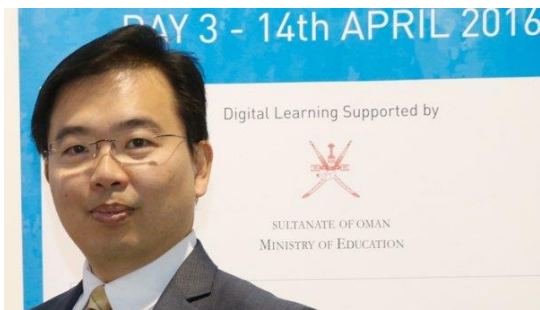# Smart cities concept in Oman can improve efficiency: Telecom official

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By ERIK PRINS/erik@timesofoman.com

Muscat: There is a lot of potential to improve efficiency in Oman by introducing the concept of smart cities, Darren Tong, chief operating officer of Telecom Oman said.

"Whatever it is what the city does, whether it's water management, waste management, traffic management or car parks, there's a lot of information out there about how things are wasted," he said. He noted that currently, this information is not being connected and not analysed. "If you do that, you can find means to improve," he said.

Tong explained that the concept of smart cities is all about reducing waste, improving time management and optimising human interactions. He said that exchanging ideas and knowledge can be made easier by improving connections between people.

"We are having trouble with meeting each other because we are stuck in traffic jams, have trouble connecting with each other because servers are down.

Also, smart technologies can help reduce waste of electricity and water. We are wasting energy because every room has an air condition while not all rooms are occupied," he said. "Since water in Oman is desalinated and there is no electronic monitoring with electronic meters, when the water leaks, it just flows away and is wasted," he said.

He said that digitalisation would help here, by connecting sensors with 3G technologies and a data centre absorbing all the information. The information can then be analysed to find ways to optimise the process.

Tong said that city planners, developers and businesses should take the opportunity to improve efficiency to reach the goal of a smart city. "If you identify the needs and certain areas of inefficiency, as an entrepreneur we can go and address it," he said.

He said that Oman is in a starting stage of introducing smart cities. "Right now, nothing is connected, nothing is studied or analysed. The potential however, is to cut your energy costs by half," he said.

"Smart city is a way for Oman to participate in the digital economy, train its human resources and take advantage of using data to make government services more efficient."

He said that Telecom Oman, which is seeking a licence to operate as a third telecom operator in Oman, can provide the infrastructure to help stakeholders make this move towards more efficiency. He said that Telecom Oman is seeking to play a role in the development of Omagine, a new project where smart city technologies will be displayed. "This is where the technologies are showcased, tested and hopefully rolled out to the rest of the country. By 2020 we should be able to see a first version of a smart city here in Oman" he said.

He said that there is also potential for e-business to flourish in Oman.

"A lot of Omani's are still involved with brick-and-mortar. They like to visit shops and they like to feel and hold the product," he said. He noted that new technologies like data centres can help the industry to grow in Oman, by inviting big players in e-commerce to base their operations here.

Tong said that as a new telecom operator, it wants to be more than a provider offering phone calls and internet. "We want to be a catalyst in introducing new technologies and solutions to Oman," he said.

He added that Telecom Oman not only wants to provide the infrastructure like fibre optic or towers, but also provide the products and services on top of it, like apps, data centres.

"Whoever wants to set up a business somewhere, we can do the mobile phone service, internet and ERP and CRS systems and other services, while the entrepreneur can focus on what he is good at," he said.

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