



The Journey to Digital Government 5.0

Part 2: The Digital Transformation Journey of GCC Governments



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Digital Government Globally – Recap of Part 1

In the first part of this two-series report, we explored the evolution of government services from Government 1.0 to Government 5.0 as well as the characteristics and benefits of achieving digital government maturity.

During Part 1, the concept of digital government as a fundamental shift in the way governments around the world are approaching their missions was explored. Over the years, digital government has evolved through key stages, transitioning from the digitisation of individual government services in Government 1.0 towards the development of a citizen-centric model that provides services centred around citizens' life events in Government 5.0.

Digital Governments at 5.0 maturity exhibit a whole-of-government approach that emphasises the coordination across departmental boundaries to deliver seamless, citizen-centric services. The main concept of Digital Government 5.0 is to develop services centred around citizens' life events, accessed through a single interface, and enabled by seamless collaboration across departments.

Governments that have achieved this level of maturity are well-positioned to reap various benefits such as enhanced collaboration, information sharing, improved efficiency, investment optimisation, innovation, and agility in service delivery.

Part 1 concluded that, on a global scale, digital government is now viewed as the path towards enabling national agendas, achieving economic diversification, and developing a more sustainable future. Although governments across the world are at different stages of digital government maturity, all governments should be shifting focus towards citizen centricity and building services around citizen life events in the coming years. This would help governments enable more efficient business models, achieve higher citizen satisfaction, and reap various economic benefits. However, the challenges associated with this are not simple and include challenges with digital regulation, policy making, digital trust and governance.

This part of the two-series report (Part 2) explores the state of digital government in the GCC countries, diving into recent digital government use cases and initiatives, current and upcoming challenges to GCC government digitisation, and the recommended way forward for our GCC government clients.



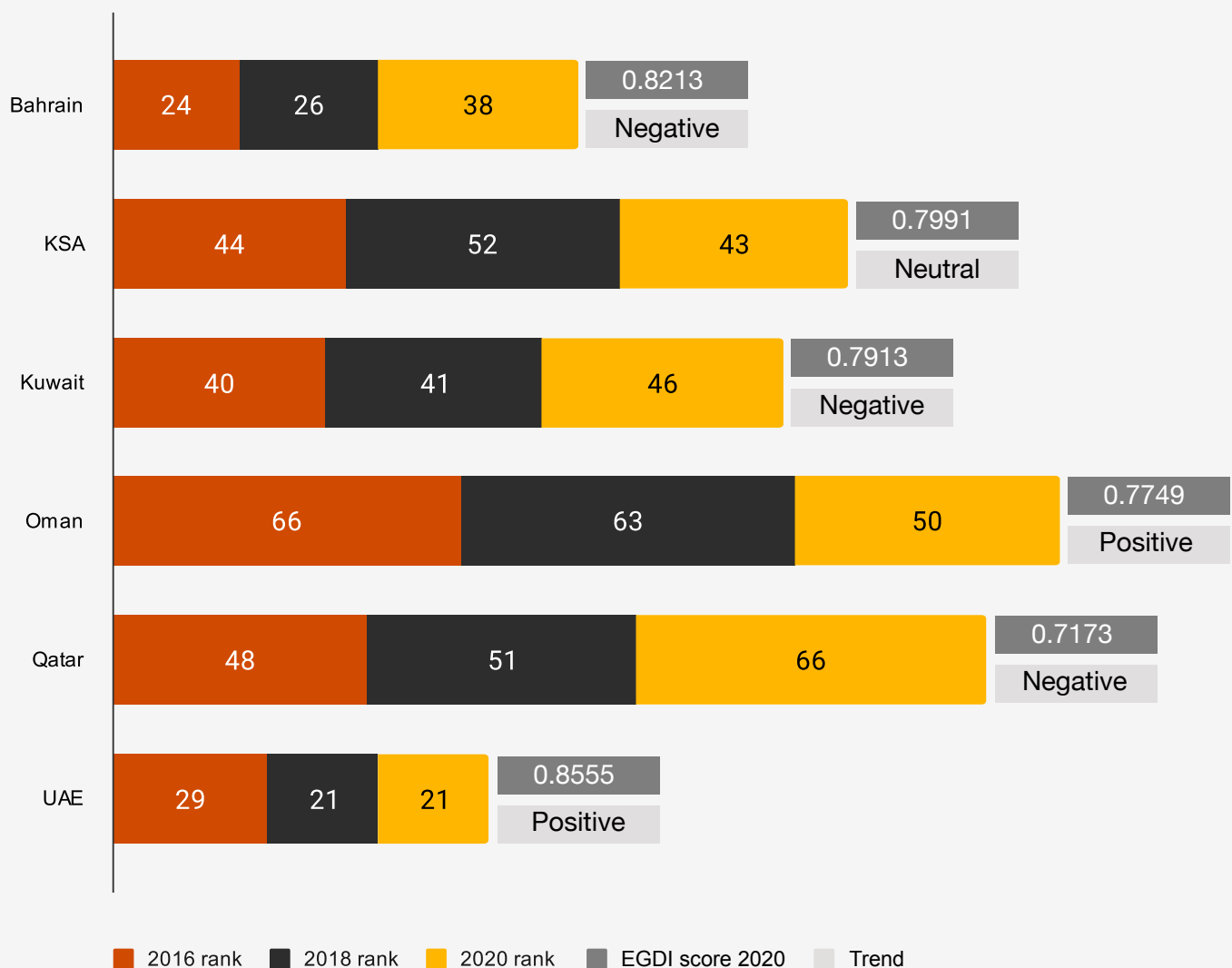
Digital Government – Spotlight on the GCC

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries - Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain - have realised the importance of embracing digital government transformation and have already launched e-government initiatives as part of their national plans. Each of the GCC countries has developed a national digital strategy which is being used as a tool for public organisation reform, economic growth, and policy development.

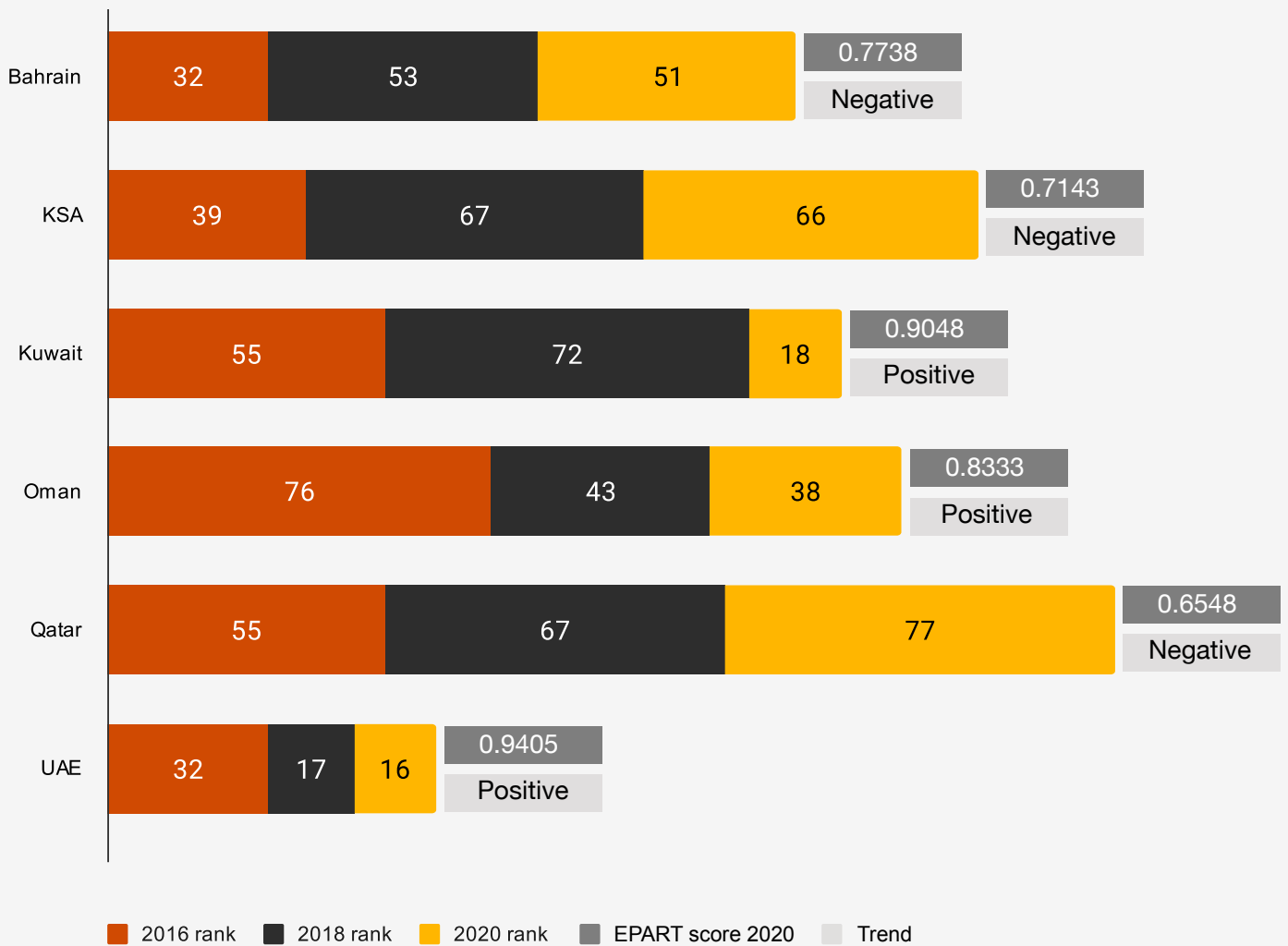
Many of the GCC nations have been making strides in digital government over recent years, in alignment with their national strategies such as the Qatar National Vision 2030 and KSA Vision 2030. Digital government maturity can be gauged through several international indices including the E-government Development Index and the E-participation Index. The E-government Development Index (EGDI) is a composite measure of three important dimensions of e-government, namely: provision of online services, telecommunication connectivity and human capacity, while the E-participation Index assesses the quality, relevance, and utility of government websites in providing online information and participatory services to their citizens.

Based on these two rankings, Oman and UAE emerge as the only two GCC nations to have improved across both indices. On the other hand, Bahrain and Qatar have both seen a decline in EGDI indices and E-participation rankings.

EGDI Ranking:

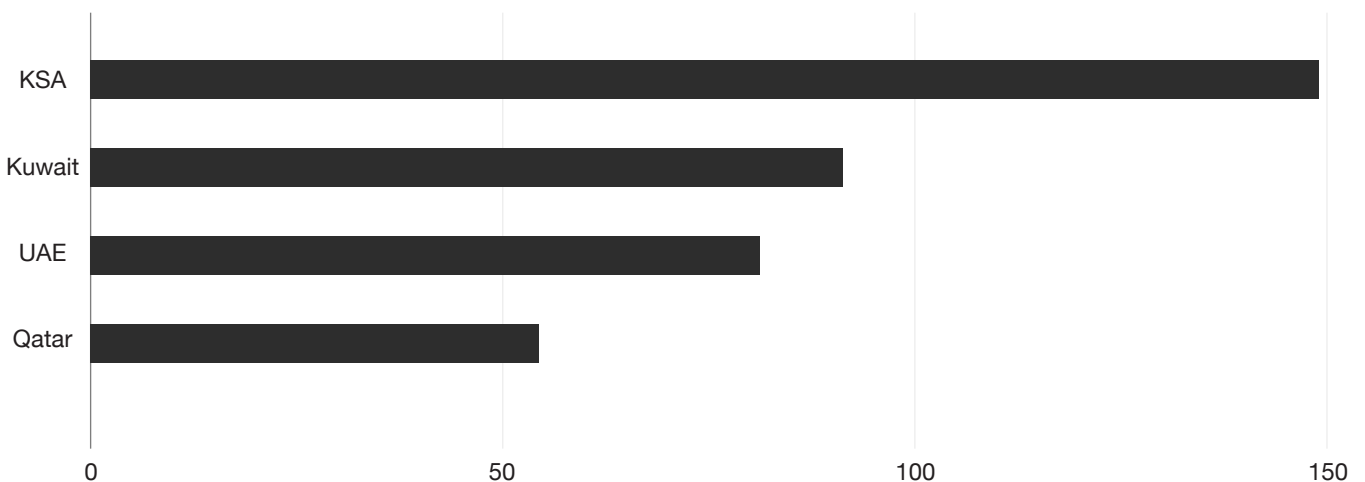


E-participation Ranking:



KSA has emerged as the top contender in the Digital Riser ranking by the European Centre for Digital Competitiveness. It has emerged not only as the top gainer across the G20 nations, but also among the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) group, gaining an increment of close to 150 in the 2020 rankings.

Points gained in 2020:





The State of Digital Government in the GCC



The various GCC countries have implemented different strategies and digital initiatives to realise their plans for economic diversification and more sustainable economic growth. They are at different levels of digital government maturity and at different stages of their digital transformation journeys. However, all of them have recognised the need to champion technological innovation across emerging technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence and digital twinning to support their economic development plans and tackle the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

KSA

The Kingdom has developed a three-part action plan, each of which was designed for a duration of 5 years:



Within the framework of these strategies, several programs and initiatives have been launched over the years to support and empower delivery of government services. These include:

01 GovX:

Leverages advanced tools, methods, and technologies to improve the end-user experience. This centre is divided into three compartments, namely the Digital Competencies Centre (develops digital capabilities to support digital transformation), the Digital Consulting Centre (supports digital transformation across government services), and the Digital Innovation Centre (enhances government agency’s work).

02 The Government Service Observatory (Marsad):

Uses KPIs to measure digital transformation and the maturity of digital services to ensure that they reach their full potential.

03 Measurement (Qiyas):

Assess the current state of digital transformation in government agencies and contribute to the development of digital government within the Kingdom.

To drive the evolution in digital government, KSA has established the Digital Government Authority to act as the regulator and advisor of digital government. The Digital Government Authority was established by a Council of Minister’s Resolution and aims to “regulate the work of digital government in government agencies, in order to reach a digital and proactive government capable of providing highly efficient digital services, and achieving integration in the field of digital government among all government agencies”.

The UAE has emerged as the frontrunner among the GCC member countries in terms of efforts towards digital transformation. The UAE Strategy for Government Services was issued in March 2021, with an aim to boost the country's competitiveness in the service sector and position it among the best in the world in rendering government services. The strategy will implement over 28 initiatives by 2023, which will enable the provision of advanced and efficient digital services to citizens from anywhere and around the clock.

UAE

Key goals of the strategy include:

- Providing 90 percent of public services through a single digital platform to enhance the government services' experience. The platform will be established by 2022 and is expected to raise customer satisfaction levels to over 90 per cent.
- Designing 100 percent proactive digital services that cater to public needs.
- Designing 100 percent services in partnership with all sectors of the community.
- Ensuring that, by 2023, 100 per cent of government services will be accessible from anywhere and round the clock.

At an Emirate level, the Abu Dhabi Digital Authority (ADDA) enables, supports, and delivers a digital government that is proactive, personalised, collaborative, and secure. In Dubai, Digital Dubai was established in June 2021 to develop and oversee the implementation of policies and strategies related to the emirate's IT, data, digital transformation, and cybersecurity.

Qatar

Envisioned in 2013, Qatar e-Government 2020 offered a blueprint for the country's one overarching vision - that "all individuals and businesses will benefit from connecting online with Qatar's more open and efficient government".

The strategy has three main objectives:

To better serve individuals and businesses by bringing 100 per cent of government services online and ensuring users can complete e-services end-to-end without any physical visits.

To create efficiency in government administration through automation of functions, state of the art applications, and a common ICT infrastructure that saves money, increases security, and enhances the user experience.

To develop a more open government with enhanced participation of citizens and residents in their government, and to offer greater access to data that will help spur innovation and help diversify Qatar's economy.

As part of Qatar e-Government 2020, over 1,200 digital services have been launched and over 40 entities now offer mobile applications for their services. Further, 100 per cent of common application and infrastructure projects were achieved - including the government data exchange platform project, the open data portal project, the government correspondence project (Tarasul), the human resources management project (Mawarid), the electronic registration and documentation service (Tawtheeq), the government network, electronic payment gateway, and the government contact centre.

Currently, a new strategy titled Qatar Digital Government 2026 is underway. The new strategy will focus on proactive service delivery to individuals based on data and AI systems that predict the actual needs of citizens. The strategy will also focus on transferring the infrastructure to local cloud computing to achieve scalability, cost-effectiveness, and harmonious governance



Oman

The e.Oman 2030 strategy aims to prepare the community, workforce, businesses, and the government for the impacts of technology and digitalisation. Its vision is to attain “leadership in digital transformation and innovation to boost the economy and the prosperity of the society”. The key goals include increasing the IT sector’s share of GDP, digitising all public services, creating digital technology jobs, fostering digital technology start-ups, and positioning Oman among the top 10 countries for cyber security and trust.

The e.Oman strategy is built on seven strategic pillars:



Inclusive Digital Society: Addressing the digital gap of disadvantaged citizens, promoting inclusion in the digital space, and facilitating e-participation



Digital Skills and Capabilities: Embedding technology in education curricula, building digital business skills, and building digital capabilities



Digitised Government: Digitising both government and public services



Digital Industry Growth: Driving entrepreneurial spirit, creating a digital marketplace, and promoting research & innovation



Standards & Compliance: Developing infrastructure and data architecture, developing digital laws and regulations, and complying with published architectural standards and specifications



Cyber Security: Implementing robust security and resilience, and activating security cooperation and alliances



Digital Infrastructure: Creating a ‘smart cities’ infrastructure, creating high-speed, high-density networking, and building a government services platform

Kuwait



The Kuwait Government Online portal was launched in 2012 and has seen monthly visits growing from 222,799 in January 2012 to over a million in January 2021. The portal lists both information and e-services for all Kuwaiti government agencies. The most frequently used e-services include inquiries on civil ID, utility payments, and appointments for foreign workers' check-ups.

Under Kuwait's 2035 vision, developing the technology infrastructure is one of the seven key pillars of the National Development Plan. This focuses on creation of IoT systems facilitated through the development of telecommunications.

Bahrain



Under the guidance of Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030 and the Government Action Plan 2019-2022, the Information & eGovernment authority has been instrumental in driving the digital aspirations of the Government of Bahrain to empower the public administration and enhance public service delivery.

The Economic Vision 2030 focuses on shaping the vision of the government, society, and the economy, based around three guiding principles; sustainability, fairness, and competitiveness. Following the launch of the Economic Vision 2030, the Economic Development Board (EDB) initiated an on-going programme of economic and institutional reform and coordinated with ministries to compile the first National Economic Strategy, which served as a roadmap to achieve the Vision.

Some of the vision's main strategic goals include:

- Government service transformation by encouraging innovation through participatory adoption of both matured and emerging technologies.
- Knowledge management and business intelligence through the dissemination of up-to-date and reliable information.
- ICT Management and Governance through the adoption of emerging and matured technologies facilitating the value for money.

GCC Digital Government Challenges



Although the GCC countries have made significant strides towards improving their digital maturity, they continue to face challenges across various areas of government.

01 Data Privacy & Protection

Around 81 per cent of organisations in the Gulf region find securing data as their biggest challenge during the digital transformation journey, based on the latest Gulf Business Machines (GBM) security survey. This is due, in part, to the fact that privacy-related provisions in these countries have not been drafted with the information age in mind. Laws designed primarily to protect privacy do not typically exist as laws in their own right, but rather as provisions within the context of other laws such as penal codes, medical conduct laws, credit disclosure laws and unfair business practices regulations.

02 Cyber-Security and The Threat of Cyber-Attacks

Despite relatively high rankings in the Global Cybersecurity Index (which assesses countries' commitment to cyber-security), cyber-attacks have remained common in the GCC member nations. These include the 2012 software attack faced by Saudi Aramco, which resulted in a significant interruption to the giant's IT infrastructure, and the 2019 attack on Bahrain's government portals including its National Security Agency, the Ministry of Interior and the Electrical and Water Authority. The GCC member nations face the challenge of setting up mechanisms for safeguarding against these threats in an ever-evolving cyber-security environment.

03 Organisation and Cultural Challenges

The digital transformation should be enabled by an agile and collaborative culture. The GCC member countries are taking active steps to change the government working culture of traditional operating models and relatively strict command and control practices. Nevertheless, challenges faced in moving to more agile and lean operating models has possibly slowed down digital government transformation. Although initiatives to digitise are being taken, there is often a lack of continuity in the progress of digital transformation initiatives and interruptions in this field are detrimental to progress, since technologies evolve rapidly.

04 Digital Skills Gaps

Several governments across the GCC face challenges with gaps in digital skills. In some countries, this is compensated for through partnerships with private entities. Government entities face challenges in improving the compensation of the workforce to account for increased responsibilities and workload demanded for digital transformation. Thus, there are challenges with acquiring, developing, and enhancing the technical capabilities and skills needed to drive digital transformation. Currently, the model relies a great deal on the expertise of external partners and subject matter experts. Since the turnover rate of resources with digital transformation skill sets is high and there are limited knowledge management and succession planning mechanisms in place, governments in the GCC countries face challenges both in acquiring and retaining the right skills to drive the digital agenda.

05 Societal factors

Rapid economic and social expansion has doubled the population of some GCC countries over the recent past and national citizens constitute only a minority of the population in Bahrain and UAE. This ethnic mix poses specific challenges to the inclusive delivery of public services, but it also challenges the public sector's capacity to design and implement innovations that give due consideration to specific context conditions. GCC countries also continue to face challenges regarding participation and inclusion of marginalised groups in social, economic, and political life which has translated into gaps in digital government service adoption and accessibility. (OECD, 2014)

The Way Forward

In GCC countries, digital government is now recognised as the path towards enabling national agendas, achieving economic diversification, and developing a more sustainable future. However, they continue to face several challenges with securing their data and digital infrastructure, developing the right policies and regulations for the digital age, and acquiring and retaining digital capabilities

Governments in GCC countries need to review their digital policies, legislations, and regulations to accelerate the transition to accessible e-government services. The digital regulation of the future must include an overarching policy to enable whole-of-government participation and drive a call to action for alignment with digital government strategic direction through policy focus areas aligned with strategic priorities.

Digital capacity building challenges need to be addressed through the right training programs across all levels of government. This cannot be done in silos across government agencies, but rather it needs to be directed and managed in a cohesive fashion that ensures all government agencies are equipped with the right skills and capacity to play their part in this whole-of-government approach.

Robust and clear governance is needed to foster trust in digital public services and alter the relationship with citizens. This involves educating GCC citizens on e-government initiation to ensure better participation and engagement.

There needs to be a holistic governance framework in place to ensure that the entire ecosystem is progressing towards national digitisation in a cohesive fashion, and to ensure that obstacles are carefully managed. In other words, there should be a consensus and understanding on the overarching objectives and goals of the digital transformation at the national level, and a robust governance to ensure that all government agencies progress towards these goals together. This must include a governance of the digital government platforms being developed and operated by different government agencies and their partners. This is to avoid a proliferation of multiple government platforms, which may introduce redundancies in service and duplications of effort as well as hinder progress towards an omnichannel approach and obstruct the transition to a seamless digital government.

Finally, focus should be placed on quality assurance, speed, agility, and adherence to service level agreements through an integrated customer management framework. Since many GCC government agencies are still in the early stages of their digitisation journeys, this provides a golden opportunity to design services with focus on the citizen through a well-designed digital service design process that spans across government agency boundaries and ensures that the needs of all ethnic, social, and political groups are considered.

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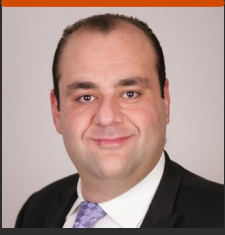
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