministers appointed by the Supreme Council of Rulers of the seven emirates. In addition, each emirate has its own local government entities.

The country enjoys a relatively high per capita GDP that reached \$38,600 in 2006. The official inflation rate was estimated at 9.3% in 2006. However, the Economist Intelligence Unit estimated a substantially higher inflation rate of 14% in 2007 (EIU 2008a, MoE 2008). As a result of the surge in domestic demand which generated price pressures in real estate and certain services sectors, by late 2007 the government announced a 70% increase in salaries of federal government employees. Similar increases took place on the local government level in several emirates. Some analysts viewed these raises as attempts to

close the gap between salaries of public sector employees on a local and federal levels among the seven emirates (EIU 2008a).

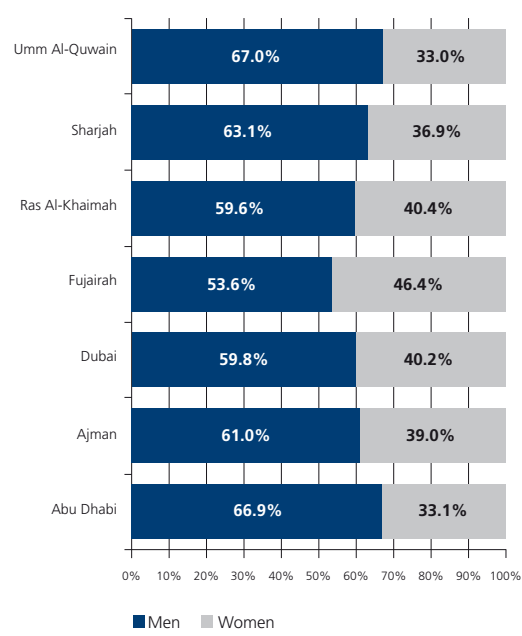
According to the latest official data from the Ministry of Economy, the population of the United Arab Emirates reached 4.2 million persons in 2006 (estimated at 4.48 million in 2007), more than 85% of whom live in the largest three emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah (33.8%, 32.4% and 19.4% respectively). In total, UAE citizens make around 20% of the total population, with the rest comprised of multinational expatriates (MoE 2008). More than 80% of total UAE citizens working in the public sector are employed by local government entities in the two emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, with around 50% in Dubai, according to national pension data provided by the National Human Resource Development and Employment Authority (Tanmia 2008).

Figure 1
UAE Population by Emirate



Source: UAE Ministry of Economy 2007

Figure 2
Gender Balance in UAE Local Government (Citizens only)



Source: National Human Resource Development and Employment Authority (TANMIA) 2008

In general, public sector jobs comprise 48% of total jobs in the UAE (Al-Ali 2008). Almost proportional with the overall population balance between citizens and expatriates, the majority of the workforce in both the private and public sectors in the UAE is comprised of expatriates. While these ratios differ from one emirate to the other, more than 88% of the total labor force in the country (citizens and expatriates) is situated in the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah, with 40% employed in Dubai (MoE 2008). Among 3.1 million employees in the UAE in total, 99% of private sector jobs are occupied by expatriates, and 91% of public sector employees in total are also expatriates (Al-Ali 2008). The government, however, did announce plans to increase the participation of UAE nationals in the labor force as a key priority in 2008 and 2009 (EIU 2008a).

Additionally, the official UAE census of 2005 stated that there are more than 300,000 “non-nationals” in the UAE that are not legal expatriates. According to the Ministry of Economy’s *Population, Housing and Establishments Census* report, the “population census doesn’t include groups of non-nationals, and they are estimated as 335,615” (MoE 2006). Anecdotal evidence from our research suggests that some of those belonging to this group do get employed in local government entities in all seven emirates.

To further understand the nature of the public sector in the Arab countries, one must remember that existing administrative structures were developed under the combined influence of colonial and local cultural factors during the past century. This institutionalized tribal and social norms, as well as informal and formal systems that in most cases led to public sectors dominated

by patronage networks (Halima 2008, Rugh 2007). The *UN Arab Human Development Report 2004* acknowledged these predicaments plaguing the public sectors in Arab countries, and concluded that

“clannism flourishes ... wherever civil or political institutions that protect rights and freedoms are weak or absent. Without institutional supports, individuals are driven to seek refuge in narrowly-based loyalties that provide security and protection” (UNDP 2004).

Several public sector reform initiatives have been implemented in the UAE over the past decade. Examples include the *Government Excellence Awards* programs and the implementation of performance management and incentives-based systems in some emirates, which have encouraged collaboration and partnership within government entities. Nonetheless, the public sector in the UAE still suffers from some of the same problems that dominate government bureaucracies in the Arab region in general, though on a relatively lower level. As a result, a recent research paper by a human resource specialist in Dubai Municipality stated that “as much as 10% of UAE nationals resign per year due to social and cultural factors because low trust is an impediment to employment for UAE nationals. This is in addition to gender inequality in terms of position and salary. Nepotism, or what is locally called “wasta,” also prevails in the workforce” (Al-Ali 2008).

Understanding these societal characteristics and the multinational and multicultural nature of the UAE government workforce is essential for understanding the perceptions of collaboration and nature of trust models existing among public sector employees.

Beyond the Rhetoric of Collaborative Government

Governments worldwide are struggling to establish the foundations of their future governance strategies by emphasizing cross-agency cooperation and collaboration within the public sector itself. A challenging and lively discussion is taking place among government leaders, who are trying to build the right local fit of “carrots” and “sticks” within the public sector. Their overarching objective is to transform government through collaborative approaches such as “whole-of-government,” “joined-up government,” “networked government,” “horizontal government” and “connected government” initiatives (Goldsmith and Eggers 2004, Kaczorowski 2004, OECD 2005, OECD 2008, Pollitt 2003).

Over the last two decades, public sector managers have been influenced by the much-hyped “New Public Management” and related concepts proposed by Osborne in the 1990s. These concepts have been largely focused on decentralization and competition as drivers for improving public sector efficiency. The introduction of information technologies in government within a “digital era governance” philosophy has brought about the promise of a less centralized and more collaborative approach during recent years, primarily because of the tremendous possibilities of cross-agency information and knowledge sharing that challenges the predominant rigid hierarchical and silo-based culture of the public sector (Dunleavy et al. 2006a, Osborne 1993, UNDESA 2008).

While these decentralized approaches managed to deliver a government response to various needs in public sector organizations, they have effectively increased institutional and policy complexity and reduced the ability of public sector employees and individual departments to achieve optimal levels of collaboration and cooperation (OECD 2005). The competitive drive generated by such concepts among government agencies has

also enforced the “silo mentality” among public sector managers and employees. Consequently, this has limited agencies’ abilities to position their activities, functions and projects properly within these “connected,” “joined-up” or “whole-of-government” models (Dunleavy et al. 2006b, OECD 2005).

During the past two decades, comparable public sector management models have emerged, each promising dramatic changes in the nature of relationships connecting public sector employees together and with external parties. Examples of collaborative (rather than competitive) governance approaches include the UK government’s “joined-up government” approach in 1998, the “horizontal governance” approach in Canada and the “whole-of-government” approach in Australia (Entwhistle and Martin 2005). Through partnerships, these collaborative approaches promised to draw on the contributions of government agencies, based on their competencies and resources, to increase efficiencies. Fostering networks between public sector agencies promised to bridge existing gaps in information flows within the public sector. Such models also promised a more inclusive government involving all relevant parties on the strategy and policy-making levels. This “public-public partnership” is made more realistic today because of the functionality of new collaborative Web technologies, as well as because of the increased e-readiness of today’s public sector employees. More recently, such discussions have been taking place globally under the various titles related to “electronic government” (OECD 2008).

However, the objectives of such collaborative initiatives—regardless of their chosen titles—boil down to the transformation of government through harnessing the power of sharing information, knowledge and expertise

through cross-agency collaboration. The core underlying theme throughout these models is that information and communication technologies are the *sine qua non* for better government collaboration. The key benefits sought from these approaches could be categorized as follows (Lau 2007):

Direct material benefits (financial)

- Reducing costs of government transactions
- Enhancing investment environments and attracting private sector participation
- Nurturing economic growth

Direct immaterial benefits

- Development of multichannel synergies within government
- Increasing citizens' satisfaction with government
- Increasing levels of trust, accountability and transparency (political trust)

Indirect benefits

- Initiating wider transformation of government and society through altering existing shapes of relationships between society and government (social trust)
- Increasing social acceptance of technology among citizens (technological trust)

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the United Nations suggest that, in the last few years, electronic government initiatives have refocused on a number of key concepts, including effective inter-agency and intra-agency collaboration, to better address the complex government predicaments discussed above (OECD 2005, UNDESA 2008).

The key barriers to achieving better collaborative government are cultural, structural and technological. They include low levels of trust (in its different social, political and technological forms), as well as the silo-based compartmentalized mindset. This is usually enforced over time through a combination of local cultural factors related to tribalism, patronage networks

and nepotism, and influenced further by the new competition-driven public management approaches. Breaking down these barriers and bridging the government silos requires cultural shifts within all levels of government, as well as the introduction of strong governance structures and technological channels that support and encourage collaboration as a new government *modus operandi*. Realistically, however, collaboration has never been the standard approach in governing, due to the common over-politicization of public sectors. Openness to collaboration and the sharing of information, ideas and knowledge is not an intrinsic behavior for either public sector employees or organizations.

Understanding the real potential contributions of collaboration in government is essential for change to take place in prevailing mindsets and cultures. So where can collaboration really contribute towards better government?

In managerial terms, collaboration might be described as a softer version of the more rigid managerial concept of "knowledge management." Knowledge management in the public sector focuses on processes, technologies and people, and tries to enforce a structured approach for sharing and managing information, ideas and expertise implicitly or explicitly available in employees' documents, minds and computer hard disks (UNDESA 2008). The concept of "collaboration" captures these pillars of knowledge management, while emphasizing the human aspect through nurturing trust and thereby enforcing individuals' willingness to collaborate with peers. In other words, knowledge management approaches aim to break information silos and harness collective knowledge by enforcing rules and norms that "make" employees share information and ideas. Meanwhile, the underlying concepts of collaboration—utilizing a softer approach—create an intrinsic built-in culture based on instilling relationships of trust among groups and individual, as well as on understanding and appreciating the need and shared mutual

benefits of cooperating and knowledge-sharing.

Information technology provides the power to infuse this cultural shift throughout government and make this rather “romantic” philosophy materialize as a realistic *modus operandi* in government. This has been proven successful over the last few years within private sector organizations and, on

a wider societal level with the emergence and increasing accessibility of collaborative information technologies. Increasing evidence suggests that a similar cultural shift is taking place in public sectors around the globe. This survey provides evidence that this shift could also be an achievable goal in the context of the UAE government, and possibly in the wider region that shares most of its fundamental cultural norms with the UAE.

The Notion of Trust and Concepts of Collaboration

Trust has been described as a “noble but backward form of dealing with risk” (Cukier 2004). Backward or not, trust plays an integral role within most cultures. With regards to collaboration and peer relationships, trust has dual and interrelated definitions: trust in integrity and trust in competence of the other party. The first part of the definition entails confidence in the integrity of the other party within a government context, meaning that the other party will not withhold information, will willingly share necessary information, will commit to shared contracts and laws, and will maintain confidence and work together with due diligence. The second part entails trust in competence, which refers to mutual confidence that the other party has the abilities, resources, skills and willingness to contribute to the collaborative relationship in a complementary way. For the purpose of this research, all references to “trust” capture both definitions in the context of relationships within the public sector. This definition of trust in its duality was made available to all survey respondents beforehand.

On the wider societal scale and with regards to government employees’ relationships with different agents in the public sector, we refer to trust in three key forms for the purposes of analysis of survey results (Blind 2006, Nye et al. 1997, Peters 2001):

1. **Political Trust:** This type of trust refers to the assessment of government institutions, policies and government leaders by employees (and citizens) as efficient, promise keeping, honest and fair, even when constant scrutiny is absent.
2. **Social Trust:** This form of trust refers to employees’ (and citizens’) confidence in their

peers as members of one social community that shares common goals and objectives.

3. **Technological Trust:** This increasingly important concept of trust refers to people’s acceptance of technology in their daily lives and their confidence that it will deliver on its set objectives.

By collaboration, this survey refers to the relationship between two parties working together to achieve shared objectives. In collaborative relationships, government employees share knowledge and business processes to increase the benefits gained (and shared value generated) by each party by opting to work together over working separately. Such collaborative relationships may occur within a business unit, across different departments, functions or organizations. The parties collaborating may be groups, individuals or organizations.

To understand collaboration better, it would be useful to further break down the concept into its underpinnings of “coordinating” and “cooperating” as per the dichotomy of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2005):

- “Co-ordination” refers to the use of organizational information flows to ensure sharing of information among coordinating parties. This component of collaboration refers to the architecture of the relationship (direct, indirect, peer-to-peer, etc.), but not to the way information is used.
- “Co-operation” on the other hand, implies a joint intention by all parties, without addressing the form of the relationship.

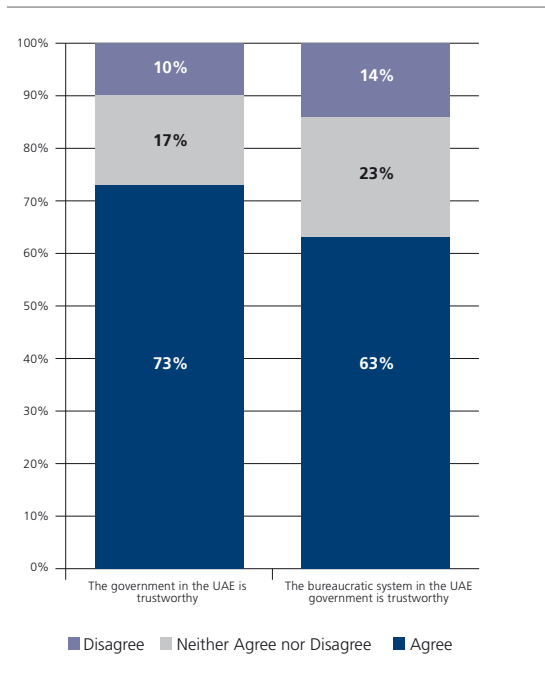
Collaboration, therefore, implies both the intention and the structure of the relationship among individuals or organization in government.

Construction of Trust within the UAE Public Sector

The sources of trust and trustworthiness include accountability, reputation, reciprocity, third party assurances and common norms. On the other hand, the sources of mistrust include lack or asymmetry of information, uncertainty, anonymity, a limited time window for decision making and lack of persistency (Cukier 2004). In our survey, about 80% of respondents said that they would “work better” with people they trust, while only 13% implied that the level of trust would not affect their level of professional conduct with others. Most of these sources of trustworthiness have been highlighted by survey respondents, in one shape or another, within the context of the UAE public sector.

The findings of the *2007 Arab World Competitiveness Report* highlighted a shared perception of high honesty among politicians in the UAE. The country ranked ninth worldwide in the “Public Trust in Politicians” indicator (WEF 2007). Indeed, the UAE government enjoys a comfortable reservoir of political trust among its citizens, despite the limited level of public participation in political decision making. A relatively high percentage of UAE nationals appear to be satisfied with the country’s rulers, primarily because of the government’s active policy of wealth redistribution among citizens (EIU 2008a). In our survey, 73% of public sector employees in the seven emirates viewed the UAE government as trustworthy (10% disagreed). The bureaucratic system in the UAE government, however, was viewed somewhat less favorably, with 63% of UAE government employees saying that it is trustworthy (14% disagreed). Clearly, the UAE government enjoys a certain reservoir of political trust among employees and citizens in general due to years of steady growth, political stability and security. However, despite this high level of “political trust,” our survey shows that “social trust” among government employees, and between employees and the private sector, seems to be of a lower level.

Figure 3
Perceptions of UAE Government Trustworthiness



Perceptions of trust and trustworthiness are socially and culturally constructed. For example, from a cultural point of view, in societies where people are integrated into strong “in groups” characterized by relationships predominated by loyalty (sometimes referred to as *collectivist cultures*), establishing a relationship of trust with another person or group is usually required before any personal or professional transaction can take place (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). The UAE society and other Arab societies fall, to a large extent, within this cultural context.

Even “information sharing,” which might be considered as one of the “quick wins” of collaborative relationships in government, entails the prerequisite of trust. According to survey respondents, establishing a certain level of social trust among public sector employees is viewed as an important prerequisite for sharing information. How important is this trust prerequisite in different relationships

within a government department, across government agencies and with private sectors employees? Around 62% of government employees said that establishing a certain level of trust is a prerequisite for sharing information with colleagues within the same government department. This percentage was slightly higher (65%) for sharing information with employees in other government departments. Predictably, even a higher percentage of government employees (72%) think that establishing trust with the other party is a prerequisite when information is to be shared with the private sector (figure 4). However, achieving this prerequisite of social trust is no easy task. Earlier research covering several countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including the UAE, concluded that the costs of betrayal and low trustworthiness are viewed as significant and real in these societies (Bohnet et al. 2006). One could argue that such costs could be higher in the public sector, where the value of

information and implications of decisions have more weight.

It is clear that a majority of those working in the public sector view the UAE government as trustworthy. However, comparing the survey results presented in figures 3 and 4, one could argue that there is much room for the government to embrace the true value of productivity that can be tapped into from its workers.

Furthermore, loyalty plays a crucial role in the construction of trust within cultures where people are usually integrated into strong in-groups, which usually entails the existence of a culture of “clannism” (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). However, an organic substitution of this culture of clannism has been taking place within the UAE government in the last three decades, with strong political and civil institutions gradually replacing the loyalty-

Figure 4
Is a Certain Level of Trust a Prerequisite for Sharing Information Within Government, Across Government Agencies and with the Private Sector?

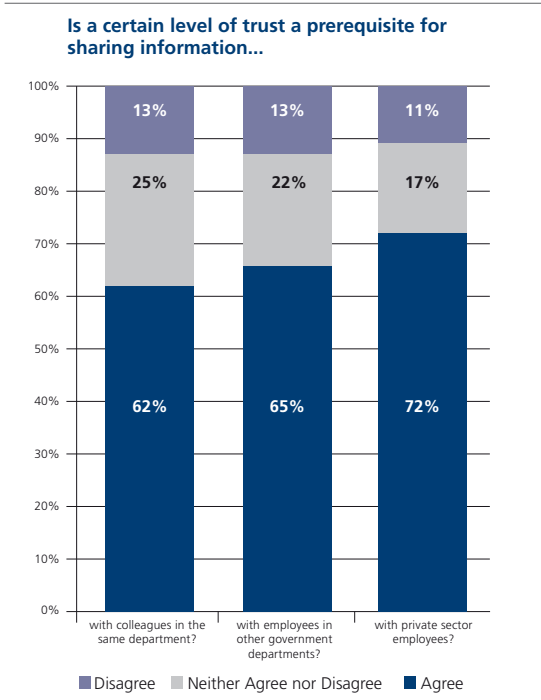
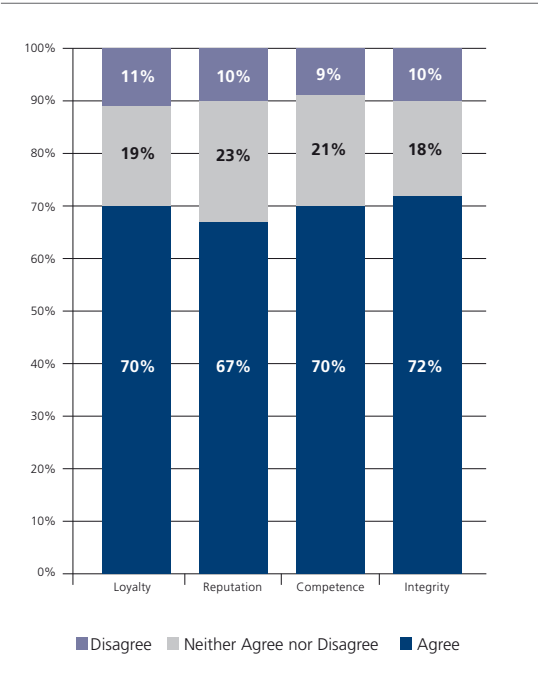


Figure 5
Social Construction of Trust: Loyalty, Reputation, Competence and Integrity as Social Factors Contributing to Construction of Trust



based systems. This said, these cultural aspects which took decades to build are still prevalent. Our findings confirm that 70% of UAE public sector employees hold the view that “trust is related to loyalty.” In addition to loyalty, however, a similar percentage of respondents (70%) thought that trust is also based on “competence,” while 67% also agreed that “reputation” plays a role in shaping trust and 72% thought that it is also related to “integrity” (figure 5).

With the largely distinct federal and local government structures in the UAE, one would notice a strong in-group culture that provides members of each department with a sense of identity in each of the two sectors; in many cases this would be in exchange for loyalty. This is prevalent among government departments within the same emirate and between federal and local departments on the national level. In the words of one employee in the Prime Minister’s Office characterizing this challenge, “most local government departments have little trust in the capacity and capability of the federal government.” Our research revealed several arguments suggesting that this is partly due to the effects of competition and “the race for excellence” between government departments on the local and federal levels. This argument was repeated in anecdotal forms within the focus group discussion, as well as through open-ended questions in our survey. However, the findings also suggest that tribal and other cultural factors play a role in shaping this strong competitive in-group culture in the government. Moreover, government employees’ commitment to job security is usually high on a global level, and even more so in developing countries. Hence, after years of working in one organization, rigid organizational cultures within government departments enforce this in-group culture by distinguishing employees of one organization from another and giving them a sense of belonging.

Trust and reputation are also closely related. In the so-called *collectivist* cultures, the notions

of reputation and “face” (where an individual is expected to meet essential requirements and behaviors related to his or her social position) strongly contribute to shaping the social trust dynamics in society at large, and more particularly within the governmental environment, which relies highly on reputational factors. It is no surprise that 67% of respondents viewed reputation as a factor related to shaping trust (10% disagreed).

One could conclude, mostly from anecdotal evidence, that in the UAE society (and in societies where in-groups play a key role in shaping trust dynamics) the standard way a person would be treated is usually dependent on the “group” to which this person belongs. This is referred to as *particularism* (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). This cultural aspect also contributes to the way trust is constructed in the UAE society. For example, 43% of respondents thought that people who belong to their same tribe or family are more trustworthy, and 60% agreed that “religion» is a factor in shaping trustworthiness. In contrast, “race” was viewed as less relevant in shaping trust among the majority of respondents, as only 34% thought that it is a relevant factor for trustworthiness (as with the rest of personal factors surveyed, it is hard to say if the 53% of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed did so for political correctness or due to genuine belief that “race” is an irrelevant factor in the social construction of trust). Other factors that were viewed as contributing to trustworthiness included fellow-citizenship and “language” (43% agreed on both). Gender was viewed as less of a factor in shaping trustworthiness compared to other factors listed, as 39% of respondents thought individuals belonging to their gender are more trustworthy (with 23% disagreeing and 39% neither agreeing nor disagreeing).

While less relevant, all these personal and societal factors do contribute to shaping trust in society and therefore could shape both barriers and enablers for collaboration in government (figure 6).

Figure 6
Personal Perceptions of Trust: Personal Factors Contributing to Construction of Trust within the UAE Government

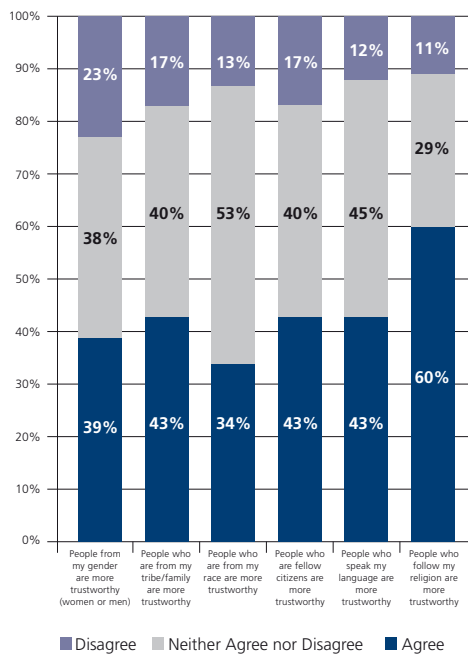
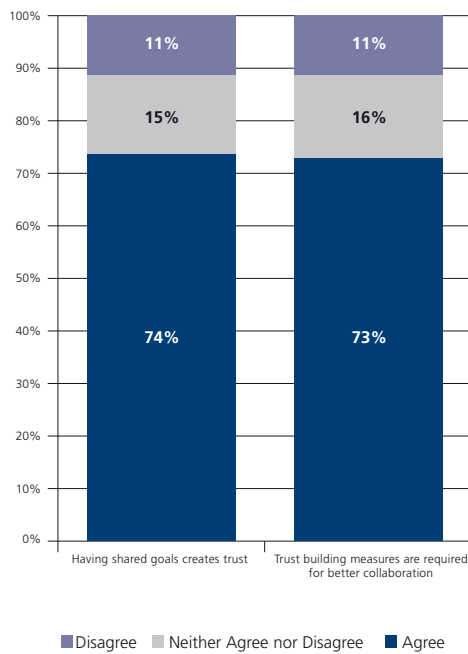


Figure 7
Organizational Factors Contributing to Construction of Trust in the UAE Government



Trust can also be nurtured regardless of the societal or personal factors that are beyond the control of government or organizations. Organizational factors that contribute to trust include setting shared goals and locally-designed trust building measures. In our survey, 74% of respondents said that “sharing common goals” would contribute to increasing levels of trust in the government. Almost equally, 73% agreed that “trust building measures” would be useful in fostering better collaboration within the government (figure 7). Additionally, a group discussion with employees in the Prime Minister’s Office highlighted several examples of trust building measures where ministers and senior heads of government departments are brought together in informal “retreats” which lead to breaking down barriers within and between organizations, thereby nurturing open trust relationships that later trickle down from the top management level in each organization.

Earlier research suggests that in the UAE culture, “betrayal aversion” contributes to the way people make decisions on whom to trust, especially when the other person in a relationship—rather than external factors—determines the outcomes (Bohnet et al. 2006). In other words, the willingness to take the risk of trusting others in such cultures (including the UAE) is relatively low. The willingness of a person to take such a risk is usually highly dependent on gaining assurances related to many of the personal perceptions of trust shown in figure 6. Given that the UAE enjoys a relatively high level of “political trust” and “technological trust,” evidence from our research suggests that the complex cultural and behavioral construction of trust in the UAE public sector makes the need for increasing the level of “social trust” in the public sector a priority if better levels of collaboration are to be fostered.

Perceptions and Drivers of Collaboration within UAE Government

A majority of respondents (69%) are aware that “sharing information” is required when collaborating with others, and a similar level of awareness exists about the need to “share ideas” with others in order to collaborate better (71%). However, 69% of respondents also agreed with the view that “information is power,” and 88% thought that their “ideas” constituted a source of power. Interestingly, those respondents with higher levels of academic attainment agreed more frequently with the notion that “ideas” and “information” are “sources of power” in government.

Does this finding suggest a contradiction? The idea of “the power of information” usually implies withholding such information until certain “benefits” are gained in return. Such benefits usually take informational, reputational or sometimes financial forms. The fact that a majority of respondents view information and ideas as sources of power, while acknowledging the need to share information and ideas for better collaboration in the public sector, suggests that “information sharing” requires an incentive system within government. Otherwise, employees will continue to withhold information and ideas if no value is gained in return. This is currently the case in many public sector environments (figure 8).

Our research indicates that most employees do realize the benefits of and need for collaboration within government. The top three benefits highlighted by our survey respondents were “information sharing,” “increased productivity” and “creating new opportunities” in the public sector. Figure 9 highlights these and other benefits as perceived by the respondents, which also included increasing government responsiveness, meeting common objectives more efficiently, better access to best

Figure 8
Perceptions on Information, Ideas, Power and Collaboration in Government

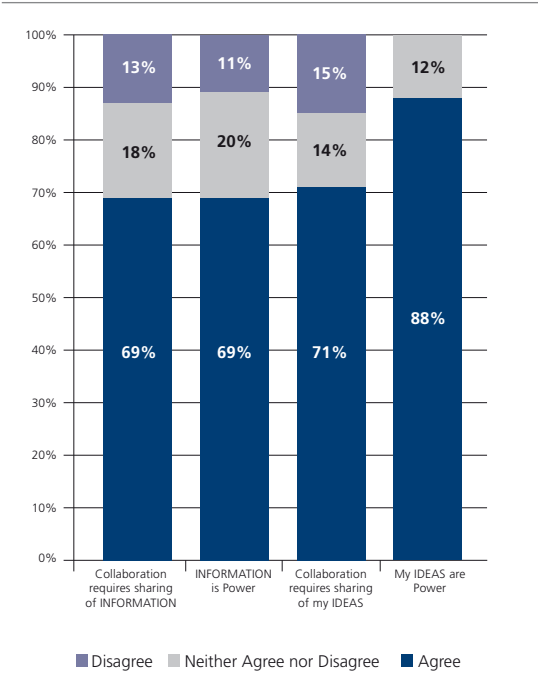
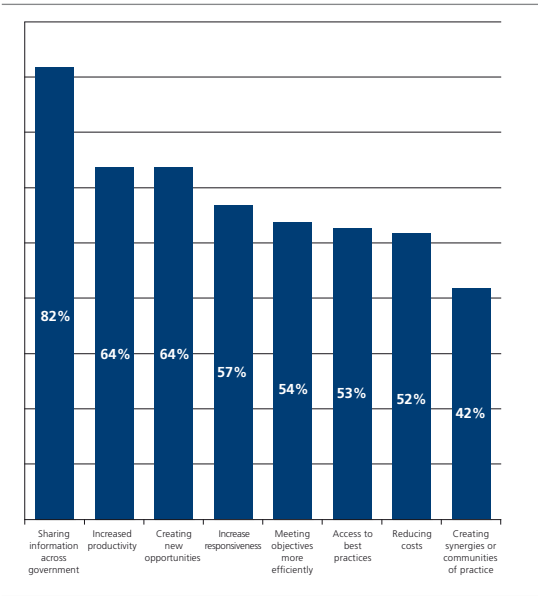


Figure 9
Benefits of Collaboration in the UAE Government



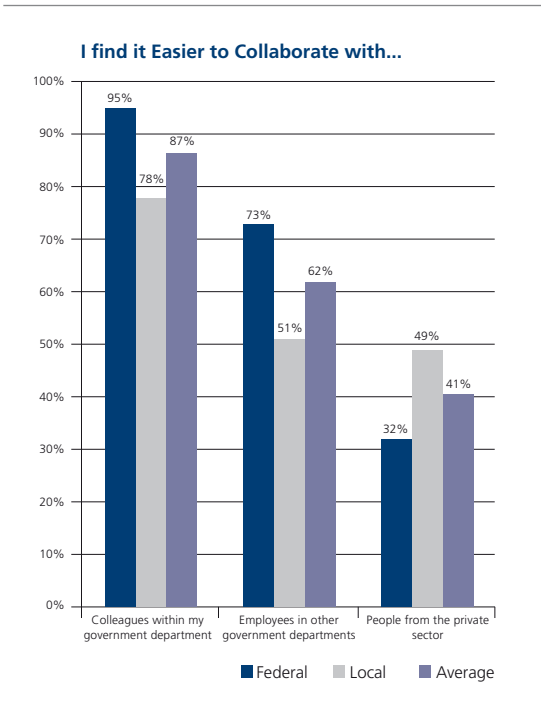
government practices, reducing costs and creating synergies and communities of practice.

Collaborating with others requires a certain level of trust beforehand; hence, a collaborative relationship is easier to achieve among peers who have intact personal relationships. This view was highlighted in our survey, as the overwhelming majority of government employees said that collaborating on projects with colleagues in the same government department is easier (87%) than collaborating with government employees in other government entities (62%). This was clear among employees both in local and federal government departments (figure 10)

However, it seems as though UAE public sector employees in general have a more favorable view of collaborating with employees in the public sector than with the private sector; only 41 % of respondents

thought that it would be easy for them to collaborate with the private sector. This is probably due to the different organizational cultures of the two sectors. On the other hand, employees in local government entities seem to view external collaboration equally, regardless if it is with employees in other government departments or the private sector. Around 51 % of local government employees said that they view collaboration with fellow public servants in other departments positively. Almost the same percentage (49%) had a positive opinion regarding collaboration with private sector companies. In contrast, federal government employees viewed collaboration with private sector employees less positively than with employees in other government departments (73% find it easy to collaborate with public administrators in other department, while only 32% view collaboration with private sector employees positively). Public sector employees in the Emirate of Dubai had the highest positive view of collaboration with the private sector (58%). One would argue that this is mainly due to the organizational trends in local government entities in Dubai that depend heavily on outsourcing, and have had a successful history with public-private partnerships.

Figure 10
Perceptions of Collaborating Internally with Colleagues and Externally with Public and Private Sector Employees



As it is clear that government employees realize the value and benefits of collaboration, why would government employees prefer not to engage in a collaborative relationship with others? In other words, what are the personal barriers to collaboration in the UAE government? According to our survey, the clearest costs of collaboration perceived by respondents include “losing ownership of ideas,” “losing control of information,” and “undermining managerial hierarchy” (losing managerial control). This correlates with the view that information and ideas are perceived as sources of power in the public sector organizational structure. Other perceived costs of collaboration in the UAE public sector include lack of recognition for ideas, negative impact on personal productivity, fear

of reputational damage due to disclosure of information, and waste of time (by spending one’s time collaborating with others).

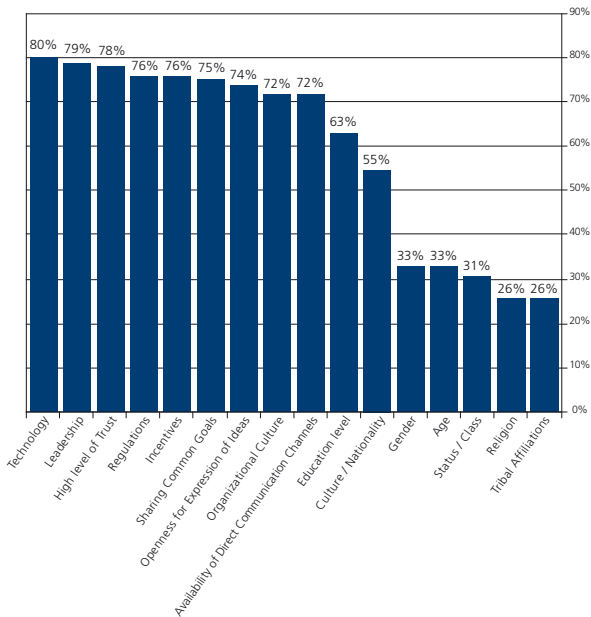
Reasons for not Collaborating

- 59%: Losing ownership of ideas
- 51%: Losing control of information
- 48%: Losing managerial control / Undermining managerial hierarchy
- 39%: Lack of ideas recognition
- 34%: Negative impact on personal productivity
- 30%: Fear of reputational damage due to disclosure of information
- 26%: Wasting time

With these perceived costs and benefits in mind, what are the barriers to and enablers of better collaboration within the UAE public sector? According to our survey respondents, the five enablers with the most impact on collaboration in the UAE government are “technology,” “leadership,” “high trust level,” “proper regulations” and “availability of incentives.” Other factors that respondents also viewed as enablers of better collaboration include “sharing common goals,” “openness to expressing ideas,” “organizational culture” and “availability of direct communication channels” (figure 11). Other social factors (such as gender, culture, age, status, class, religion, tribal or family affiliation) seem to have less impact on collaboration within the government, according to our survey.

However, if we look back at one specific personal factor contributing to perception of trust and compare it to the responses on enablers of collaboration in government, one would notice what seems to be a paradox. On the one hand, “religion” is viewed by 60% of respondents as a personal factor contributing to shaping trust (figure 6); in turn, “trust” is also viewed as one of the top enablers of collaboration. However, in contradiction, “religion” is viewed as having the least impact as an enabler for collaboration in government (figure 11). One conclusion that could be drawn here is that government employees do

Figure 11
Enablers of Collaboration within the UAE Government



have the motivation and desire to collaborate; however, some could be viewing personal factors such as tribal and religious affiliation of possible partners in collaboration has barriers to better collaboration. This said, one should also not discard the possibility of respondents opting for political correctness in their answers on religious and tribal affiliation.

With regards to barriers to collaboration, some of the factors highlighted in the survey included “inflexible organization structure,” where strong hierarchal systems and bureaucratically entrenched government cultures hinder collaboration (61% agreed). Additionally, 59% of respondents also said that “frequent change in management” in government departments is considered a barrier to nurturing sustainable collaborative cultures. Interestingly, 47% of respondents also perceived “fear of impact on reputation” as a barrier to better collaboration. All these social perceptions of enablers and barriers to collaboration in government are directly linked to the level of trust in the public sector. Therefore, a high level of trust is considered a key component of shaping collaboration in the government.

In a series of policy forums held in the Dubai School of Government between 2006 and 2008, senior government officials from different Arab states acknowledged the lack of incentives as a key factor negatively affecting integrity and innovation in the public sphere (Halima 2008, Salem 2006). However, can innovation be fostered simply by introducing customized incentive-based management systems in the public sector? One key underlying enabler of innovation is an environment that ensures the free flow of ideas and information. Lessons learned from the private sector suggest that such an environment depends greatly upon the existence of a culture that views collaboration and openness positively. In general, public sectors in the Arab countries lack such a culture, partly because of the lack of incentives but also due to other cultural factors. In the UAE, most government sector employees in our survey (76%) agreed that introducing incentives for public sector employees would constitute a key enabler of collaboration within the government. However, such a system would also require capable leadership and proper regulations. According to our survey, 79% of respondents thought that capable leadership is an enabler for better collaboration in government, and 76% also considered the availability of proper regulatory frameworks a key enabler.

However, defining the kind of leadership that promotes a more collaborative culture is problematic. In the highly political environments of the public sector, a consultative form of leadership is usually perceived negatively, while decisive forms of leadership are rewarded. This, coupled with the turf wars common in the public sector, might hinder the development of a collaborative culture that needs to be promoted through leading by example

(UNDESA 2008). For example, a PMO employee in our focus group gave the example of a local government project to establish a "one-stop-shop window" for investors in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi which required the collaboration of different government departments: "The leadership was fully behind it, but the heads of departments did not fully cooperate, resulting in a 'one-hall shop' with each government institution having its own window."

With regard to incentives, there seems to be an interchangeable and iterative relationship between trust and incentives in the public sector. Around 78% of UAE government sector employees in our survey said that a "high level of trust" would be considered an enabler for better collaboration. Introducing proper incentives could also have the indirect advantage of enhancing trust in the public sector. In our survey, 73% of respondents said that introducing incentives would increase the level of trust between the management and government department employees. Developing effective incentives requires a good understanding of the different drivers perceived positively by individual employees, based on their different backgrounds and job descriptions. To this effect, one would argue that there is no "right" incentives model that fits across government agencies for nurturing better collaboration.

Based on our findings, "technology," "leadership," "trust," "regulations" and "incentives" are perceived as the five key interconnected enablers of collaboration in the public sector. However, the single most important enabler of better collaboration in the UAE government, according to our survey respondents, was information and communication technology.

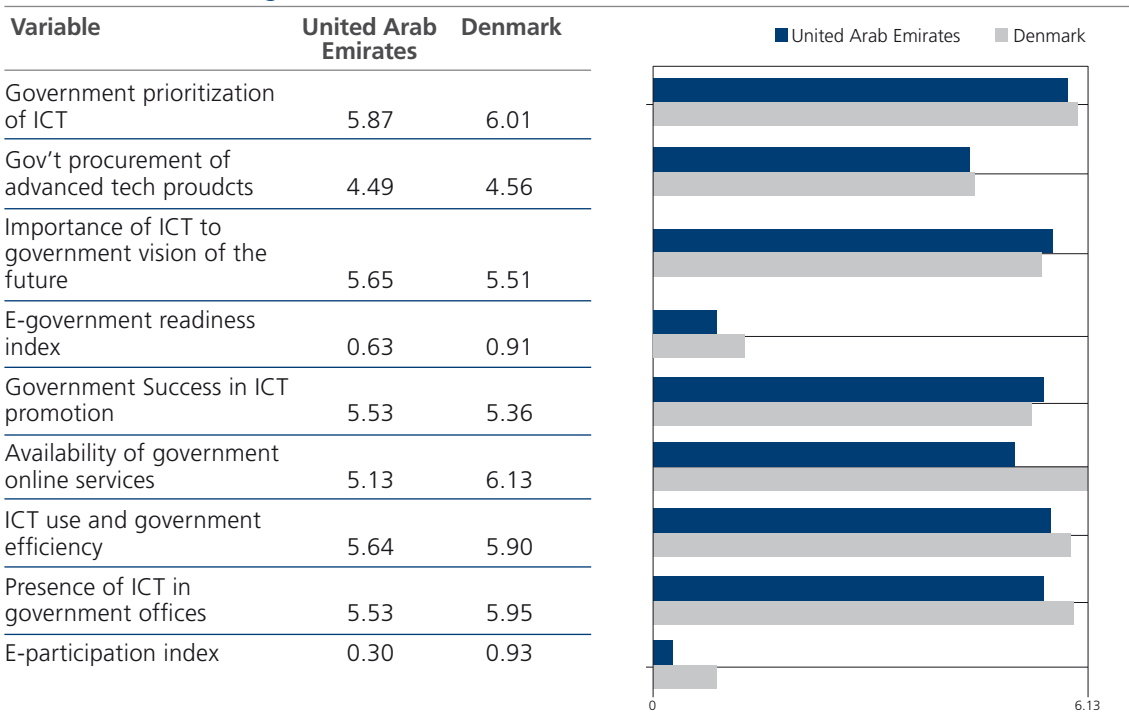
Impact of ICT on Collaboration in Government

The UAE is usually referred to as a “technologically savvy” country in reference to the relatively high level of technological trust within government and among society at large. The country regularly ranks highly in international knowledge-society-focused benchmarking reports. For example, according to the *2008 UN e-Government Survey*, which evaluates countries’ readiness based on infrastructure, Web presence assessment, human resources endowment and participation, the UAE is ranked 32nd worldwide among 182 countries, with the highest score in government Web presence in the Middle East region. Among other reasons, the report ascribed the UAE’s improvement of ten positions over the previous report to the increased responsiveness of federal ministries (namely the Social Affairs, Labour and Finance ministries) through online channels. The UAE also ranked fifth worldwide in the percentage of transactional government services provided

online. It was also one of only 20 governments globally that are starting to take advantage of technologies such as RSS to engage with citizens online, opening the potential of collaborative applications on a government-wide scale. The UAE also ranked third in the Middle East and Africa region in the EIU’s *e-Readiness Rankings 2008* report on the “Government Policy and Vision” indicator (EIU 2008b, Salem and Jarrar 2007, UNDESA 2008)

More recently, the *Global Information Technology Report 2007-2008*, published by the World Economic Forum and INSEAD, ranked the UAE tenth among 127 countries on its “Government Readiness Index.” More specifically, the UAE ranked fourth worldwide on the level of “Importance of ICT to Government Vision of the Future” and seventh in the “Government Prioritization of ICT” indicator. The country also ranked 17th in “Presence of ICT in Government Offices,” sixth in “Government

Figure 12
Benchmarking the UAE (ranked tenth) compared to Denmark (ranked first) on Government ICT Usage Indicators



Source: World Economic Forum Global Information Technology Report 2007-2008

Success in ICT Promotion,” eleventh in “ICT Use and Government Efficiency” indicators, as well as 25th on “Availability of Government Online Services” (WEF and INSEAD 2008). A comparison with Denmark (the top-ranked country in the Government Readiness Index in this report) as a benchmark strongly suggests that the UAE government is a global leader in government readiness (figure 12). Clearly, the UAE government and a large percentage of the UAE society enjoy a healthy level of social acceptance of ICTs. Successful government policies in promoting ICT usage are a key factor that have contributed to what we refer to in this report as “technological trust” (Blind 2006). Earlier research suggests that this form of trust, in turn, has partially contributed—especially among the younger generation—to the relatively high level of “political trust” the government enjoys in the UAE (Salem and Jarrar 2007).

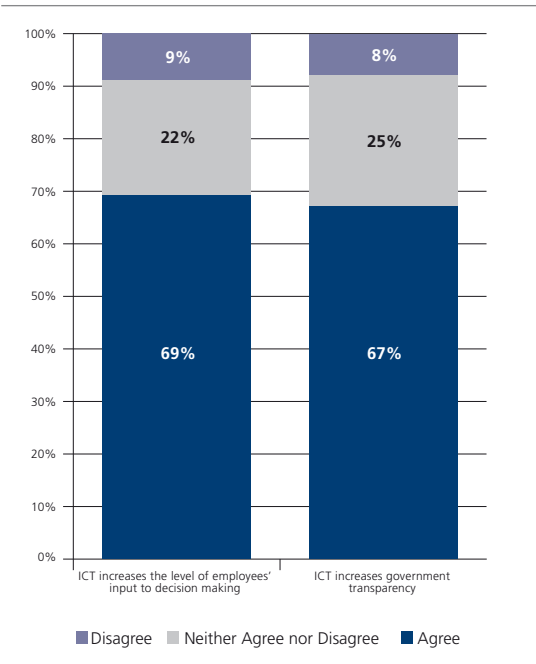
In our survey, 71% of respondents said that they have been introduced to electronic government projects in their government departments during the past three years, and 89% said that they use the Internet in their daily work. Around 65% of respondents also said that they frequently or extensively use e-mail to interact with other government departments. According to our sample, the level of dependence on e-mail within the UAE government is almost equal to that of telephone (62% of respondents said that they depend on telephone either frequently or extensively to interact with other government employees). In total, 52% of respondents rated their level of “technosaviness” as four or five on a five-point scale. This represents the level of IT sophistication in UAE society fairly well, in accordance with published societal ICT indicators. Accordingly, most respondents seem to realize the positive impact of introducing ICT in government. In total, around 70% of respondents thought that the increased usage of information technologies in their work would increase their input into government decision making. A similar percentage of respondents (67%) also said that ICTs can positively contribute to increasing government transparency (figure 13).

ICT Usage Among UAE Government Employees

- 89% of UAE government employees use Internet at work.
- 65% of UAE government employees frequently or extensively use e-mail to interact with other government departments.
- 62% of UAE government employees frequently or extensively use telephone to interact with other government employees.
- 71% of UAE government employees have been introduced to electronic government projects in their departments during the past 3 years.

Can these technologies *affect collaboration positively*? Around 71% of respondents said that collaboration with other government departments has increased due to the introduction of cross-agency e-government projects. A majority of respondents (68%) also said that they “find it easier” to use technology (e-mail, teleconferences, etc.) to collaborate with other government employees. Paradoxically, despite this clear realization of the value of ICT in enhancing collaboration within

Figure 13
Perceptions of ICT Impact on the UAE Government



government, a majority of respondents (64%) also said that they would still prefer “face-to-face meetings” instead of ICT-enabled ones while collaborating with other employees. How could these seemingly conflicting preferences be interpreted? One would argue that they indicate two common but conflicting preferences, coupled with the common IT risk aversion attitude in the public sector (avoiding risk or uncertainty related to IT communications). In other words, they could indicate a realization of the positive impact of face-to-face meetings on nurturing personal relationships of trust and its richness as a form of communication, on the one hand, while also indicating appreciation and awareness of the practicality, speed and convenience of IT enabled interactions.

How do these conflicting personal preferences impact IT-enabled collaboration within government? In several scenarios, respondents were willing to accept giving up the preferred way of collaborating (personal face-to-face) in return for convenience. For example, 49% said that they would prefer IT channels of communication if the other party was from the opposite sex. This could indicate that ICT might be more successful in boosting collaboration within government in certain scenarios. Investigating such cultural tendencies and scenarios further would help government departments realize where ICT channels could play a better role in nurturing a more collaborative culture.

Face-to-face vs. IT-enabled Collaboration in Government
68% of UAE government employees “find it easier” to rely on technology to collaborate with other employees.

However...
64% of UAE government employees “prefer face-to-face meetings” instead of ICT-enabled ones when collaborating with other employees.

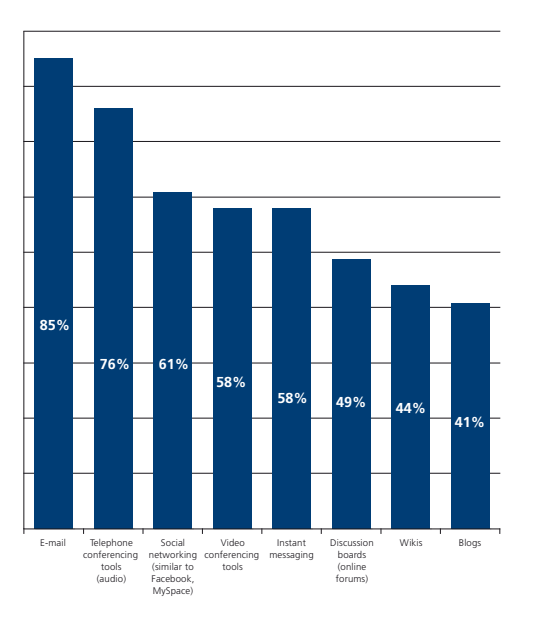
While...
49% prefer IT channels of communication if the other party is from the opposite sex.

Within a single government department, where trust is usually at a higher level, 70% of respondents said that ICT implementations have fostered a better level of teamwork. Additionally, 69% also thought that such implementations have made it easier to interact with their managers. Better information sharing was a clear advantage of ICT, as 71% said that sharing information among peers within the same government department has increased because of ICT usage.

In terms of the impact of ICT on fostering collaboration with external parties, 70% said that ICT would enable better cross-government collaboration, and 60% said that such positive impact could be similarly achieved with the private sector.

According to the survey respondents (figure 14), the top three technologies that would most positively impact collaboration within government are “e-mail,” “audio teleconferencing” technologies and “online social networking tools” (similar to “Facebook” and “MySpace”).

Figure 14
Which Technologies Could Increase the Level of Collaboration within the UAE Government?



Information Technology and Government Transformation

Clearly, information and communication technologies are perceived as key enablers for better collaboration by public sector employees in the UAE. How to better utilize these technologies in the context of the UAE government to nurture better collaboration is the question investigated in this section.

The “transaction cost” view of society has long been utilized to explain how organizations function. Transaction cost economists have argued for viewing society at large as markets rather than hierarchies. The logic behind this argument is that social dealings and relationships in society are constructed of economic transactions between people. Such transactions may include forming decisions on the trustworthiness of others, with whom to share information, or even with whom to conduct financial dealings. In a “hierarchical system” (such as the overwhelming majority of government entities), the high costs of these economic transactions push individuals collectively to opt to form more hierarchical organizations (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). Such is the case of the public sector, in contrast to an open market system that depends less on hierarchies in its dealings and transactions.

Information and communication technologies have brought down the costs of most social transactions in society. Introducing such technologies into the government has unintentionally and effectively caused the rewiring of information flows within government in a way that has comprehensively lowered the cost of making social decisions (for example, the cost of deciding “whom to trust” and “whom to share information with,” among many other transactions).

On the wider societal level, this new technology-dependent economic model has made collaborative “transactions” less costly and more widely accepted in market models. On the private sector level, this “wikinomic” approach—a term coined from the collaborative and open User Created Content (UCC) model of “wikis” on the Web—is effectively fostering collaboration by bringing down the costs and risks of sharing information, as well as the costs of making decisions about whom to trust and therefore whom to collaborate with (Avgerou et al. 2005, Tapscott and Williams 2006, WEF and INSEAD 2008).

Our findings introduce evidence that this would also be the case in government as well. Evidently, as indicated by a survey of UAE government employees, information and communication technologies can potentially bring down the “cost of trusting” and reduce the time needed to decide with whom and how to share information and collaboration within the government and with external parties. Technologies that can foster collaboration in government may include cross-government “social networking platforms” or simply a standard and reliable cross-government e-mail system. Introducing these technologies, coupled with clear and transparent government policies on privacy and freedom of information, can play a key role in advancing collaboration in government, thereby increasing government efficiency and reducing costs of sharing information.

The ideas of the new collaborative Web technologies (which form part of an umbrella of technologies more recently referred to as “Web 2.0”) are being increasingly explored by governments for service delivery as well as cross-government collaboration. If

introduced rationally, these technologies can potentially have a transformational impact on the way government employees interact. Since 2003, this wave of Web technologies has created major shifts in the way social trust is constructed in the private sector and among societies of Web users (Tapscott and Williams 2006). Increasing evidence suggests that it could also contribute to altering the channels and dynamics of collaboration within government through reshaping social trust models among public administrators. A European-wide survey, for example, found that Web 2.0 applications can potentially contribute to the goals of “better, simpler, joined-up and networked government” (Osimo 2008). Successful cross-government collaboration examples based on information technology within the US government are numerous (NASCIO 2007). The most successful implementation for such collaborative technologies could arguably be “Intellipedia,” the CIA back-office wiki application which facilitates direct collaboration among analysts located in all 14 US intelligence agencies. Intellipedia contributes to reducing the “silo effect” among these agencies by eliminating most hierarchical channels of filtering (Wikipedia 2008). The most obvious benefits for such technologies on the government back-office would be related to cross-agency collaboration, regulation and knowledge management.

Our survey suggests that similar evidence also exists in the UAE context. Experimenting with this concept in selected “e-ready” local government entities in the UAE might reveal additional unintended indirect positive outcomes. On the wider government level, it would be wise to explore the benefits of such a proposition (such as those related to ICT capacity and the level of social acceptance of technology) in different government sectors.

As with most new disruptive technological changes, such propositions present considerable opportunities and risks. For

example, the use of such technologies is widely spreading among the relatively younger and technology-savvy generation in the UAE, which is part of a global generation increasingly referred to as “digital natives” (Palfrey and Gasse 2008). Given that citizens entering the workforce in the UAE are mostly young graduates who belong to this group of the population, such a change might also have the indirect positive impact of increasing levels of young talent in the public sector.

Potential risks would be related to organizational change of informational structure, cultural shifts and resistance to change (Fountain 2007). Additionally, there is no guarantee that moving from a competitive hierarchal structure to a collaborative networked structure in governance will lead to better results in all cases (Milward and Provan 2006, Vangen and Huxham 2003). Such uncertainty would require introducing custom risk management approaches. Lessons learned from earlier local electronic government initiatives that triggered resistance from public administrators should prove valuable for drawing future strategies. Furthermore, convincing public administrators to abandon their perceptions of power (withholding information, ideas and knowledge) requires a long and gradual process of nurturing trust and building capacity. Earlier lessons learned suggest that many would see this new change as a threat and, if abruptly enforced, many in the public sector would react to this new model with a strong resistance to change, as was the case when earlier methods and technologies were unrealistically introduced. Public administrators would need to see the value of the new model, and not just on the levels of government efficiency and responsiveness; more importantly, they need to see the value and returns for themselves individually.

Information and communication technologies have transformational abilities that can make trust transmittable among social communities. Web businesses are realizing the value of trust

in expanding their customer base and creating new products and markets. The new cultural orientation created by openness in sharing information and generating knowledge among online businesses (or what is increasingly referred to as “User Created Content” businesses) usually contributes to fostering strong trust models that bring people back (Tapscott and Williams 2006, WEF and INSEAD 2008). There is no reason to conclude that

such a culture can’t thrive in the public sector as well, if the right combination of technology, capacity, incentives and regulations is designed and introduced organically within government. The prospects of such a collaborative approach can create a similar new cultural orientation in government. The young population and the technology-savvy society in the UAE could prove such a scenario to be realistically achievable on the government level.

Conclusions: Towards Public-Public Collaboration in the UAE Government

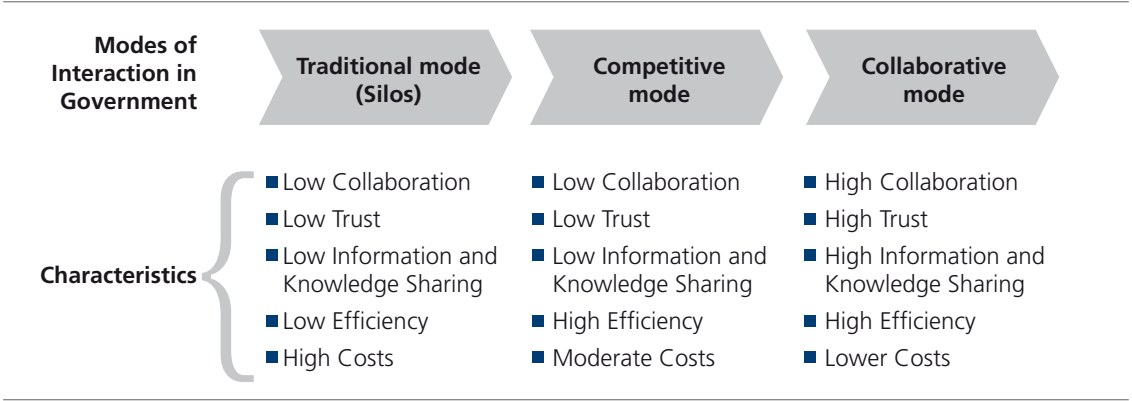
Over the past decade, several local and federal government entities in the UAE have moved from the “silos mode” of governance into a “competitive mode,” where government entities compete in a race for excellence. This cross-government competition has created a healthy improvement in government efficiency. However, in many cases it has also enforced a strong perception of information, knowledge and experience as the main sources of competitive advantage. This competitive view, in turn, has reduced the level of trust among competing individuals and institutions. In many cases, public administrators have decided that withholding information from colleagues or from other government entities would provide them or their departments with a competitive edge. Empirical and anecdotal evidence in our research suggests that informal and formal sharing of information within local and federal government entities in the UAE has been affected negatively. Moreover, it also suggests that the level of trust among government employees and departments has decreased accordingly; this, in turn, forms a barrier to better collaboration in government.

However, it should be noted that only a few government sectors in the UAE have reached

this competitive phase, while the majority of Arab governments are still stuck in the “silos” mode of governance. Therefore, the mixed results and negative side effects of the competitive approach should only drive us to cautiously draw conclusions. For example, one might conclude that the competitive approach in governance that was encouraged by the New Public Management philosophy better fits with the overtly competitive private sector. However, one conclusion that could safely be drawn here based on experiences in other countries is that the private sector will be a much larger employer of citizens and have more significant economic momentum in the future. That scenario will then need a new type of collaborative relationship with the government in order for both sectors to grow and prosper.

Meanwhile, avoiding the unintended negative side-effects of the competitive governance model—despite its advantages—and developing a collaborative model that harnesses the power of knowledge sharing, cooperation and collaboration within government requires the introduction of a combination of both “carrots” and “sticks.” One possible “stick” would be laws and regulations that would mandate

Figure 15
Traditional, Competitive and Collaborative Modes of Governance



an information sharing culture both within government and between government and citizens. Such regulations have been increasingly enforced globally, specifically through electronic means in the form of information freedom acts. As for the “carrots,” a combination of formal and informal incentive systems that encourage sharing ideas, information and knowledge in government is a necessity as well. These measures will partly depend on the introduction of proper “social trust” building measures within government that take into consideration the specificities of each government sector, whether local or federal (Pardo et al. 2006, Vangen and Huxham 2003).

Moving forward from the competitive mode to a more collaborative mode of governance requires another shift of cultural orientation in the public sector, entailing three key prerequisites. These include fostering a comfortable level of “political trust” with government, where government decisions are viewed with credibility, as well as achieving a threshold of “technological trust” within the public sector with an overall social acceptance of technology in day-to-day government work. The third prerequisite is the reform of “social trust” dynamics in society, enabling members of the work force to view their peers and colleagues as members of a larger group working for shared objectives,

regardless of the cultural and societal affiliations. The personal and institutional barriers to enhancing social trust in the UAE society presented in this survey may prove this third prerequisite the hardest to achieve.

The role of trust in such a cultural shift cannot be overemphasized. Building government environments that nurture trust among employees requires developing or selecting government leaders who promote the culture of information and knowledge sharing, and the introduction of formal appraisal systems that incentivize collaboration and sharing of ideas. From a strategic point of view, this “trustful” culture would lead to reduced information transaction costs in the public sector (UNDESA 2008).

The relative youth of UAE public sector organizations, the public’s relatively high level of “political trust” of government, and the society’s healthy level of “technological trust” are all factors that put the UAE in an advantageous position to reap the benefits of better collaborative government. Given the futuristic government vision and the ubiquitous ICTs in the UAE government and society, collaborative IT applications (such as those made available under the Web 2.0 umbrella) can potentially accelerate achieving the above objectives and reaching the “collaborative government” mode, where a true “public-public” partnership is nurtured. However, mindful of the resistance that e-government initiatives have provoked globally, convincing public sector managers to abandon their “silos” mindset and employees to make available the information they view as a key source of power requires a cultural shift in the public sector that can only be facilitated through a combination of soft and hard measures, with carefully designed approaches to change management.

Cross-government collaboration is perceived as either a cost or a threat by many elements in government (UNDESA 2008). Achieving

Figure 16
Trust and Public-Public Partnership

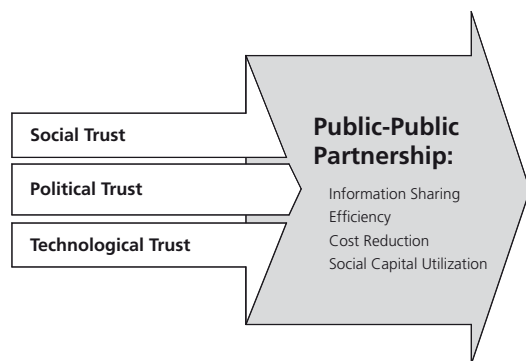


Figure 17
The Road towards Collaborative Government in the UAE



the discussed prerequisites to fully create the cultural shift into a more collaborative government will take time. The UAE government enjoys a high level of “political trust” among citizens and public servants. Society at large also enjoys a comfortable level of “technological trust.” These factors are core prerequisites for developing a more collaborative government in the UAE through taking full advantage of new collaborative information technologies. However, it has been argued that political trust is inseparable from the notion of “social trust” (Blind 2006). In such a multicultural and multinational society, an insufficient level of “social trust” within the public sector in the UAE might hinder fostering collaboration.

As this report is intended to provoke thought leadership discussions in the public sector, a social impact assessment of such technologies within the context of UAE government is required beforehand to assess risks and implications. However, there is a need for developing locally grown systems to overcome existing cultural barriers in order to achieve a higher level of “social trust” in the UAE public sector, in particular.

Furthermore, if a wider regional generalization is to be drawn, the case of the UAE presents one key caveat. A key prerequisite for developing a wider collaborative government in the Arab region is a relatively high level of social acceptance of technology among the government sector work force. While the UAE public sector is fortunate to have a high social acceptance of technology, earlier research suggests that government employees in Arab countries, in general, suffer from a wide ICT capacity deficit that forms a key barrier to developing electronic government projects in those countries (Salem 2006).

Finally, with the plethora of collaborative governance frameworks introduced in the last decade (“joined-up governance,” “whole-of-government,” “connected government,” “networked government,” to mention a few), we stand at risk of *collaboration in government* becoming a target pursued for its own sake if the term is viewed by public managers as the next “buzz word.” A review of the lessons learned from the electronic government “hype cycle” over the last decade might prove to be an enlightening exercise. While the early champions of e-government initiatives focused excessively on information technology per se as a public sector panacea, more recent conclusions drawn from practice and research have instead realized the importance of positioning technology as the core tool that can facilitate rewiring information flows in government and enabling better collaboration (Mayer-Schönberger and Lazer 2007). Similarly, collaboration within government should be viewed as an approach for achieving better governance and reaching development objectives, rather than as a goal for its own sake.

Case Study 1:

Enhancing Trust in Government through ICT – The Case of e-Voting in the UAE*

The United Arab Emirates' society has grown comfortable with ubiquitous information and communication technologies (ICTs). Despite repeatedly ranking high in terms of e-government readiness and social acceptance of ICTs, there were concerns that the government's decision in 2006 to push for using "electronic voting" in the first participatory elections held in the country's history would be crossing the boundary of social acceptance of technology.

The National Election Committee (NEC) decided to form a cross-agency technical team to supervise the electronic systems to be implemented during the election process. The team included experts from different government departments, including the UAE General Information Authority, the Naturalization and Residency Administration, the Ministry of State for Federal National Council Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the Emirates Identity Authority, the Civil Service Bureau and the Ministry for the Development of Government Sector. The NEC viewed cross government collaboration as pivotal for the success of the voting process as a whole. The technical team's responsibilities included setting the standards for the e-voting process, supervising the development of the technical infrastructure in the polling centers, developing the information system to be used in the voting process, creating contingency plans and risk assessments, and training the Electoral College and the poll center workers on using the system.

Knowledge management played an important role in the e-voting process in the UAE's first election in widening social acceptance of e-voting through increasing transparency and

thereby enhancing trust in government. Regardless of the voting method used, elections are usually associated with controversy. In 2006, the Bahraini government announced that an e-voting system would be used for its municipal and parliamentary elections, a first in the Arab region. Despite the buildup to be the first Arab country to implement e-voting, the Bahraini government announced that it would not be using the e-voting system a few weeks before the election date. The issue was politicized during the election campaign when the opposition disputed the e-voting process and argued that it would enable the government to manipulate the results. Interestingly, in the 2008 parliamentary elections in Kuwait, the opposition reacted similarly, claiming that the e-voting will lead to "rigging the vote."

In both cases, the controversy forced the two governments to announce that the e-voting system would not be used, and that a manual mechanism would be followed instead. The Bahrain e-voting controversy, however, did not have much negative effect on trust of voters and candidates in the UAE e-voting process. While the UAE society is not as politicized as the Bahraini or Kuwaiti societies, the cross-agency cooperation coupled with the high level of e-readiness in the country helped expand the perception of government as trustworthy.

The e-voting system used in the UAE 2006 elections was perceived as trustworthy by the Electoral College because of several characteristics:

- collaboration of cross-government entities and individuals in developing the country strategy for e-voting

*Adapted from Salem and Jarrar 2007

- openness and transparency of the NEC in making the system available to the public for testing and inspection before the elections
- ease of use and simplicity of the e-voting process
- the perception of security of the process and the paper ballot backup
- an efficient vote counting process
- the voters' sense that more control over the results is in their hands (rather than in the hands of the ballot counters in the manual systems)

Case Study 2: Dubai e-Government: The Infrastructure of Collaboration*

Unlike many of its regional neighbors, the Emirate of Dubai has diversified its economy, deriving less than 6% of its GDP directly from oil. Its port and airport function as important regional and global hubs, while tourism and real estate development have contributed to Dubai's vibrant economic growth.

Given its hierarchical governing structures—with strong leadership on top—and its relatively small size, a centralized, command-and-control implementation of its e-government strategy would have been an obvious choice (similar to Singapore's, for example). Yet Dubai chose a different path. Instead of centralizing power, Dubai Electronic Government (DEG), the public agency responsible for advancing e-government in the Emirate, saw its role as one of fostering coordination and collaboration within the Government of Dubai. For example, DEG offers public agencies building blocks for their e-government initiatives—for example, an electronic payment (“ePay”) system and suggested standards for Web sites—but refrains from mandating the adoption of

particular standards and technologies. It also collects expertise on e-government implementation in the form of “best practices” that are then shared with public agencies.

The only “stick” that DEG wields is transparency: the agency measures the quality and development of e-government projects based on a customized framework of criteria, capturing everything from the planning process to the implementation and subsequent use of particular functionalities. This information is shared with all public agencies, thus putting reputational pressure on agencies to perform well in these benchmarks.

Since DEG began offering this information, the compliance of various government agencies with DEG e-government guidelines has increased substantially. By May 2008, 91% of Dubai's public services were being offered online, with 74% of services available completely online. DEG also reported savings of 66 million UAE dirhams (\$18 million) by the end of 2007.

*Adapted from Mayer-Schönberger and Lazer 2007

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