

E-Governance: The mantra for future governance

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Abstract

With the emergence of more informed and technology friendly civil society, citizens are becoming better aware of their rights and they expect the government to perform and deliver more efficiently as a result of which the entire concept of governance has changed. Government has to be now not only transparent and efficient but also accountable to citizens for its conduct. In achieving good governance, ICT (information and technology) tool are bound to play a crucial role. With good ICT support, it is realized that e-Governance is the next logical step in systems of governance in order to ensure larger contribution and deeper involvement of citizens, institutions, businesses and the private players in the decision making process. This paper seeks to understand the concept of e-Governance, identify the challenges and suggest suitable measures to overcome those challenges.

Keywords: G2G, G2C, G2B, NeGP

1. Introduction

In India, e-Governance first came into existence in 1970's with the emphasis on formulating in house application for use in defence services, election work and census. Initially attention was only on automation of back end operations. Gradually, the focus shifted to creating a two way interaction between the entities. Now a days, the term is extensively used. According to the World Bank ^[1], "E-Governance refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as wide area networks, the internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens (G2C), businesses (G2B), and other arms of government (G2G). These technologies can serve a variety of different ends:

- better delivery of government services to citizens,
- improved interactions with business and industry,
- citizen empowerment through access to information,
- And more efficient government management.

The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions."

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the meaning and scope of e-Governance.
2. To study the various government initiatives to promote e-Governance.
3. To identify the various challenges faced in the implementation of e-Governance initiatives.
4. To suggest various measures to overcome the challenges and to spread the benefits of e-Governance to larger sections of society.

3. Types of Interactions in E-Governance

Governance requires interaction between different participants in governance. These interfaces may be described as follows:

1. **G2G (Government to Government):** This involves the interaction within and between various government entities. The aim is not only to achieve the automation of government services but also to ensure sharing of information between government agencies both vertically and horizontally. G2G helps governments at various level to interact with each other i.e. government at various levels can coordinate not only with each other but also with central government. G2G will help to bring the integration between the services offered at various levels of government.
2. **G2C (Government to Citizens):** In G2C there is a two way interaction between the government and citizens. People can access all the public services digitally instead of actually visiting the office. This provides the citizens choice to communicate with the government any time, anyday, as amenities are available (24*7). This type of interface focusses on making all the public services citizen centric and citizen friendly.

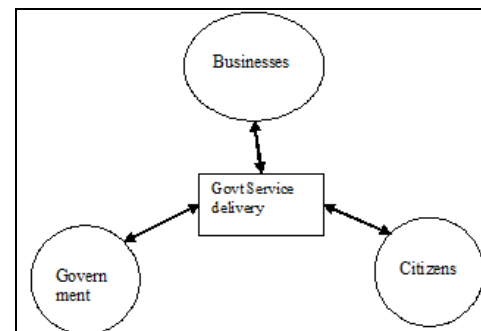


Fig 1: E-Governance Target Agents

¹ Source: (<http://go.worldbank.org>)

3. **G2B (Government to Business):** In this type of governance there is an interface between the government and business entities. G2B helps the business in performing various activities like obtaining licences, permits, filing online returns, submitting documents by the company to ROC (Registrar of Companies) online without being struck in red tapism and bureaucracy. This ultimately results in savings in cost and time and creates a more congenial environment for a business to flourish.

4. Benefits of E-Governance

E-Governance is transforming the way governance is done. It will lead to the following benefits:

- a) **Availability of Appropriate and Timely Services for Citizens:** The focus is on providing appropriate and reliable services to citizens on all the aspects relating to governance. The initial phase involves making the information available online like forms, rules, instructions, reports etc. Once the citizens get comfortable using the information, the next step is to move to an interactive phase wherein the citizens can get all the work done digitally. This will result in huge savings in time, effort and money. Also the citizens enjoy the convenience of interaction with the concerned entity 24*7. The ultimate objective of e-Governance is to achieve complete digitization of all the public services.
- b) **Greater Transparency and Answerability in the Governance:** Application of ICT to governance along with streamlining of complicated administrative processes would result in simplification of the system. Unnecessary duplication and redundant steps will be removed, which will further improve the efficiency. Effectiveness in operations will be the new parameter on which governments will be rated. This in turn will make governments more accountable
- c) **Expanded Reach of Governance:** Wider penetration of smart phones, better internet connectivity, improved computer literacy have already crafted a base for e-Governance. By adopting e-Governance in the current scenario, the public services can be made available in the remotest areas and at the doorsteps of citizens. This would facilitate greater involvement of people in the governance process.

5. Government Initiatives

Setting up of Department of Electronics in 1970 was the first step taken by the government in this direction. The National Informatics Centre (NIC) set up in 1977 brought the focus on potential of information and its communication. In the initial years, owing to high cost of computers very few organization had them. However, with the launch of personal computers, cost went down and many government departments started using them. Though the usage was limited to word processing and data entry. Gradually organization started using computers for maintaining database, payrolls, generating reports and preparing accounts.

However, the major push to e-Governance was provided by the launch of NICNET in 1987 – the National Satellite-Based computer network. To achieve penetration at the district level, District Information System under the aegis of National

Informatics Centre was launched to computerize all district offices in the country. NICNET was extended via the State capitals to all district headquarters by 1990.

In the early 1990's with better internet connectivity, deeper telephone penetration, large number of e-governance projects were initiated both at the central and state level. A National Task Force on Information Technology and Software Development was constituted in May 1998. With the recognition of information technology as a frontier area of knowledge, government focused on utilizing it as an enabling tool for assimilating and processing all other spheres of knowledge. In 1999, the Union Ministry of Information Technology was created. Later in 2000, a 12-point minimum agenda for e-Governance was identified by Government of India for implementation in all the Union Government Ministries and Departments. To achieve extensive and wider e-Governance, National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) was launched by the government in 2006, comprising 27 mission mode projects. In 2011, 4 projects - Health, Education, Public Distribution System and Posts were added increasing the number to 31. The NeG plan is not a term plan, it is a long term plan with an aim to achieve highest level of e-Governance across the country.

6. E-Governance: Challenges

Though the government is making lot of effort to enhance the reach the e-governance initiatives but is still it's a long way to go. This may largely be due to the following reasons:

- a) **Lack of Understanding of Potential of E-Governance:** In India, though majority people have become computer literate but they still prefer to use computers for word processing and data entry only. For doing transaction they still rely on traditional way of visiting the office. This is because of lack of awareness regarding benefits of e-Governance. Even the administration is not fully prepared to roll out e-Governance on large scale. The systems, processes needs to restructured to remove the technical glitches.
- b) **Lack of Synchronization between Government Departments and Application Developers:** Before designing any application/software for e-Governance project, there has to be proper consensus amongst the government department and the agency developing it as to its specifications and what it is intended to achieve. But majority of government officials are not very enthusiastic and don't contribute much, which results in a variance between the solution developed and requirements of the e-Governance scheme.
- c) **Resistance to Restructuring Administrative Procedures:** Successful execution of e-Governance projects requires streamlining systems and processes, redesigning infrastructure, changing work culture, enhancing the skill set of personnel at all levels in the departments. This is difficult to achieve due to lot of resistance and lack of willingness on the part of existing staff to reorient themselves. This derails the entire process and intended results are not achieved.
- d) **Lack of Integration of Services:** There is lack of integration between e-Governance facilities offered by various state and central governments. Also, there is lack

of synchronization between various initiatives with in the state. As a result, a citizen has to go through multiple and often duplicating steps for completing the process. This discourages the citizens from adopting e-Governance initiatives.

- e) **Recruitment of Key Persons:** E Governance projects requires highly trained and motivated personnel. Recruiting such key personnel is another challenge.
- f) **Underutilization of Existing ICT Infrastructure:** Computers are still used in government offices and institutions for only word processing and data processing. The computers are still not very widely used for data mining and managerial decision making. This underutilisation of resources may be due to lack of awareness or lack of appropriate application software to use the hardware. This underutilisation is a big hindrance in the implementation of e-Governance.
- g) **Need of Unique Identifier:** India has huge population. Though it is an asset to the country but this poses a huge challenge in the form of creating unique identity for every Indian national. Still there is no unique identity of a person in India. But now government is trying to incorporate Aadhaar card as the unique identity identifier for every Indian citizen. Government is trying to link everything right from mobile number, bank account, PAN number to Aadhaar. But it still requires lot of time before Aadhaar become s single access point for all digital as well as non digital transactions.
- h) **Diversity in Languages Spoken:** In India, there is a lot of diversity in the languages spoken. Every region has a specific language. The real challenge in successful and wide application of e-Governance is implementing the initiative in not only Hindi and English but also in various regional languages.
- i) **Geographical Dispersion:** India is a very vast country. It is difficult to achieve ICT penetration in remote areas. Strong infrastructure in the form of electricity, computer networks and updated technology are prerequisite for any e-Governance initiative to be successful.

7. Vision for Future

There is a need to focus all efforts on not only developing but also sustaining succesful implemtation of e-Governance projects and deliver best e-services to citizens. This will require long and focused effort. Some of the necessities for achieving successful e-Governance across the nation are:

- a. **Partnerships:** In a country like India, it is considered as the government's responsibility to push infrastructural and other national importance projects like e-Governance. However, government alone cannot carry out this mammoth task owing to resource and time constraint. Other players who are better equipped in terms of money and other resources have to contribute to its effective implementation. The onus of creating basic infrastructure may lie on the government but other players will have to take the responsibility of furthering this infrastructe with requisite hardware and software. There are several types of e-Governance projects that can be run in the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode. In all such cases (PPP) should be the preferred mode.

- b. **Creating a Congenial Environment:** Creating a e-governance friendly environment is an essential for its effective execution. This should be achieved by:

1. **Overcoming Resistance to Change:** It's the human nature to resist change. After getting used to certain methods, systems and procedures, there is resistance in adopting new skills and processes. A strong and dedicated effort is required from within the government itself to switch to digital mode.
 2. **Political Backing:** The implementation of e-Governance requires lot of restructuring of not only administration processes but also the change in the mindset of officials. It also requires enormous infrastructural and financial support which will not be possible without the undiluted support at the highest political level.
- c. **Checking e-Readiness at the Central and State level:** The extent of development of e-Governance among the different states is of varying grades A few states have implemented these initiatives extensively whereas a few are yet to start with any initiative. So there is no single framework that can be uniformly applied at the state as well as central level. Therefore an e-Readiness exercise should be carried at all levels to assess the level of acceptance of e-Governance initiatives.
 - d. **Maintaining Database of all the E-governance Schemes at the National Level:** Building a National database of all the e-Governance projects will enable the organization planning an e-Governance scheme to check from the database whether such or similar project has already been carried out anywhere in India. This will enable the intending implementers to modify the existing available application to suit their requirement. This saves the effort of designing from a scratch. Also the executors will be better able to identify and remove the problems which earlier implementors faced. All this translates into better and improved quality of e-services.
 - e. **Expanding Connectivity:** The other area which requires immediate attention is achieving sufficient infrastructure either through opening of dedicated service centres in villages or empowering village panchayats so that the services are accessible even in the remotest areas.

8. Conclusion

Successful implementation and achieving maximum penetration of e-Governance requires much more than computerization of back end operations. It requires restructuring of administrative processes, change in work culture, and dedicated effort on the part of executives and politicians. Every stakeholder be it citizens, businesses, government, politicians, officials has to play an active role in switching from traditional paper culture to digital culture. This cannot happen overnight. It will require dedicated and focused effort to transform the old existing processes to new computerized processes. The required transformation is going to face lot of resistance. The challenge lies in not only in overcoming resistance but also creating enthusiasm and desire across all sections of society to bring a culture of e-governance.

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