Volume-3, Issue-11, Nov Special Issue -2014 • ISSN No 2277 - 8160

Research Paper | Finance

Strategies for Effective Indian E-Governance Readiness

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ABSTRACT

The process of governance has been and is continuously impacted by the developments in various technologies. It brings down the cost, improves the process quality and makes a speedy reach to all the objects targeted. E-Governance is generally considered as a wider concept than e-Government, since it can bring about a change in the way how citizens relate to governments and to each other. The objective of e-Governance is to engage, enable and empower the citizen. E-Participation, e-Voting, e-Transparency, e-Accountability are some of the dimensions of e-Governance. It considers social, economic and environmental aspects in the decision making of its policies. E-Readiness is the ability to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to develop state's economy and to foster state's welfare. While e-readiness is a larger concept that measures a nation's comprising of citizens, businesses and government taking advantage of the digital revolution, it mainly relates to the processes involving the government transformation using the tools of ICT. E-readiness touches upon the state of all interfaces viz. G2G, G2B, B2B, B2C and C2C. This paper stretches its objectives for a critical review on the concept of e-Readiness in Governance with special focus to Indian E-Governance initiative. Some of the Indian projects for E-Readiness are analyzed to know its impact in the E-Governance implementation process. The main goal of this paper is to bring out concerns related to Effective E-Governance Readiness through the case studies.

KEYWORDS : E-Readiness, Information and Communication Technology, E-Governance, E-Governance Readiness

With technical revolution, it's easier for governments to be consistent and cordial relationship with citizens and public bodies. It's a strategic opportunity for governments to harness ICT to provide service excellence by increasing the efficiency of service and information delivery to citizens; build and strengthen links and cooperation between government; its citizens and stakeholders; realize operational and financial efficiencies; assist in community building and outreach; with an environment which encourages innovation.

Readiness is the degree to which a community or government is prepared to participate in the Networked World. It is gauged by assessing its relative advancement in the areas that are most critical for ICT adoption and the most important applications of ICTs. When considered together in context of strategic planning dialogue, an assessment based on these elements provides a robust portrayal of its Readiness. Government may be well poised for some applications of ICTs, but unable to use others. E-Readiness measures a state's capacity to participate in the digital economy. An e-Ready society is one that has the necessary physical infrastructure. It is a measure of the degree to which a country or economy may be ready, willing or prepared to obtain benefits which arise from the ICTs. The Economist Intelligence Unit's rankings are commonly used in defining a country's e-readiness as a measure of its digital participation. The rankings are based on assessing readiness along 4 fronts – policy, infrastructure, resources and usage.

This paper describes the known issues in E-Governance initiatives and gives some suggestions as best practices for a better implementation of the E-Governance based on weightage to some components in the framework with reference to some case studies in India being described below. The data for the case studies are obtained from the respective public agencies through applicable laws in India. This paper mainly focuses on the strategies for effective E-Governance Readiness as a case study methodology.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to J. Satyanarayana (2006), there are various models globally to implement the Electronic Governance in each sector. Hence for a clear understanding the steps for e-readiness and the various known issues are discussed below. It is necessary to look at three issues described below.

People readiness:

We can program processes but not people. People readiness has four stages of evolution viz. readiness to think, learn, act and transform.

Reform readiness:

Reform is triggered by the need to introduce new services and to provide the existing services in a new way to the citizens, in a manner that is convenient and cost effective from the citizen's viewpoint.

Back Vs Front End readiness:

The conflict between development of services, establishment of infrastructure and readying the people Vs the creation of a delivery channel policy, establishing service centres and portals needs a perfect plan which is back Vs front end readiness. In other words it's the design Vs implementation.

Obtaining e-readiness in governance requires a multi pronged effort which may be possible by a structured approach but it should overcome the issues stated above. The steps discussed above should overcome the above mentioned issues in e-Government Readiness. The Ministry of Information Technology under Indian Government has developed a model shown below to assess e-government readiness.

E-readiness Component	Weightage	E-readiness Sub components
Preparedness	15	Understanding of e-Government
		Importance of IT in the functioning of the department
Policy	20	IT Action Plan – Availability & Quality
		Adherence of IT Action Plan
		IT Spending
People	20	Computer literacy
		IT education & training
IT infrastructure	20	Hardware/Software Infrastructure
		Networking Infrastructure
		Web site Infrastructure

Processes	15	Business Process Reengineering
		Mode of Interaction
		Status of Automation & Integration
		Database maintenance
		Security
IT Benefits or Outcomes	10	Benefits
		Return on Investment
		Impact on Productivity

This model gives the measuring or assessing of several macro and micro indices across different state projects and agencies involved or implementing the E-Governance projects. This table gives an indication whether a state stands with regard to development of ICT sector and its usage. It is also observed that some of the sub components are specific to e-government and some to the e-commerce. It is possible to develop a different model adopting the above components with same weightage.

CASE STUDIES

E-Government initiatives are common in most countries including industrialized economies, emerging economies as well as developing economies. World Market Research Centre's *Global E-Government Survey list,* suggests that 196 countries are having e-Government initiatives. United Nation's *Benchmarking E-Government Survey* (UNPAN, 2001) lists 133 countries (Saxena, 2004).

India, one of the emerging economies and also one of the most populated countries of the world has also implemented many E-Governance projects. India through it National E-Governance Plan (NeGP) has setup many Mission Mode Projects (MMP) to develop the required infrastructure across India in the E-Governance implementation. Some of these projects are state owned and some or through private collaboration. According to the Indian Government, Public Private Partnership (PPP) or P3 is defined as a partnership between a public sector entity (sponsoring authority) and a private sector entity (a legal entity in which 51% or more of equity is with the private partner/s) for the creation and/or management of infrastructure for public purpose for a specified period of time (concession period) on commercial terms and in which the private partner has been procured through a transparent and open procurement system. The case studies below gives some of the initiatives in Indian E-Governance.

State Portal and State Service Delivery Gateway Scheme*:* State Service Delivery Gateway (SSDG) is a messaging services initiative taken by the Department of Information & Technology, Government of India at the State level as a Mission Mode Project (MMP). At the central level it is referred to as the NSDG (National e-Governance Services Delivery Gateway) with a budget of approximately 300 Crores in Indian currency. The state-level and central gateways together form a Constellation of Gateways. SSDG is standard based Messaging and routing Switch which provides seamless interoperability and exchange of data across multiple government departments. This project approved by the Indian Government in December 2008 aimed to setup Standard based messaging and routing switch, Nation-wide Gateway Constellation and Single Window service delivery across India. This scheme was envisaged to be acting as a nerve centre, would handle large number of transactions and would help in tracking and time stamping all transactions of the Government. The scheme is targeted towards the infrastructure establishment or e-readiness. The stakeholders of the project are the various state agencies, service centre agencies at the state and centre, and the implementing authorities like National Informatics Center (NIC). As on date, out of the 33 approved State/Union Territories (UTs), 15 states have gone live, 12 states/UTs are in the implementation phase, 2 states at the initial stage and 4 states are yet to float for proposal. The main highlight of the project is that apart from English, the local official language of the corresponding state/UT is also given preference in implementation of this project to target all the people in this initiative. By this the Government or the sponsors expect to provide easy and anywhere, anytime access of Government services and reducing administrative burden, time and cost of the Government in delivering the services. More details on this case can be obtained from the website, *nsdg.gov.in or deity.gov.in.*

State Data Centre Scheme*:* State Data Centre (SDC) is also one of the Mission Mode Projects (MMP) under the National E-Governance Plan (NeGP). This project approved by the Indian Government in January 2008 with a budget of more than 1000 Crores and sponsored by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology under the Indian Government, aimed to setup State Data Centres for the States to consolidate services, applications and infrastructure to provide efficient electronic delivery of G2G, G2C and G2B services. These services can be rendered by the States through common delivery platform seamlessly supported by core Connectivity Infrastructure such as State Wide Area Network (SWAN) and Common Service Centre (CSC) connectivity extended up to village level. SDC provides much functionality such as Central Repository of the State, Secure Data Storage, Online Delivery of Services, Citizen Information/Services Portal, State Intranet Portal, Disaster Recovery, Remote Management, Service Integration etc. SDCs would also provide better operation & management control and minimize overall cost of Data Management, IT Resource Management, Deployment and other costs. The stakeholders of the project are the various State/UT and Central Government Departments along with the implementing agencies. As on date, out of 33 States/UTs approved, the project is implemented and operational in 22 States / UTs. Procedural formalities for implementation are underway in 3 States / UTs. Delhi and Chandigarh have opted out of this scheme. The main highlight of this project is that the SDC involves private Cloud Environment enabling to host more Government services in a Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) model with the Disaster Recovery planning implemented by the NIC. Reputed agencies have conducted audit on this project and report is available at *www.mit.gov.in*. More details on this case is available at *deity.gov.in.*

APPLICABILITY

The fact that a society rates highly in e-readiness does not automatically mean that it will adopt e-government readiness. Despite the high levels of e-readiness in the city, majority of the environmental projects could not achieve targeted outcomes. Altman (2002) found that there was no direct link between those states with high potential readiness and those with actual broad use of e-governance. This implies that the link between a state's e-readiness with that of e-government readiness involves many factors between them. A similar idea was explored by Pare (2003), in the context of developing countries that the use of and access of ICT on their own were unlikely to reduce transaction costs. Hence simply creating an e-ready environment will not enable for successful E-Governance. The costs, skills and other features of service provision essential for successful processing must be considered if policies to promote e-readiness are beneficial. Picci (2006) states that e-readiness measures can provide useful summaries, but inherent difficulties may arise when attempting to quantify the relevant magnitudes.

The various findings on above case studies show that the E-Readiness initiative in Indian E-Governance related research pursues a clear multi-disciplinary approach. According to Kajikawa (2008), the challenge ahead is to explore if such research could become inter or trans-disciplinary. Unfortunately, there are numerous limitations to e-readiness measures, a lot of which have already been identified with the literature. This is largely due to the fact that these indices are often regarded as overly simplistic solutions to extremely complex problems. According to Bridges.org (2001), each tool has its own impact, benefits and limitations and therefore to be carefully selected in order to fulfill the required goals. In large implementation, the models may be lacking and hence every model should require redesigning in order to be a comprehensive assessment tool. The success of any project is gauged by the extent to which it achieves its predefined goals.

CONCLUSION

E-Government has already occupied a significant place in the global economy. The various agencies of United Nations Organization (UNO) and the World Bank provide huge support in these initiatives. It is quite useful for states and agencies to make a quick assessment of their e-readiness and/or e-government readiness without huge investment of resources in doing this. The fairly simple methodology given above could yield successful outcomes and sustainable results in E-Readiness. There is always a need and transformation in the ex-

isting structure. In order to make progress in a new research area like E-Governance Readiness, there is a need to build a good understanding of the underlying concepts and to assess the state of this area and its immediate neighborhood. In order to fulfill this need, this paper presented a conceptual framework with few case studies for Indian E-Governance Readiness. The framework identified various components and their inter-relationship. The main contribution of the paper is to build a good understanding of the nature and state of the E-Governance Readiness related research, and to establish a foundation for further related research.

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