



Challenges in Developing Citizen-Centric E-Governance in India

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ABSTRACT

India is passing through a phase, where tremendous changes are taking place both in the corporate sector as well as in government space. The changes are far reaching and the citizen is deeply impacted. New horizons of economic growth and prosperity are opening up and tremendous opportunities are unfolding from which business world as well as governments can benefit. Along with these opportunities, new sets of challenges have arisen. It is time for the decision makers in India to start preparing to meet these challenges.

Keywords: Corporate sector, economic growth, government

1. Introduction

Global shifts towards increased deployment of IT by governments emerged in the nineties, with the advent of the World Wide Web. The technology as well as e-governance initiatives (Heeks & Richard, 2006) have come a long way since then. With the increase in Internet and mobile connections, the citizens are learning to exploit their new mode of access in wide ranging ways. They have started expecting more and more information and services online from governments and corporate organizations to further their civic, professional and personal lives, thus creating abundant evidence that the new “e-citizenship” is taking hold. The concept of e-governance has its origins in India during the seventies with a focus on development of in-house government applications in the areas of defense, economic monitoring, planning and the deployment of IT to manage data intensive functions related to elections, census, tax administration etc. The efforts of the National Informatics Center (NIC) to connect all the district headquarters during the eighties was a very significant development. From the early nineties, IT technologies were supplemented by ICT technologies to extend its use for wider sectoral applications with policy emphasis on reaching out to rural areas and taking in greater inputs from NGOs and private sector as well.

There has been an increasing involvement of international donor agencies under the framework of e-governance for development to catalyze the development of e-governance laws and technologies in developing countries. While the emphasis has been primarily on automation and computerization, state governments have also endeavored to use ICT tools into connectivity, networking, setting up systems for processing information and delivering services. At a micro level, this has ranged from IT automation in individual departments, electronic file handling and workflow systems, access to entitlements, public grievance systems, service delivery for high volume routine transactions such as payment of bills, tax dues to meeting poverty alleviation goals through the promotion of entrepreneurial models and provision of

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market information. The thrust has varied across initiatives, with some focusing on enabling the citizen-state interface for various government services, and others focusing on bettering livelihoods. Every State Government has taken the initiative to form an IT task force to outline IT policy document for the state and the citizen charters have started appearing on govt. websites. For governments, the more overt motivation to shift from manual processes to IT-enabled processes may be increased efficiency in administration and service delivery, but this shift can be conceived as a worthwhile investment with potential for returns.

2. Mapping E-government

E-government (E-gov) is a function of four variables: governance (G), information and communication technology (ICT), business process re-engineering (BPR) and e-citizen (EC). It can be stated as an equation, which may be called the first e-government fundamental equation, thus:

$$E\text{-gov} = f(G, ICT, BPR, E\text{-C}) \dots (1)$$

where E-gov = E-government, f = Function, G = Governance, ICT = Information and Communication Technology, BPR = Business Process Re-engineering, and E-C = Electronic Citizen. The four independent variables - G, ICT, BPR, E-C, require elaboration. There cannot be any e government (e-gov) without good governance, sound information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure support, a critical examination of existing administrative procedures followed by appropriate administrative reforms, here designated as business process re-engineering (BPR) and, finally, meeting the needs of e-citizen, a citizen who seeks public service delivery and interacts with state online, a citizen of the virtual state and a member of emerging e-society. The e-government function is not any free floating function in cyber space. It has a definite objective: to transform government. This objective is based on two basic premises: first, current government functioning, as exhibited by its public service delivery, is far from satisfactory. And, secondly, government can perform better, aided by the existing and emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs). In this conceptualization, therefore, e-government is transformation, from giving rise to the second e-government fundamental equation, thus:

$$E\text{-gov} = T\text{-gov} \dots (2)$$

This conceptualization of e-government gives rise to four important corollaries, namely, first e government is an intermediary stage for transforming government. Thus e government is not an end in itself but a means for reaching an end. Secondly, e-government must aim at government transformation failing which its full potential will continue to remain unrealized. Thirdly, any e-government attempt must be based on administrative reforms, failing which the e-government attempt may not give desired results. And lastly, e-government should strive to reach the ultimate stage, still eluding the developing countries, when e-government becomes synonymous with government.

3. The Transformation Process of E government

The transformed government (t-gov) has two stages: 1. The process of transformation, and 2. The end result of transformation or the stage of transformed government (t-gov). In the second stage e-government becomes synonymous with government giving rise to the third e-government fundamental equation, thus:

$$E\text{-gov} = \text{Gov} \dots (3)$$

where E-gov=E-government and Gov=Government. Equations (1), (2) and (3) taken together map e-government space and help us in developing a definition of e-government.

4. Issues and challenges in developing citizen-centric governance

- The expectations of public from the Government are very high. Delivery of services has to be highly efficient to meet these expectations and the use of technology for delivery is inevitable. Traditional methods of delivery of services will no longer suffice. Investment decision for roping in technology have to be made on the basis of resultant efficiency of services. e-Governance can not happen until we are able to bring in paradigm shift in the attitude and mind-set of government functionaries. Shifting of focus from regimented processes to 'Citizen Centric Governance' involves a real transfer of power from the government officials to the common man. So it is important that the challenge of bringing about this change in the mind-set of the government officers is met head on.
- Lot of efforts have been made to bring in technology. Yet, the net result is hardly commensurate with the effort. Partly it is due to the old mind set of our old official system and this needs to be changed quickly.
- Technology is but one tool to usher in change. On its own, ICT can do little to improve the lot of the common man. However, with pro-active governance, ICT can become a very powerful agent of change. All that is needed is keen desire to re-work government processes and objectives to suit the requirements of the citizens. The common man now-a-days is fully ready to adapt to fast changing technologies and the excuses "citizen is not ready for change" is no longer available to governments which do not want to change. Radical change is needed in the way governments address the problems of the citizens.
- The first step towards 'Citizen Centric Governance' would be analysis of the requirements and understanding the need of the citizens. Similar to research activities taken by Corporate sectors to understand the needs of customers across different categories of age groups, gender, income etc, Government should undertake studies to understand citizen requirements. This will help in proper designing and positioning of 'services' thereby increasing usage of e-services by the citizens.
- The analysis of the requirement of the citizen should not be at variance with the expectation of the citizens. Citizen looks forward for a one stop solution from the government that can be accessed easily for getting a desired government service. Currently he has to run from pillar to post even for the simple activity of filing an application form and has to approach multiple government agencies for application processing. There is a need for 'Integrated Service Delivery' mechanisms cutting across boundaries between departments and organizations that can be accessed easily by the citizens. There is a need to develop a common vision and a common objective oriented action plan. This can provide a common implementation framework for e-Governance.
- The government should look at providing a 'single window' means for delivery of multiple citizen services. Probably, the best approach would be to encourage citizens to avail e-services from the citizen-portal. The Common Services Centers (CSC) scheme of the Government is a step in the right direction with increased access of ICT infrastructure to the citizens. We should be able to design a delivery mechanism which provides easy and affordable access to a host of most needed services at the citizen-portal. This will motivate the citizens to use such means and also build the common man's confidence in the delivery system for public services. It is important that the system adds value for the citizen in terms of saving time, avoiding delays and eliminating harassment. The system can thus pave the way for a good quality of life for all citizens. This will boost the productivity of the country as a whole.
- Service excellence has been a long held goal for the private sector and increasingly, in the government sector for many countries. With the introduction of online services in recent years by governments around the world, the provision of excellence in e-Governance services is becoming an equally sought after goal. The measurement of e-Governance quality is addressed here with particular reference to India, a country with a population of approximately one billion people,

- where a high standard of e-Governance provision can be expected to have a positive impact on a very large number of people. Global best practices must be analyzed and adopted in this regard.
- It is important to create an enabling environment and atmosphere to conceptualize, design, develop, implement and adopt the best e-Governance solutions. Capacity building initiatives will be required for the necessary change in attitude as well as management of change, consequent to re-working of processes and systems. It will also be important for the governments to adopt scientific means for evaluation of such measures. Learnings are available globally for such evaluation. There are examples of Government Departments adopting a very business-like evaluation process for assessing the impact of e-Governance measures. United States has adopted an "American Customer Satisfaction Index", a uniform, national cross-industry measure of satisfaction for the quality of goods and services available in the United States both in the corporate and public sector. A number of Federal Government Agencies use this Index for evaluation of hundreds of services and programmes. Similarly, the Singapore Government uses a 'Citizen Satisfaction Index' to gauge the effectiveness of its policies and plans. The Governments in India need to work out similar systems for a very professional and business-like approach to the business of governing people.
 - Successful e-governance initiatives can never be taken in haste. Particularly for the democratic nation of the billion people like India, Governance should enable seamless access to information and seamless flow of information across the state and central government in the federal setup. No country has so far implemented an e-governance system for one billion people. Some of the requirements for implementing successful e- governance across the nation are :
 - E-Governance framework across the nation with enough bandwidth to service a population of one billion.
 - Connectivity framework for making the services reach rural areas of the country or development of alternative means of services such as e-governance kiosks in regional languages.
 - National Citizen database which is the primary unit of data for all governance vertical and horizontal applications across the state and central governments.
 - E-governance and interoperability standards for the exchange of secure information with non-repudiation, across the state and central government departments seamlessly.
 - A secure delivery framework by means of virtual private network connecting across the state and central government departments.
 - Datacenters in centre and states to handle the departmental workflow automation, collaboration, interaction, exchange of information with authentication.

For success of an e-governance project and superior service delivery, it is imperative that the government agency focuses on whole citizen experience. Focusing on the citizen is essential for long term success. The govt. agency needs to integrate information from all points of citizen interaction. The overall architecture for e-Governance needs to ensure that the architecture components are extensible and scalable to adapt to the changing environments. The e-Governance (Misra, 2006) applications that are emerging as islands of successes have to be interoperable.

5. Concluding Remarks

India has a unique responsibility as a nation in transition from "developing" to "developed" economy. We are the role model for a number of countries and it is our responsibility as a nation to be the thought leaders for transforming governance to 'e-Governance' and further on to 'i-Governance'. The Indian Central, State and Local Governments will rise to the occasion and very soon our vision of effective 'Citizen Centric Governance' will be realized across the country.

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