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A study of e-governance: Issues and opportunities

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Abstract

Governments and public sector organizations around the world are face with increasing requests to reform their public administration institutions and deliver more efficient and cost effective services, as well as better information and knowledge to their stakeholders. Increasingly governments use information and communication technology, especially Internet and web-based applications, to provide external services to citizens, business and not-for-profit organizations. Related to this, internal government procedures and work methodologies are also undergoing substantial changes.

This research provides an overview of the basic theoretical and practical issues of governance regarded as a set of government policies and their practical applications based on the use of ICT tools for strengthening democracy and supporting development. It argues that e-governance, combined with democratic intent makes governments more responsive. Moreover, it can offer a connection with its citizens in order to effectively meet various development challenges and ultimately, it tends to build a more sustainable future for the benefit of the whole of society and the world in which we live. Although the demand for e-governance comes from the necessity to achieve greater operational efficiency and from a need to provide a better response to citizen's demand for improved public services, the policy externality is that e-governance relates more and more to democracy than to administrative reforms. What we discover is that the politics administration dichotomy is actually related or converging in the sense that it is difficult to have administration in the absence of democracy.

Keywords: Green computing, eco-friendly technology, carbon emissions, carbon foot print, e-waste, degradation

Introduction

E-governance is basically means the use of a range of Information and Communication Technologies such as Internet, Local Area Networks, Mobiles etc. by Government empowerment of citizens and increased transparency in public dealings by governments; increased efficiencies in delivery of public goods is and inherent underlying assumption. The big question is that what actually we want to do by adding the letter 'e' in front of various words (government, democracy, commerce, business, politics, warfare etc) The main objective of it is just only computerizing the manual process running from last so many number of years or we want to improve it without changing the way of processing. The term 'E-governance' is one such term. E-governance come into the picture to give benefits to all sectors of the society by modifying the working of government with all possible sharing of information to the citizens by engaging them also in the work. E-governance allows direct participation of constituents allows direct participation of constituents in government activities. The main objective of the E-governance models is that better use of information and makes a clear transparency in government people transactions. It also creates a platform for profitable participation. Customer relationship management gives better service to the citizens in less time and costs as well as better utilization of space by paperless work environment. Different departments of the government can also communicate very effectively which infect give benefits to the society and helps in the growth of a new economy. The overall reduction in transaction costs can be up to 45%. Also, a citizen can avail multiple government services from a single point.

While looking at these advantages from the E-governance, we also have to take care about all challenges which play a big role in success of E-governance system. Some of these challenges are Lack of Integrated Services, Lack of Communication between different, Establishing Person Identities and Different Languages. According to an officer from NIC, success factors of e-Gov projects-10% Technology, 60% Process, 20% Change Management, Rest is luck.

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E-Governance Issues in India

Countries like India people are poor and infrastructure are not put up the mark. Under such condition it becomes very difficult to provide government services to the people. There are number of reasons for that.

Poverty

Internet access is too expensive for the poor in developing countries like India. Installing the necessary telephone lines needed for internet or email access is equally unaffordable in most poor countries. In India, each telephone connection may cost as much as Rs. 30,000 in urban areas and Rs. 70,000-80,000 in villages, which is unaffordable by most low income families. It is also very expensive to gain internet access in India: it may cost about Rs. 25 per hour in cities and Rs. 150-1200 per hour in rural areas [3].

Table 1: ICT usage in various countries

Country	PC's/100	Telephone Lines/100	Internet Users/100
India	2.76	3.37	6.93
Canada	94.58	55.48	76.77
UK	81.21	55.43	66.15
USA	79.89	53.35	71.94
Australia	75.70	47.05	54.19
Singapore	72.61	41.91	69.99
New Zealand	54.15	40.83	80.41

Source: International Telecommunication Union, World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators 2008 (September 2008 update)

Technical illiteracy

There is general lack of technical literacy as well as literacy in countries like India, the correlation between education level and use of electronic means or Internet and other ICT means are quite significant, for instance about usage of ICT is given above in the table 1 [4].

Language Dominance

The dominance of English on the internet constrains the access of non-English-speaking population. It is found that of all the web pages in the world, about 84 percent are in English followed by 4.5 percent in German, 3.1 percent in Japanese, 1.8 percent in French, 1.2 percent in Spanish, 1.1 percent in Swedish, 1 percent in Italian and less than 1 percent in all other languages [5]. In the case of India, 95 percent of the population does not speak English [6]. Due to such overwhelming dominance of English over these communication channels, computers and the internet are quite useless in Indian villages, and the use of local languages does little to alleviate the problem due to the poor literacy level to alleviate the problem due to the poor literacy level mentioned earlier.

Unawareness

There is general lack of awareness regarding benefits of e-governance as well as the process involved in implementing successful G-C, G-G and G-B projects. The administrative structure is not geared for maintaining, storing and retrieving the governance information electronically.

Lack of Participations of Society, Public and Private sectors

Designing of any application requires a very close interaction between the govt. solutions. At present the users

in govt. department and the agency developing the solutions. At present the user in govt. departments do not contribute enough to design the solution developed and implemented does not meet the requirements of an e-governance project and hence does not get implemented.

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.

Infrastructure: Lack of necessary infrastructure like electricity, internet, technology and ways of communications as in Table1 will affect the speed which delays the implementation.

Impediments for the Re-Engineering process:

Implementation of e-governance projects requires lots of restructuring in administrative processes, redefining of administrative procedures and formats which finds the resistance in almost all the departments at all the levels.

Operational Reluctance: The psychology of government servants in quite different from that of private sectors. Traditionally the government servants have derived their sustenance from the fact that they are important repositories of government data. Thus any effort to implement Documents Management and workflow technologies or bringing out the change in the system is met with resistance from the government servants.

Some e-governance initiatives

Shifting to IT-enabled processes will increase efficiency in different area and delivery of the services will also improve. Saukaryam (Vishakapatnam, AP) computerization is one of the projects which is self-sustaining and does not require government funding and actually imply revenues for governments. The project has brought in transparency, accountability and speed of delivery and has helped to reduce their unnecessary movement to government offices. In a developing country like India where the dependence of people on government is very high, the project has helped better their lives immensely. More importantly, the real spin-off is in the enhanced image of the government as being citizen-0friendly. Here is the list of the State/Union Territories and respective ICT programs running there.

Andhra Pradesh: E-Seva, CARD, VOICE, MPHS, FAST, E-Cops, AP online-One-stop-shop on the Internet, Saukaryam, Online Transaction processing.

Bihar: Sales Tax Administration Management Information.

Chhattisgarh: Chhattisgarh Infotech Promotion Society, Treasury Office, e-linking project.

Delhi: Automatic Vehicle Tracking System, Computerization of website of RCS office, Electronic Clearance System, Management Information System for Education etc.

Goa: Dharani Project.

Gujarat: Mahiti Shakti, request for Government documents

online, Form book online, G RISHI books online, census online, tender notice.

Haryana: Nai Disha.

Himachal Pradesh: Lok Mitra.

Karnataka: Bhoomi, Khajane, Kaveri.

Kerla: E-Srinkhala, RDNet, Fast, Reliable, Instant, Efficient Network for the Disbursement of Services (Friends).

Madhya Pradesh: Gyandoot, Gram Sampark, Smart Card in Transport Department, Computerization MP State Agricultural Marketing Board (Mandi Board) etc.

Maharashtra: SETU, Online Complaint Management System-Mumbai.

Rajasthan: Jan Mitra, Raj SWIFT, Lokmitra, Raj NIDHI.

Tamil Nadu: Rasi Maiyams-Kanchipuram; Application forms related to public utility, tender notices and display.

Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalays, Mizoram & Nagaland: Community Information Center. Forms available on the Meghalaya website under schemes related to social welfare, food civil supplies and consumer affairs, housing transport etc.

E-governance Opportunities

E-governance is generally considered as wider concept than e-government, since it can bring about a change in the way how citizens relate to governments and to each other. E-governance can bring forth new concepts of citizenship, both in terms of citizen needs and responsibilities. Its objective is to engage, enable and empower the citizens.

E-commerce allows business to communicate with each other more efficiently (B2B) and it brings customers closer to business (B2C). Similarly, e-governance aims to enable the interaction between government and citizens (G2C) (*i.e.*, democracy); improve interagency relationship between the government and business enterprises (G2B) (*i.e.*, e-business) (Fung, 2002) Therefore the main segments of e-governance are e-democracy, e-government and e-business.

Perri (2004) offers a similar division, but with four distinct areas of activity, namely e-democracy, e-service provision, e-management and e-governance. Although they are distinct, there are important relationships between them since they are not designed to function effectively in isolation from one another. There is a requirement for their system integration in order to achieve greater control, quality and rationality in public sector decision making.

E-Democracy

The term e-democracy refers to the processes and structures that encompass all forms of electronic interaction between the Government (elected representatives) and the citizens (electorate) (Backus, 2001). Online democracy includes access to elected officials, availability and use of discussion forums (e-participation), access to meetings and meeting documentation, voter registration, and ultimately online

voting, also known as e-voting. UK Government hopes to use e-voting in order to bring youth into the democratic process since their participation in elections was regarded as very low (Riley, 2003). It implies greater and more active citizen participation and involvement enables by ICT in the decision-making process.

Backus (2001) grouped objectives of e-democracy in the following two categories:

- a) **Passive access related objectives:** To provide citizens access to information and knowledge about the political process, about services and about choices available.
- b) **Active access related objectives:** To make possible the transition from passive information access to active citizen participation by :
 - Informing the citizen
 - Representing the citizen
 - Encouraging the citizen to vote
 - Consulting the citizen
 - Involving the citizen.

Besides all thee potentially positive outcomes of various e-governance initiatives, particularly e-democracy, some serious caution needs to be exercised. That was well emphasized by Hoff *et al.* (2003) in their article on the state of a e-democracy in Denmark. They clearly stated that expectations for the potential of information technology to promote participation in democracy were extremely high. However, according to them and some other researches as well information technology will not automatically result in increased democratic participation. Hoff at al. gave a number of examples which demonstrated Danish Government reluctance to engage in any sort of e-democracy. Even the Government's belief in future of e-democracy was very weak as explicitly stated in the Government latest strategy plan from 2002- IT for All: Denmark's Future. That strategy did not bring up the issue of e-democracy at all. It was only mentioned once in a sentence in the foreword where it said that electronics debate forums were of no value if ordinary people were unwilling to let their opinions be known (Denmark, 2002).

E-Government

According to Al-Tawil and Said (2002) Electronic government (e-government) is the transformation of public sector's internal and external relationship through Internet enabled operation, thereby strategically deploying ICT to optimize government service delivery and governance. E-governance is the development, deployment and enforcement of the policies laws and regulations necessary to support the functioning of an e-government.

Okot-Uma (2004) assumes that e-government, includes two basic components; delivery of services to the public, also know as e-services, and administration processes of government, known as e-administration, E-government implies dissemination of information and provision of public services through improved government processes using new information and communication technologies.

External delivery of e-government services (front-office) has the goal of satisfying immediate public's needs and expectations and to simplifying their interaction with various online services. The use of internet and information technology is government operations facilitates speedy, transparent, accountable, efficient and effective interaction with the public, citizens, business and other agencies.

Internal delivery of e-government services (back-office), as its strategic objective, sets creation of fast, transparent, accountable, efficient and effective processes for performing government administration activities. Usually, some significant cost saving in government operations are expected as its outcome.

It should be noted that e-governance is more than just a government website on the Internet. Besides technology aspects, more important are political, social and economic aspects which determine e-governance.

E-Business

Electronics business (e-business) refers to the processes and structure that define the relationship between governments and the markets; the processes and structures that define the relationship between governments and the private sector. At the same time, it includes the Business-to Government relationship model which refers to those services consumed by entrepreneurs, business and corporations for a commercial purpose. These include filing statements of incorporation, obtaining business licenses, assistance with site locations, obtaining workforce information and others.

Conclusion

The E-governance projects should defines a set of business processes and Technology standards to be followed throughout the government enterprise, providing services which are citizen centric, open standards based, interoperable, transparent, flexible, secure, result oriented and dynamic. A clear understanding of the problems associated with E-governance system will help tackling them during planning and implementation.

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