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# Generic Collaboration Approach as a Strategy for the Implementation of an Electronic Government: A Case Study of Malaysia

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## Abstract

*Collaboration is a professional relationship between multiple organisations or sectors working together to accomplish mutual goals. Although collaboration involves many parties and stages, it normally occurs in a single relationship for a particular purpose, outcome, or task. However, the collaboration method of Malaysian Electronic Government, represents a generic collaboration approach, consisting of multiple collaboration relationships, different stages, different partners, and different outcomes, but for one purpose and task. The outcome of this collaboration relationship represents a win-win situation for all participants. This paper uses a case study to focus on this collaboration approach, and address the extent to which an understanding of the benefits of collaboration exists, and the extent to which experiences can be shared.*

**Keywords:** Collaboration, Electronic Government, Smart Partnership, Generic Collaboration Approach

## 1. Introduction

Broadly defined, ‘*electronic government*’ (EG), includes the use of all information and communication technologies, from fax machines to wireless palm pilots, to facilitate the daily administration of government. However, like e-commerce, the popular interpretation of electronic government is one that defines it exclusively as an internet-driven activity... to which it may be added: “that improves citizen access to government information, services and expertise to ensure citizen participation in, and satisfaction with, the government process.” It is a permanent commitment by government to improve the relationship between the private citizen and the public sector through enhanced, cost-effective, and efficient delivery of services, information, and knowledge. It is the practical realisation of the best that government has to offer (UN and ASPA, 2001. p.1).

In common understanding, electronic government focuses on relatively simple transactions between identifiable customers, for example, citizens, business, on one side, and a multitude of government agencies in charge of paying bills, issuing driving licences, updating the human resources data, or monitoring the tasks within the government agencies, on the other (Lenk & Traunmüller, 2002). At the same time, electronic government is inspiring government to move away from bureaucratic organisation around agencies, operating like ‘stove pipes’, and to streamline their main functions, public service delivery, according to the needs of their main customers. Electronic governments will also strive to dramatically improve their internal efficiency and effectiveness, which are related to the costs and quality of government. Meanwhile, there are many emerging programs and initiatives of electronic government at all levels of government world-wide, which will require implementation over another decade, as infrastructures must be built, policy issues resolved, and

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interoperability and collaboration established. As electronic government phenomena offer the potential to improve public service delivery, lower the costs of government, restore public confidence in government (Norris et al, 2001), and face the challenge of providing quality services with declining resources, interest is growing in collaboration and partnership with other levels of government and the private sector. In this situation, collaboration is the key to electronic government implementation, making it possible to achieve and realise the vision of electronic government

Furthermore, collaboration that involves multiple agencies and other organisations is also a key component of most electronic government initiatives, so a discussion of strategies for collaboration is an essential part of a complete electronic government business case. As the government attempts to integrate services across organisations, particularly in cases where federal agencies overlap in providing similar services to customers, the issue of how agencies collaborate can determine an initiative's success or failure. To help mitigate the risk of failure, the business case needs to provide a convincing argument that collaboration can be accomplished, and a plan for how collaboration will be carried out (GAO, 2003). The combination of collaboration among government entities and the private sector can assist government in crafting meaningful reforms and can expedite the implementation of electronic government. Private sector experts with a deep understanding of topics such as e-commerce, information technology, marketing, and management can provide useful advice to government. The private sector may have considerable expertise that can help achieve the goal of increasing efficiency, capacity, and citizen satisfaction. However, collaboration in electronic government requires both strategic, in-depth planning, and major co-ordination and consolidation of government resources and experiences.

Technically, collaboration is a process of participation through which people, groups, and organisations work together to achieve desired results. Collaboration can occur among individuals, groups, or organisations at the same time (synchronous) or with a time delay (asynchronous). Collaboration can also occur between people located in the same place or separated by physical distance. According to Michael Winer and Karen Ray (1994) in their book *The Collaboration Handbook* (reproduced by Greg, 2002), true collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more individuals, groups, or organisations in order to achieve results they are more likely to achieve together than individually. Collaboration can also be defined as a process in which the group as a whole must be self-governing and in which all participants must be equally represented in the making of joint decisions. The participants of the collaboration believe that by bringing together diverse interests, skills, resources and sensitivities there will be a greater ability to understand the problem before them, and a more effective solution is likely to emerge than that which any of them could develop alone. Collaboration is the best choice when no other method can accomplish the goals or outcomes the participants want to achieve.

Collaboration occurs at various levels:

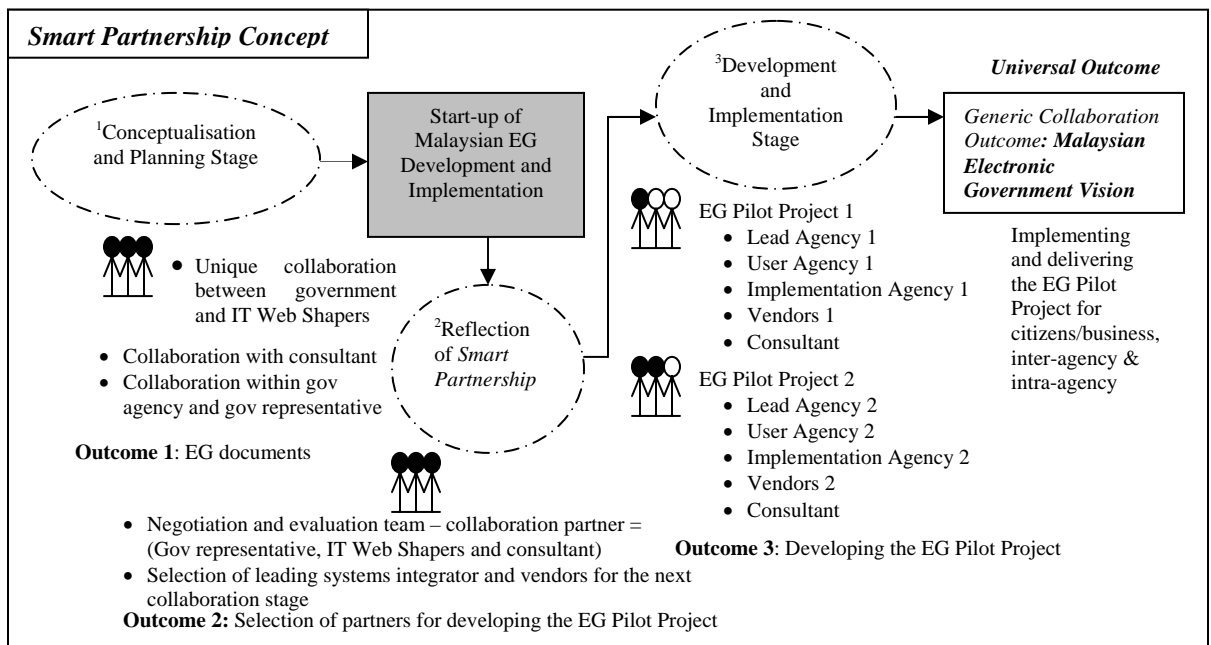
- *Informal Collaboration* - This is the simplest level of collaboration, involving activities which are unstructured and informal. Examples of this level of collaboration would include one-to-one communication, discussion groups, and one-off meetings.
- *Process / Project Collaboration* - The next level of collaboration comprises processes that are more structured in nature, which have defined start and end points, as well as a defined flow of events between the two. Examples of these activities would include sale order, purchasing requisition, and claims settlement processes.
- *Extended Collaboration* - The third level of collaboration involves activities that extend beyond the enterprise to include customers, partners, and vendors. Activities in this category would include interaction with customer focus groups, product design sessions with vendors, and delivery of services or products by partners.

Collaboration is also a key factor in innovation and creativity in organisations, something that most organisations are concerned about and interested in stimulating as a tool for competitive advantage and differentiation. Effective collaboration can reduce elapsed time in situations where a large number of partners are involved, and the power of collaboration allows small work teams to resolve issues quickly and accelerate

delivery. Collaboration is the life-blood that guides the flow of conversation and creation of meaning in human systems. Moreover, partners engage in collaboration activity for a variety of reasons, and normally to achieve varied goals. Collaboration must also be something an organisation needs and wants, the worth of which it can define. In fact, collaboration between government agencies, between subdivisions of government entities, between government and businesses, and between individuals and their government, is not new. This collaboration can lead to better service from government for its citizens, better decision-making, and improved government processes, as well as the generation of an effective co-operation between government and private sector. However, collaboration will not change government overnight. But it is important that governments look for opportunities and solutions from which they can benefit, and this is especially so for governments beginning to implement electronic government, since the collaboration process in each electronic government implementation will vary.

## 2. The Generic Collaboration Approach

The Malaysian Electronic Government’s collaboration experience effectively began with collaboration between government and IT Web Shaper, and continued with the creation of a ‘*smart partnership*’ between government, consultants, and leading IT systems companies, which mainly designed and developed the electronic government pilot project for public service delivery and improved the government processes, as illustrated in *Figure 1*. This combination of collaborations, defined as a ‘*generic collaboration approach*’, shared the goal of realising the vision of Malaysian Electronic Government. The approach adopted under the generic collaboration approach is to orchestrate the conceptualisation and planning process in a co-ordinated and concerted manner, according to a *smart partnership* concept, which brings together a synergy of effort from both the public and private sectors on an unprecedented scale. If previously the government carried out its planning function using its own resources, this function has been successfully implemented in the initial stages of EG by mobilising experts from IT web-shapers companies, both local and international (Rais & Salmah, 1999; Nazariah & Rais, 2003). This ‘*generic collaboration approach*’ involves different partners at different stages that must co-operate in order to achieve a specific task.



**Figure 1** Generic Collaboration Approach for Electronic Government Implementation

This 'generic collaboration approach' is a collaboration model of smart partnership, that comprises government, private sector, and internal government agencies, is based on the combination of public-public and public-private sector collaboration. This collaboration also involves a different group of partners at each stage, for example, during each stage of the electronic government pilot project and the development and implementation of the electronic government initiative, which have been defined as 'smart partners'. This model was based on 'strategic alliance' elements, and starts with a unique combination of collaboration between government and private sector representatives, as an EG start-up project team. Figure 1 shows the generic collaboration approach, detailing the partners at each stage of the collaboration. Appendix 1 (b) shows the description of what each stage in the generic collaboration approach involves. The collaboration arrangement for this smart partnership concept is a horizontal arrangement, where co-operation between all parties involves one function domain and collaborative partners sit in the same stage in order to contribute to value creation. However, the task of co-ordination must be allocated to a single member or partner. In this research study, MAMPU (Malaysia Administration and Management Planning Unit) is the co-ordinator of all collaboration in the EG implementation. This collaboration is a close arrangement since partners have a clear border and intend to occupy a specific goal or target. New partners are only introduced following critical incidents, for example, a partner leaving the project or failing to comply with the agreement.

### 3. The Generic Collaboration Outcome

The case study conceptual model, as shown in Figure 2, which provided the basis for the generic collaboration approach, was developed from the current body of knowledge in the field of collaboration as the result of a case study conducted by the authors. Figure 3 illustrates the generic collaboration relationship that involves all the collaboration partners, tasks, and outcomes that must be achieved, as shown in Figure 2. Appendix 1(c) references the relationship of the outcomes in the generic collaboration with the case study.

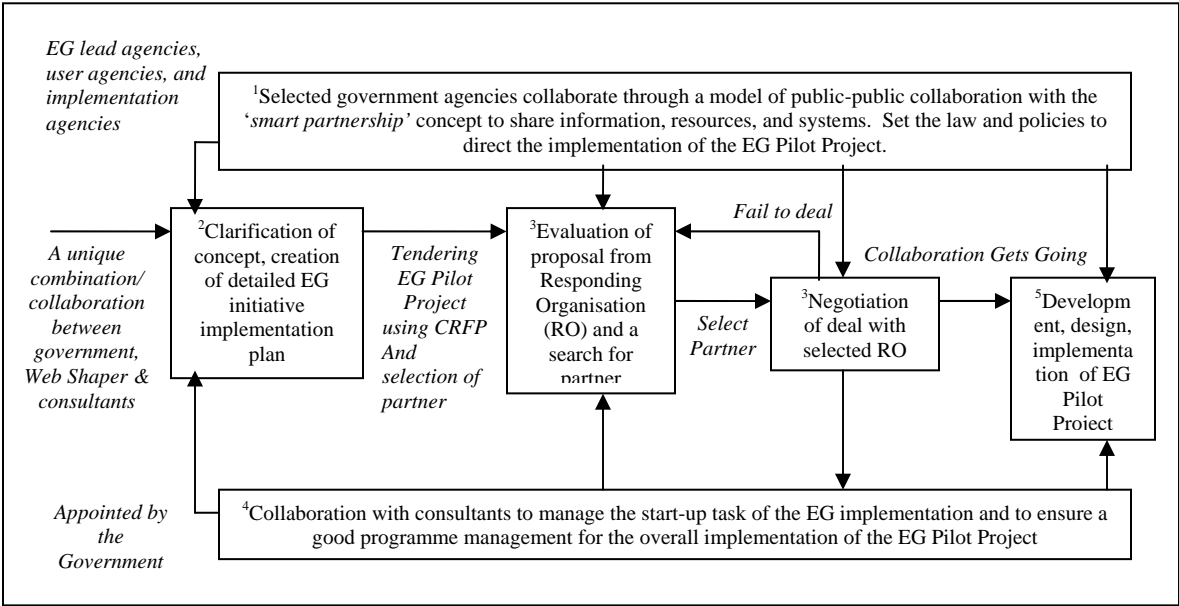


Figure 2 Case Study Conceptual Model for Electronic Government Implementation<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Case Study of Malaysia Electronic Government implementation

From the case study conceptual model, it can be seen that the collaboration stages involve different collaboration partners and outcomes. Every level of collaboration will involve a group of collaboration models, or combination of collaboration models, represented in this study as cases. At some level, the collaboration consists of a continuity of groups or stakeholders from the initial stages of EG implementation, but other collaboration occurs after the other collaboration has achieved its outcome. The two types or models of collaboration concerned in this research study are:

- *Public-Public Sector Collaboration* - This category includes both horizontal agreement between two agencies at the same level of government and vertical agreement or intergovernmental alliances between or among federal, state, and local levels. These collaborations go beyond the traditional legal frameworks that tie public agencies together through the operation of single programs. They represent voluntary relationships, often driven by the need to solve mutual problems (Lise Préfontaine, *et al.*,2000).
- *Public-Private Sector Collaboration* - The arrangement among the parties in these collaborations rests on a formal agreement, which specifies the purpose of the collaboration and the sharing or allocation of associated responsibilities, benefits, risks, and resources. These formal agreements often exist in the form of contracts for a specified period of time. In these collaborations, governmental control is ensured by contract or law and by regulations governing the activities of the co-operation. Government remains accountable for a service, which is totally or partially operated by the private sector, but in the conceptualisation and planning stages, collaboration is represented as voluntary, even though it involves private sector problems (Lise Préfontaine, *et al.*, 2000).

The research study also documents and compares five case studies from two models of collaboration in the delivery of services and improvement of internal processes, in their implementation of the electronic government initiative. These focus not only on Malaysian government agencies but also selected organisations of consultants and vendors. A qualitative approach has been applied for collecting rich data that influence the collaboration process in each case studied, and methods for data collection included interviews, document analysis, and observation.

The cases have also been selected to represent variation in other dimensions. For instance, cases focus on different service types, for example, the guidelines for the implementation of the EG initiative, complementing the knowledge and resources of government and delivering the pilot project to the public, including citizens and businesses, and also to government agencies as decided by the EG Steering Committee. The cases also vary in terms of time and duration. These situations are based on the implementation levels of the Malaysian Electronic Government initiative, as shown in *Appendix I(a)*:

- Level 1 – Initial Stages / Conceptualisation and Planning Stages
- Level 2 – Development Stages of EG
- Level 3 – Implementation Stages of EG
- Level 4 – Outcome of EG Implementation / Project Roll-Out / Go Live

There are three main levels of collaboration which are involved in the full delivery and implementation of electronic government. First, Public-Private Sector Collaboration occurs during the conceptualisation and the initial stage of the electronic government initiative. The outcome here is very successful, even though it is based on a voluntary collaboration and pooling of information. The outcome has been used as a critical reference and guideline for the comprehensive development and implementation stages of the electronic government initiative. These collaborations also develop the strategy and master plan for how to develop and implement the electronic government initiative through a few series of steps and approaches, including the process of developing the smart partnership between leading systems integrators and vendors to ensure a win-win situation for both the public and private sectors. The same collaboration also defines the needs of a public-public collaboration between government agencies involved in the implementation of the electronic government pilot project, in order to share the information, resources, and system testing during the development and implementation of the electronic government initiative.

Second, Public-Private Sector Collaboration occurs at the beginning of comprehensive development stages where work involved in the evaluation and negotiation process is assigned to the team prior to the smart partnership collaboration between government and leading systems integrators, vendors, or consortia. This collaboration is also responsible for making a recommendation for the selected partner<sup>4</sup> that will collaborate with government during the development stage of the electronic government initiative.

Third, Public-Private Sector Collaboration occurs after the evaluation and negotiation process. This time, smart partnership collaboration is expected from both sectors. Vendors or consortia are asked to build, operate, and maintain the complex electronic infrastructure required, and to evaluate sets for the development of the EG initiative. The vendors or consortia are also responsible for designing, developing, and testing the concept, proofing the concept, implementing, installing, maintaining, and enhancing the electronic government pilot project. Vendors also need to bring the current technological and multimedia approaches to the implementation of the system and fulfil the negotiation arrangement and contract agreement.

*Table 1* provides an overview of the five cases representative of two collaboration models in implementing the electronic government, including level involved in collaboration, the specific outcome, and the status of the partners in collaboration to the next level of collaboration stages. *Appendix 1(c)* summarises the five cases in this generic collaboration approach.

**Table 1** Overview of Case Studies

Case	Level involved	Types of collaborator	The specific outcome	Collaboration status to the next Level
Case1 (Government Agency, EG Committee & MDC)	Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 Level 4	Selected Government Agencies /(Implementation Agencies) for every pilot project in EG initiative, Lead Agency and Government Representative	Defined the needs of every agency, systems users, test the pilot project and give feedback	Involves in all levels of collaboration stages
Case2 (Government & Web Shapers)	Level 1	Between Government and Web Shapers	Refining the vision and creating a blueprint for EG, EG IT Standard & CRFP (Concept Request For proposal)	Disperse after outcomes of Level 1 & between Level 1 & 2 achieved.
Case3 (EG Evaluation Team)	Between Level 1 & Level 2	Electronic Government Evaluation Team	Evaluate the Proposal from CRFP & Selected the Winning Vendors	Disperse after outcome between Level 1 & 2 achieved.
Case4 (Government & Consultants)	Level 1 Level 2 Level 3	Between selected Government Agencies involves in EG initiative and consultant	Complement and adviser to every pilot project to the Government Agencies by Consultant	Continue with the collaboration until the end of the implementation stages.
Case5 (Government & Vendors)	Level 2 Level 3	Between selected Government Agencies involves in EG initiative and vendors/consortia.	Developed the pilot project with a certain criteria and negotiation by both of the Government and Vendors/Consortia	Collaboration continues until development & implementation of EG Pilot Project Go Live.

<sup>4</sup> Partners are selected from vendors or consortia according to the best solutions submitted in response to the CRFP.

The common bond between the cases in this study is a willingness among the entities involved to work together to accomplish that which they could not accomplish alone. The term of agreement, capital infrastructure, or benefits that each entity enjoys may differ, but the spirit that binds individuals together - sharing a vision, in a trusting environment - is the quality that makes all things possible. To date, the specific outcomes of the collaboration are considered to have been achieved, and even though the electronic government pilot project is still at the level of application roll-out as planned in the electronic government implementation roadmap, there have already been visible successes.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

Although partners in a collaboration effort may have diverse responsibilities and different collaboration outcomes, most collaboration will be built around mutual goals or a common understanding. However, there are some critical components of successful collaboration. Two components critical to success are clear definition of responsibilities and jointly agreed outcomes. The heightened ambiguity of working in dispersion suggests the need for increased structure and a clear definition of responsibilities, as a lack of clarity may lead to confusion, frustration, gridlock, and disincentive. Being more specific in expectations, guidelines, and requests can reduce ambiguous behaviour, particularly if the work is only part of the collaboration. Definition of partner responsibilities, the provision of guidelines on how often to communicate and, more importantly, the inculcation of a regular pattern of communication will increase the predictability and reduce the uncertainty of the collaboration co-ordination. The formal leader must take the initiative to create structure and define boundaries; this includes identifying the collaboration need, selecting the person who will be responsible for managing the task or process, and providing the necessary support and coaching. A shared vision with clear objectives and agreed priorities is essential for measuring the success of the collaboration in terms of its outcomes and achievements. Ensuring that the partners have a sense of, and share in, the overall aim and deliverables of the collaboration will help prevent the occurrence of desultory participation. There must be strong commitment from partners to the goals of the collaboration. Moreover, a vision and goal must be shared and communicated not only among partners, but also with the project management, sponsors, and project co-ordinator, in order for the collaboration to succeed. Other important factors that are crucial to the success of the collaborative effort are mutual trust, a willingness to share ideas, and technical support, to enable the partners to communicate easily and effectively. Collaborations are also enhanced if they include flexibility in their design, and enable partners to adjust to changing circumstances. It is also important that governments select the right partners for the collaboration. In addition, the type of expertise needed to address a particular problem or issue may drive the selection of collaborators that is needed in order to achieve the collaboration targets. Finally, collaborations require the ongoing support of agency and program management. Although collaborations can develop on an *ad hoc* basis without management support, they are often short-lived unless such support can be developed. Collaborations work best when all partners are willing to make compromises to achieve collaboration partners' goals and when they are willing to consider methods and strategies that differ from those followed in their own practice.

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## **About the Authors**

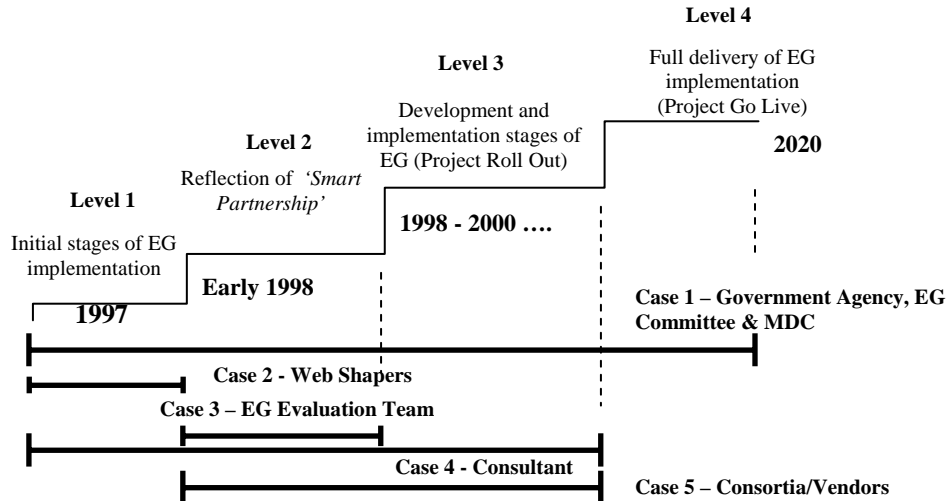
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## Appendix

### (a) Levels and stages in the implementation of the Malaysian Electronic Government Initiative and generic collaboration approach cases



### (b) Stages involved in the implementation of the Malaysian E-Government Initiative and Generic Collaboration Approach cases

Level	Stage	Description (Refer to <i>Figure 1</i> )
1	<sup>1</sup> Initial stages of EG implementation	The best solutions delivered by this collaboration were the clarification of the concept, and creation of the detailed implementation plans of Malaysian EG, as well as the development of the strategy and master plan to implement the EG initiative. At the same time, government is also collaborating with the appointed consultants to manage the start-up task of the EG implementation, identifying project standards and rollout planning for the EG pilot project, and helping in terms of a second opinion to government, so as to ensure a good program of management initiatives during the implementation of Malaysian EG (Co-ordination Manager at MAMPU, 2003). Both these collaborations created a reflection of smart partnerships as a model for the delivery of new services to the public and the improvement of services within the government agencies in a Malaysian EG
2	<sup>2</sup> Reflection of 'Smart Partnership'	A negotiation team and an evaluation proposal to select the appropriate vendors/consortia are established to combine the expertise and the experience of relevant government agencies with those of private co-operations and consultants, before making recommendations before a final decision. In terms of reflecting the smart partnerships model, the team is responsible for collaborating in order to evaluate the functional, technical, financial, and legal aspects of the winning vendors' proposal, and hence its membership must include different competencies and professionals.
3	<sup>3</sup> Development and implementation stages of EG implementation	The 'smart partnership' concept is applied to the collaboration between government and leading systems integrators and vendors to ensure a win-win situation for both the public and private sector. However, collaboration within government or user agencies still continued, in order to share information, resources, and systems developed in the electronic government pilot project. This co-operation between government and, for the most part, international and domestic IT companies, profited from synergies by getting greater service access and systems and therefore improved the government's position, and used electronic government to extract the best solution from the private sector.

**(c) Description of cases, levels, partners, stages, models, and collaboration outcomes involved in the implementation of the generic collaboration approach**

Case	Level involved	Collaboration partners (Refer to Table 1)	Stages involved	Collaboration model	Collaboration outcomes (Refer to Figure 2 and Table 1)
Case-1	1, 2, 3, 4	Government Agencies (EG Lead, User and Implementation Agencies), EG Committee and MDC	Initial, development, and implementation	Public-Public Collaboration	Collaboration of <sup>1</sup> selected government agencies through a model of public-public collaboration with the ' <i>smart partnership</i> ' concept to share information, resources, and systems. Sets the law and policies to direct the implementation of the EG Pilot Project
Case-2	1	Government and Web Shapers	Initial stages	Public-Private Collaboration	<sup>2</sup> Clarification of the concept and creation of a detailed EG Initiative implementation plan
Case-3	2	Electronic Government Evaluation Team	<sup>2</sup> (Reflection of ' <i>Smart Partnership</i> ')	Public-Private Sector	<sup>3</sup> Evaluation of the proposal from the Responding Organisation, a search for partners, and negotiation of a deal with the selected RO
Case-4	1,2,3	Government and Appointed Consultants	Initial, development, and implementation stages	Public-Private Sector	<sup>4</sup> Collaboration with consultants to manage the start-up task of the EG implementation and to ensure a good programme management for the overall implementation of the EG Pilot Project
Case-5	2,3	Government and Winning Vendors/Consortia	Development and implementation stages	Public-Private Sector	<sup>5</sup> Development, design and implementation of the EG Pilot Project