Performance analysis of e-governance: An implementing transition

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Abstract

Government in any economy aims at public welfare ultimately. Many programmes and policies have been designed and implemented in this direction. Many research conducted in this direction proves the fact that, policies and programmes have been designed with genuine objectives have miserably failed to bring in the intended results to the ultimate beneficiary. There appears to be a huge gap in designing and implementing those policies effectively. Added to the fact, that information technology revolution witnessed in India, has helped the government in reaching the masses effectively and helped in significantly contributing to the achievement of good governance goals. This paper highlights the role and impact of information and communication technologies (ICT's) in imparting government policies and making governance more efficient and effective in bringing ultimate benefits to the citizens to the country. E-governance promises plethora of benefits, which can be classified into three broad heads. First, it helps in improving the government process, second, it facilitates in easy connect with the beneficiaries and lastly, builds effective external interactions.

All underdeveloped countries, including India, faces two major challenges. First, e-readiness (which is the strategic challenge). Preparing the ground for six identified preconditions for effectively implementing e-governance. Second, closing design (which is the tactical challenge) adopting best practice in e-governance projects in order to avoid failure and to achieve success. Uneven growth and development, achieved across the country, has further impedes the uniform implementation of government policies through help of information and communication technology tools. Hence numerous challenges encountered in managing e-governance projects in India are discussed in this paper. Though information technology is very familiar to India from almost four decades, a paradigm shift has taken place in the recent past from information technology to information and communication technology, from information technology to information system. This new system aims at supporting and transforming the external workings of governance by processing and communicating data, through computer networking from intranets to internet – bringing about digital connections and digital transformations in reducing the time usage in diffusing the benefit to the ultimate beneficiary.

Key words: E-governance, Information technology, Information systems, Digital revolution.

Introduction:

Electronic governance, which is popularly called as e-governance, deals with using information and communication technologies to providing the beneficiaries with more convenient access to the government services. In simple words e-governance involves using ICT, especially the internet to improve the delivery of government services to citizens, businesses and government agencies. Though every time, e-governance is much related to government or public sector, one shouldn't mistake it only for public sector. It equally involves and incorporates even private sector as well. Using of information technology not only promises faster delivery of services, but more importantly brings about transparency between the government and the beneficiary. But the

major challenge, which is faced in underdeveloped countries, is low literacy rate and low computer literacy impedes the implementation. As per 2011 census, the literacy rate of India is 74%. This means a whopping 26% of the population still donot know how to read and write. Out of 74% literates also less percentage of people are well versed with using computers in accessing government services. Aggravating the problem further, 22% of the total population in India, lives below poverty line, making it extremely difficult for the government to provide its services to such targeted groups through the means of internet. The public service delivery system in the developing nations costs too much, delivers too little, and is not sufficiently responsive or accountable. Good governance reforms aim to revamp this delivery system. As a result, the focus shifts from simply automating the government to connect it with the larger community in the form of e-citizens, e-services and e-society. E-Governance offers new solutions, helping improve government processes, connect citizens, and build interactions with and within civil society. The E-governance becomes more feasible, adaptable with the probability of real time processing to make the policies work in a better with a higher quality standard. More and more governments around the world have implemented and introduced e-government systems as a means of reducing costs, improving services, saving time and increasing effectiveness and efficiency in the public sector. E-government and Internet has made an essential change in the whole society structure, values, culture and the ways of conducting business by utilizing the potential of ICT as a tool in the daily work. Governments have different strategies to build e-government. Some have created comprehensive long-term plans. Others have opted to identify just a few key areas as the focus of early projects. In all cases, however, the countries identified as most successful have begun with smaller projects in phases on which to build a structure.

Implementing e-governance model in public sector

Layne & Lee Study has prescribed a four stage e-governance model to help public administrators think about e-governance and their organizations. They call it a four stage e-governance development and propose a 'stages of growth' model for fully functional e-Governance. They are:

Stage 1: Cataloguing: In stage one of cataloguing, initial efforts of state governments are focused on establishing an on-line presence for the government.

Stage 2: Transaction: In the transaction stage, e-Government initiatives will focus on connecting the internal government system to on-line interfaces and allowing citizens to transact with government electronically.

Stage 3: Vertical integration: Vertical integration refers to local, state and federal governments connected for different functions or services of government.

Stage 4: Horizontal integration: Horizontal integration is defined as integration across different functions and services. In defining the stages of e-government development, the vertical integration across different levels within similar functionality is posited to precede the horizontal integration across different functions.

Benefits of adopting e-governance model:

Benefits and advantages of e-governance are same for both developed and developing countries. However, e-governance applications have many benefits for citizens, business and government entities.

- It allows people, businesses, and government sectors to access to available government information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, which improves the quality of these services.

- Documentation and record maintenance is very easy. With the advent of information technology, managing any voluminous data is easy.
- The system will reduce cost and levels of organizational processes by streamlining and re-organizing operating procedures.
- Historical information about a policy, its beneficiary could be easily maintained. And such information will be available on finger tips with help of modern gadgets. Improves efficiency of government agencies in processing of data.
- Manual maintaining of information always had a threat of losing the correct information. But since this information will be stored in servers or cloud, retrieving information is possible and easy.
- It has great benefits regarding economizing and improving the government service operations, including efficiency, reduced transactional costs, increase the transparency and increased services for citizens.
- It will improve the performance of government agencies and that it will deliver the public service effectively and efficiently for all customers.
- It creates new business and work opportunities for the literates.
- E-governance improves services through better understanding of user's requirements, thus aiming for seamless online services.
- Inter governmental sharing of information is easily as they could build one mega data base to save information.
- The system undoubtedly improves transparency, accuracy and facilitating information transforming between government and customers.
- Helps in building trust between governments and citizens, an essential factor in good governance by using internet-based strategies to involve citizens in the policy process, illustrating government transparency and accountability.
- It concentrates on bridging the gap, customizing the offerings and creating a demand driven environment to improve the quality of the service an government department. Rather than quantity, quality of service is more important.

Difficulties encountered in implementing E-governance

There are many challenges in India, which impedes the implementation of e-governance in an effective and efficient manner. Existence of poverty and poor infrastructure are the major challenges, which stops the country in reaping the full benefits of e-governance.

The various barriers can be enumerated as follows:

1. Language Dominance: The dominance of English on the internet constrains the access of non-English speaking population. In the case of India, 75 percent of the population does not speak English. Due to such overwhelming dominance of English over these communication channels, computers and the internet are quite useless in Indian villages.

2. Unawareness: There is general lack of awareness regarding the benefits of E-Governance as well as the process involved in implementing successful projects. Many donot know, how to access it, though it is available.

3. Technical illiteracy: There is general lack of technical literacy as well as literacy in countries like India. Even so called educated refrain from using internet, because of difficulties associated with it. One would prefer to go to electricity office personally to pay the electricity bill rather than linking his bank account with some application and using it to pay the bill. Several frauds happening around, apprehends the use of internet.

4. Poverty: Accessing Internet is a costly affair for the poor who struggle for their livelihood in developing countries like India. As stated earlier, 22% of the total population in India, lives below poverty line. This magnanimous number of indicates that almost 26 crore people struggling hard to find one square meal a day. Expecting them to use internet to avail benefits is not right.

5.   Lack of Privacy and Security: Online availability of information poses a great threat to safeguard personal information, maintaining confidentiality about a person. Protecting all information and systems against unauthorized disclosure of information, impersonation and altering data is very difficult.

5. Infrastructure: Lack of necessary infrastructure like electricity, internet, technology and ways of communications will affect the speed which delays the implementation. Even now, there are many villages in the country, which donot have electricity connection. Especially, many rural hinter land have been denied giving those fundamental facilities. These issues have been politicized. Rather than doing positive politics, people aim at their vote banks.

6. Inequality: Inequality in gaining access to public sector services between various sections of citizens, especially between urban and rural communities, between the educated and illiterate, and between the rich and poor. Many a times, access to these information is limited to a particular section of the society than available to the entire masses.

7. Impediments for the Re-Engineering process: Implementation of E-Governance projects requires lot of restructuring in administrative processes, redefining of administrative procedures and formats which finds the resistance in almost all the departments at all the levels. The purpose of e-governance is not only the conversion of traditional information into bits and bytes and making it reachable via the internet websites or giving government officials computers or automating old practices to an electronic platform. But it also calls for rethinking the ways the government functions are carried out today in order to improve processes and integration.

8. Lack of support from the top management: support and promise from the top leaders to accept and adopt e-governance policies act as a main driving force in implementing these projects. Lack of proper training, co-operation and co-ordination between different stake holders hampers the successful implementation of the scheme.

9. Mind blocks and Resistance to Change: Many public sector employees have posed greater resistance to undergo training programmes as they fear of losing jobs. Employees who are on the verge of their retirement or have put in many years of service are reluctant to switch over.

10. Financial barriers: high cost involved in buying computers, software maintenance, training programmes, skill development projects, maintaining servers, its periodical maintenance, availability of back of power all these involves huge expenses. The public sector would be of course not willing to spend so much money because of budgetary constraints. These departments function with an allotted budget. Hence Upgradation with allotted budget is difficult.

Suggestions to improve the performance of e-governance system in India

It is quite observed that government agencies have not delivered, what was expected from them. Rather than quantifying the issue, time has come when government agencies need to concentrate more on improving quality of their service. It is required to ensure smooth access of the services offered by the government agencies to all the beneficiaries. This is often referred as participatory governance. Further, beneficiaries need to be sensitized to enable them to use service features, pursue follow up and to provide their feedback to the concerned authorities to improve the performance. Bridging the gap, customizing the offerings and concentrating on

demand driven service are the core to improve the performance of e-governance. Some suggestions to improve the service quality in this direction are:

- Imparting proper training to the staff is very essential in successful implantation of a policy.
- Creating awareness about the availability and accessibility of information spells success.
- More importance must be given on maintaining the information eternally.
- Priority must be given to maintain the privacy and security of the personal information.
- Availability of internet is the core requirement of successful policy implantation. Hence, providing free wi-fi zones to consumers is essential.
- Lack of infrastructural facilities, impedes the use and success of e-governance schemes. Government must concentrate on improving them.
- Computer literacy, proper guiding the people in using the available service is quintessential.
- Government must allot more budgetary allowances to implement these projects.
- Reducing the information inequality, must be the mission of a government agency. Especially between urban and rural consumers.
- Any new schemes or project, will be opposed by the stake holders. Hence properly educating them about the benefits that they will reap is the key to implement such project successfully.
- Information diffusion must happen at a larger scale.

These suggestions will surely improve the performance of e-governance.

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