

# Boosting Digital Transformation in Government in the Middle East

# Abstract

A citizen's relationship with the government is evolving, driven by new self-service models that are revolutionizing the way people interact with the administration. The demand for personalized, connected experiences for citizens has seen an increase in the need for digital experience platforms—and the number of government agencies offering them.

In recent years, governments in Egypt and in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait—embarked on many initiatives to enhance government services to citizens, residents, and businesses. These initiatives aim to not only enhance the quality of life but also to build capacity as the governments pursue digital transformation.

- In the UAE, Abu Dhabi Digital Authority (ADDA) is driving the digital transformation of the government across key areas including government services, shared government solutions, data and artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and ecosystem and governance.<sup>1</sup>
- The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched its ambitious Vision 2030 in 2016 with plans to improve the quality of life for residents, boost global competitiveness and diversify the economy. Built into the vision is a plan to enhance the effectiveness of the government. To date, the government has been able to reduce visa processing time, completed infrastructure projects ahead of schedule and noted increased satisfaction among residents.<sup>2</sup>
- Egypt is building a new capital outside Cairo where residents will be able to pay utility bills, unlock doors, and report problems through a single app. The smart city will feature wifi beamed from lampposts and advanced technology systems designed to reduce waste and monitor consumption.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Abu Dhabi Digital Authority

2 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030

3 Reuters, From creaking Cairo, Egypt plans high-tech leap with new capital

# Customer experience at the center of digital transformation

GCC governments already have a strong foundation of digital services, with an average adoption rate of more than 60%. Citizens in UAE (61%), KSA (70%), and Qatar (53%) access digital government services more frequently than the global average (47%). Furthermore, 90% of UAE citizens and residents are happy with government services, according to a survey by Serco Institute.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this, they want increased digital access, more unified platforms (multiple services accessible from a single app, website, or location), and greater personalization. The report also said that people felt services could be “generic” and sometimes lacked “attentiveness.”

These responses underscore the role of the human experience in digital transformation and highlight the importance of prioritizing people over technology. Successful digital transformation starts with an understanding of the people who will be using the technology and their expectations of it.



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## Changing expectations of citizens

Citizen expectations are evolving along with the technology they have available to them. They want convenience and speed, and an increasing number of people prefer doing business from a mobile device. As a result, they expect quick responses and don't want to wait too long to get the answers they need.

To this end, consumers are increasingly choosing to take care of tasks by themselves instead of waiting for the assistance of a live representative. It's not always because they prefer solving problems on their own—many people still like the guidance of an expert. Rather, they don't want to spend too much time on a specific task. As much as 85% are more likely to choose self-service options instead of waiting to speak to a person for that very reason.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Serco Institute, Transformation, digitization & happiness: Public opinion on UAE government services

<sup>5</sup> CX Today, The Rise of Digital Self-Service

# Self-service as an integral part of digital transformation

Implementing self-service strategies is a way to facilitate the access of citizens, companies, and employees to public services. Self-services enrich digital experiences, improve relationships, and ultimately achieve greater satisfaction in the citizens' relationship with the government.

Self-service models in the digital field have brought a wide range of advantages to this ecosystem:

- Reduction in the number of calls and consultations or face-to-face appointments. More than half of citizens using digital services are taking care of tasks that previously had to be handled in person, such as making payments, renewing visas and permits, and applying for identification cards.<sup>6</sup>
- Freeing up internal resources and optimizing the available means. Over 70% of citizens search public records, get real-time information, and update contact information without speaking directly to a government employee. These employees are able to direct their attention elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>
- Greater flexibility and autonomy for the citizen who selects how and when to carry out the procedure or consultation, etc. More than 80% of the people who use digital government services are looking for information about public services. With this information, they are better prepared to make informed decisions that best meet their needs.<sup>6</sup>
- The improvement in response times. Cities have been able to reduce the processing time by as much as 50%.<sup>7</sup>
- Reduction in maintenance costs.

The end result is significant time savings for government employees and citizens in need of services. This frees up both parties to invest in new opportunities and pursuits.



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<sup>6</sup> BCG, Digital Government in the GCC: Accelerating Digital Trust

<sup>7</sup> National League of Cities, Three Keys to Speed in Government Service

# Excellence in experience

The objective is to guarantee the offer of public services with the best experience to citizens and companies. The typology of users in the Public Administration is very heterogeneous regarding their levels of digitization and preferences, Public bodies must serve both millennials and elderly people—who often have very different experiences using technology—with the same level of excellence in their experiences.

This represents an additional challenge that requires providing a good omnichannel experience through all contact points: in some cases, it will be totally digital experiences, but in most cases, it will be hybrid with the use of several channels (telephone, portals website, administrative windows, virtual offices, etc.).

Consistency across these contact points is key. A centralized location where citizens can go to access the tools and information they need streamlines processes for employees and the citizens they serve. Included in this customer portal can be relevant information in the form of FAQs, chatbots, virtual assistants, and knowledge bases.



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# Key areas to develop the digital evolution in the government sector

In addition to self-service, Liferay has three key areas to develop the digital evolution in the government of the sector:

## 1. Systems integration to achieve a single access point for both digital and physical elements

The government should take important steps to interconnect new legacy systems and tools that prevented it from having a unified and connected digital ecosystem. In addition, achieving a single access point, avoiding dispersion, and the heterogeneity of information has been key to reducing barriers to consulting information and using public services.

The trend points toward the adoption of a cohesive ecosystem, where both digital and physical elements have a place. The citizen perceives the integral seal of the government while optimizing the processes and the TCO (Total Cost of Ownership) of IT solutions because getting the most out of the investment made is more important today than ever.

## 2. Modern web portals as a vehicle for communication between organizations and citizens

Modern outlets are much more than just a technology platform used to add content and other applications. With user profile management capabilities, integration with legacy systems, content management, social collaboration and as enablers of digitization and automation of processes—speeding up time and reducing paperwork—these solutions stand as the base for most web projects, becoming the main communication vehicle between government entities, citizens, and public servants, enabling the offer of public services.

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### 3. Management of remote and collaborative work environments for citizens

Another key area is the development of solutions aimed at responding to the needs of the current public profile. Keeping offshored citizens and residents connected, informed, and at the right productivity rate, requires an effective set of tools, an intranet or employee portal, that supports the critical functions of a digital workforce. With the right technology and strategy, public bodies can use their intranets as hubs to connect offshored users, information, and departments through a common interface, unifying internal and external processes to create a centralized workspace.

## Digital transformation in action

As a great example, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, launched an “Invest in Dubai” platform that enables investors to obtain trade licenses and launch their business in only a few minutes. This centralized digital platform is aimed at assisting investors and businesses while reinforcing Dubai’s culture of innovation and cementing the city’s position as a global investment hub.

The “Invest in Dubai” platform is the product of a successful collaboration between more than 20 government entities to facilitate open a business and attracting investments in Dubai. The platform is creating opportunities for investors and businesses in the Emirate by allowing them to access investments insights, obtain licenses and permits, as well as a number of key services across the entire business cycle.<sup>8</sup>

Liferay’s Digital Experience Platform enabled the creation of a personalized web experience using standard front-end technologies. By collaborating with Liferay and its UAE-based partner Palmira Software House, Smart Dubai benefitted from an enterprise-grade, low-code, quick-to-market Content Management solution to develop and deliver the content and main pages of the platform in 3 months. This easy-to-use platform enhances user experience and empowers users to access information and services in a well-designed and developed content structure.

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<sup>8</sup> Invest in Dubai

# Future digital strategies in government services

Results of the new GCC E-Performance Index 2021 revealed that the six Gulf countries are progressing steadily in their digital transformation with UAE topping the list. Thanks to government initiatives such as UAE Vision 2021, the Middle East's public sector will continue to lead data-driven innovation to enhance citizen experiences.<sup>9</sup>

It's helpful to remember that digital transformation is a journey—more than a destination. Efforts to further cement GCC's position among future-ready economies will have to remain ongoing and evolving. Implementing robust digital platforms that offer self-service options for citizens is a starting point.

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<sup>9</sup> Dubai Chronicle, GCC e-performance index 2021 examines progress of Arab gulf countries' digital transformation



Liferay makes software that helps companies create digital experiences on web, mobile and connected devices. Our platform is open source, which makes it more reliable, innovative and secure. We try to leave a positive mark on the world through business and technology. Hundreds of organizations in financial services, healthcare, government, insurance, retail, manufacturing and multiple other industries use Liferay. Visit us at [liferay.com](https://liferay.com).

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