



THE ROLE OF E-GVERNANCE CREATING TRANSPERENCY AND EFICIANCY IN ADMINISTRATION

Political Science

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ABSTRACT

E-government is being promoted by international agencies and G8 nations as a means to obtain efficiency, accountability and transparency in the governance of economically less developed countries. In particular, the model for good governance is the one advocated by new public management: the minimal, service-delivery state. The paper shows, first through the case of Jordan, how e-government is difficult to implement, given the characteristics of the local administration, the socioeconomic context and the dynamics of the technological infrastructure. On the basis of such evidence, it asks more generally whether the marketization of the state, embedded in e-government, makes sense as the paramount approach to improve democracy and foster development. It turns out that the transformation of citizens into customers is problematic, and the correlation between good governance and minimal state with development can hardly be demonstrated historically.

KEYWORDS

E-Governance, Administration, Transformation, Communication, Technology.

INTRODUCTION

E-governance involves the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to transact the business of government. At the level of service, e-governance promises a full service available 24 hours a day and seven days a week. At all level of basic factors such as government accountability and general acceptance of state institutions, e-governance contributes to the functioning of democracy by online provision of government information which would otherwise be difficult to obtain or unavailable, and through online debates and plebiscites (Saxena, 2005; Teicher et al., 2002). At the same time, e-learning seems to have taken the world by blizzard and is fast becoming a major form of learning. It is an approach to teaching and learning that is now used widely by schools, colleges, universities and distance learning cells, and academic institutions. In this regard, if e-learning is a process, e-governance is a means. However, all forms of e-learning do not come under the purview of e-governance. Though 'e-learning' and 'egovernance' have different connotations, they are just two pictures on the same paper. Nevertheless, successful implementation of e-learning and e-governance policy helps in bridging the digital divide through a wide-ranging approach to digital environment across the world. If implementation of e-learning addresses some of the fundamental issues, for instance, infrastructure, digitization, curriculum designs, content developments, evaluation of students' needs, etc, then e-governance possesses some issues of its own. This unfastens a stimulating research prospect. Therefore, it is vital to assess some of the assorted facets of web enabled digital environment before being endemic to the situat.

What is E-Governance

E-governance raises the transparency, accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness and inclusiveness in the governing process in terms of reliable access to the information within government, between government, national, state, municipal, and local level governments, citizens, and businesses and empowers business through access and use of information.

The main focus of the E-Governance or electronic governance is to provide transparent, equitable, and accountable service delivery to the citizens. The aim of the e-governance facilitates and improves the quality of governance and ensures people's participation in the governing process through electronic means like e-mail, websites, SMS connectivity, and others.

What is Governance

Governance refers to the processes of governing in which policies are made and implemented. In this process of governing the role of civil society, state and market is very important. All these three important aspects of governance take a very crucial role in the decision making or policy making process and its implementation process as well. It has several types such as participatory governance, corporate governance, environmental governance, good governance, e-governance etc.

E-governance Implementing Transparency And Efficiency In Administration

Applications impact upon the structures of public administration

systems. Technological advancements facilitate the administrative systems by enabling:

- **Administrative Development:**

Administrative reforms, often, have focused on procedural details and restructuring of systems and processes of government organisations. The basic objective of these reforms is to enhance capacities of the systems. ICTs can be used and are being used now to give further impetus to the process. They help in the following manners: 20 E-Governance.

- **Automation Of Administrative Processes:**

A truly e-governed system would require minimal human intervention and would rather be system driven. While initially the solutions that were offered were quite primitive with poor information layout, inadequate navigation provisions, occasional disruption in services, periodic outdated content and little or no 'back office' support. However, technological advancements and increased pressure from citizenry have prompted improvements in these areas. Now administrative departments are computerised and connected through network. Software has been built and designed around government departments ensuring efficiency in operations. The departments have launched individual websites carrying information of their respective departments. This has enabled online carrying of operations and file movements. Budgeting, accounting, data flow, etc. has become easy. This has increased the efficiency of office operations and processes and has reduced unnecessary delays.

- **Paper Work Reduction:**

An immediate impact of automation would be on the paperwork. Paperwork is reduced to a greater extent with communication being enabled via electronic route and storage and retrieval of information in the electronic form. All this has led to emergence of 'less paper office'. This concept is defined as an office situation where all the information (file and mail) amongst various functionaries is distributed online. In the words of Dubey, less paper office is the implementation of effective electronic communication processes that enable elimination of reproductive works and unnecessary papers. The concept is where files and mails (information) are transmitted over wires to small computers at each employee's desk. Office work, such as, file movements, notings, etc. is computerised and documentation, report preparation, databases are now maintained in computers. Due to interconnectivity through LAN, transfer of information and files take place online, thus reducing the physical movements and consumption and storage of huge piles of paper.

- **Quality Of Services:**

ICT helps governments to deliver services to the citizens with greater accountability, responsiveness and sensitivity. Quality of services improves, as now the people are able to get services efficiently and instantaneously. As volumes of transactions and information can be electronically handled and delivered over a wider area through the net and web, qualitative services become possible in least time, in least cost, in least difficulty and in greater convenience. By ensuring online redressal of grievances the accountability of officials is ensured. They

have become sensitive to the issues affecting people. Monitoring by way of video conferencing has further facilitated central monitoring, reporting and face to face communication that has assured effective service delivery by the officials.

• **Elimination of Hierarchy:**

ICT has reduced procedural delays caused by hierarchical processes in the organisation. Through Intranet and LAN, it has become possible to send information and data across various levels in the organisation at the same time. Computerisation and communication patterns facilitated by ICT have increased efficiency and have led to the involvement of all levels in decision-making. E-Governance: Concept and Significance 21.

• **Change in Administrative Culture:**

Bureaucratic structures have been plagued by characteristics aptly described by Victor Thompson as 'bureau-pathology'. From the days of New Public Administration, efforts have been made to find ways to deal with the pathological or dysfunctional aspects of bureaucratic behaviour and to make delivery of public services effective and efficient. With e-governance, public actions coming under public glare would certainly induce norms and values of accountability, openness, integrity, fairness, equity, responsibility and justice in the administrative culture. Rather, administration would become efficient and responsive.

Hurdles In Implicating E-governance

However, implementation of e-governance architecture is a formidable task. The hurdles in implementing e-governance are the following:

Lack Of Clarity Of Objectives:

Lack of planning and unclear objectives result in poorly designed systems and cost overruns. A clear motive and understanding of the benefits of computerization is required. E-governance initiatives should be financially self-sustained.

Inadequacy Of Funds:

Though funds are available in plenty under various heads, project cost underestimations are common, resulting in unfinished projects and higher maintenance costs. Hence, careful funds flow planning for short and long terms should be done.

Human Resources Aspect:

Dearth of quality IT personnel is another problem. The existing manpower mostly is not IT-ready to be deployed into e-governance projects. Training costs might be high due to geographical spread. A favorable element is availability of versatile manpower who can be relocated, or re-trained to other functions.

Lack Of Catalysts:

Evolution of e-governance evangelists is essential for handholding the e-governance effort in the initial period. They act as catalysts to accelerate acceptance process among users and to ensure rapid deployment internally, by Facilitating acceptance Motivating the front-end service people. Create an awareness and curiosity among the users by explaining the benefits.

An ideal catalyst would be a computer savvy person who has power and authority in the governmental system and high credibility among service department and user communities. The catalytic role of media to create awareness among public should not be underestimated.

Lack Of Coordination:

Lack of coordination across administrative and policy boundaries will affect program effectiveness and program efficiency.

Internet And System Readiness Of The E-governance Eco-system:

Lack of cost efficient and technically superior Internet backhaul is a drawback. Use of existing obsolete equipment that cannot support recent Internet technologies is a constraint. Separate Internet backbone for individual departments might prove costly. Instead, if various departments collaborate, the cost is shared. Database and internal processes should be reorganized to facilitate easy computerization. The applications should be future-proof. Back up and disaster recovery should be built in.

Service Orientation And Motivation Of Staff And Intermediaries :

Customer orientation of the existing manpower is critical. Low

productivity and lack of professionalism and work ethics will prove an indirect bottleneck to implementation. E-governance eliminates corruption practices in the hallowed portals of Taluk office and the like. Hence, miscreants could moot anti-establishment activities to resist change. Use of motivated IT-savvy intermediaries can help to bridge the gap between the computer-illiterate rural masses and e-governance. The government should motivate staff and entrepreneurs to shift to rural pockets and startup activities as intermediaries.

Suggestion

The above discussion highlighted the important role of ICTs in governance. In order to harness the benefits of ICTs maximally, we need to develop sufficient and adequate infrastructure, provide sufficient capital and investment, enable easy and wider accessibility and generate ample and skilful human resources. These are some of the immediate and pertinent challenges to effective implementation of ICT and e-governance. We will now discuss these issues individually. 22 E-Governance.

Infrastructure:

The foundation of e-governance is based on the telecommunication services. To develop telecommunication, infrastructures are to be created so that the end-user is able to access the services promptly and effectively. To strengthen the infrastructure, 'The National Task Force on Information Technology and Software Development' in 1998 recommended broadband connection (also known as 'the last mile') linkage for IT Applications Service Providers (ASPs), Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and IT promotional organisations, either by fibre optics or by radio communication, with the aim to 'boost efficiency and enhance market integration' through Internet/Intranet for sustainable regional development.

Access:

At present, there are more than 10 million users of internet in the country. But the irony is that more than 75 percent of these users are in urban India. Internet has still to reach the rural and disadvantaged sections. However, efforts are being made to expand ICT connectivity into rural areas through involvement of Gram Panchayats. NIC has developed a comprehensive web-based software for panchayati raj and rural applications, which is being implemented in states like Andhra Pradesh. With most of the panchayats getting computerised, accessibility to various services has become easy.

Utility Of Information :

There is a need to provide information, which is useful. The content of the information should be such that it should be interesting, beneficial and appealing to the people. In this regard, Government of India and some of the state governments have prepared a vision document for e-governance keeping in mind the needs of the citizens. Though Citizens' Charters of many departments are available on the net, further publicity of such facilities is required to enable the public to access the necessary information.

Human Resource Development:

Despite the ascending growth rate observed in employment in IT sector, there is dearth of quality manpower. There exists a demand and supply gap in the IT manpower market. India apparently needs to have more technical institutes to impart education and training to build a pool of human resources in the field.

Capacity Building:

Service delivery will be effective if there is a trained manpower. Though computer training is being imparted to all the basic public functionaries, except in few cases, an effective use of ICT is yet to be seen. Moreover, there is an immediate need to launch a nation wide 'Train the Teachers Programme' (3T Programme). This should be done at all levels including E-Governance: Concept and Significance 23 schools and colleges. A combination of physical and virtual training also needs to be imparted.

Changing The Mindset Of Government Functionaries:

To accept the change there is a need to change the mindset of service providers and receivers. The government functionaries need to be made aware that they are there to serve the clients as per the policies and programmes and that technological advancement is only a facilitator to solutions of problems faced by people and not a solution in itself. To change the mindset of the service providers there is a need to impart orientation and training programmes to them.

Language:

Success of e-government also depends on communication with the people in their local languages. Currently, the most widely used language is English for e-government. But given the Indian social conditions, unless we develop interfaces in vernacular languages, it would remain out of reach of many people who are not capable of accessing these services in English. In this context, it is essential that a clear strategy be formulated to provide access to local level databases maintained in regional and local languages as well as to use appropriate interfaces to aggregate such data. However, it may be mentioned here that organisations like Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC) has developed multilingual software for the purpose.

Cyber Laws:

The government needs to enact appropriate laws, especially those, which are necessary to 24 E-Governance enable transactions over the internet. Safety concerns regarding use of credit cards or other modes of payment stops the consumers from using such facilities. The Mahanagar Telephone Nagar Limited, Delhi for example has provided the online facility for payment of telephone bills, but not even one percent of its consumers are making use of this provision. Hence, security has to be ensured for generating confidence in the system.

CONCLUSION

According to Traunmuller and Lenk, e-governance is a global phenomenon today and it is the most recent paradigm in public administration. The speed and transparency associated with e-governance has the potential to make public administration responsive and effective. As the development of e-governance gets past the phase of pilot projects, it becomes apparent that sustainable development of e-governance will depend on an adequate institutional framework that will enable public administration to manage and harmonies the emerging multitude of technical and organizational changes at all levels of government. The time has come to focus on the challenges in implementation, especially those related to cross-level applications and institutional framework, which would enable to bring in broader changes in governance.

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