Enable E- governance – Need of the Hour

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Abstract:

The rapid development, consumption and explosion of the new and emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs) herald new opportunities for growth and development in countries around the world. Governments worldwide are seeking to impediment the potential offered by these new technologies to create new amplitude of economic and social advancements. Implementation of large program in a governmental scenario is always a provoking work. There are many constraints which a government needs to address before offering value-added services to its citizens and other stake holders in a turbulent environment. With the explosion of information over web in recent past, governments across the world face a major challenge in keeping a pace with ever changing technologies and offer an efficient, effective and transparent way of offering its services. In this article, we discuss conceptual framework of E-governance, various challenges being faced by government in providing its services through e-governance model to all its stake holders.

E-governance: Conceptual Framework

Human life is in today's world is surrounded with technology. Technology has left barely any space for non-technical things. Change in an individual's life brings about a change in the society that individual lives. When society is influenced, the legal system or the way that society is governed changes for sure. It's a social phenomenon. With the enormous speed of development of technology governance by the states is turning out to be an "E-governance". The Information Technology Act, 2000 provides for the legal recognition to electronic communications, electronic transactions and storage of information and data in electronic form for subsequent reference. It also enables certain government agencies to facilitate filing; submission of forms related some specific processes, e.g. Income Tax Department, Banking Processes, etc. The Information Technology Act, 2000 was amended comprehensively in 2006 and 2008 which has made adequate effect in transforming some areas of governance into e-governance. E-Governance is a form of public administration making "use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to enhance the access and delivery of government services to benefit citizens, employees and management of urban local bodies." It aims to "help strengthen government's drive toward effective governance and increase transparency to better manage social and economic resources for development."

Many definitions exist for e-governance. Before presenting an overall definition of e-governance, the relation between governance, e-democracy and e-government is explained.

E-democracy refers to the processes and structures that encompass all forms of electronic interaction between the Government (elected) and the citizen (electorate).

E-government is a form of e-business in governance and refers to the processes and structures needed to deliver electronic services to the public (citizens and businesses), collaborate with business partners and to conduct electronic transactions within an organisational entity.

The term *interaction* stands for the delivery of government products and services, exchange of information, communication, transactions and system integration.

Government consists of levels and branches. Government levels include central, national, regional, provincial, departmental and local government institutions. Examples of government branches are Administration, Civil Service, Parliament and Judiciary functions.

Government operations are all back-office processes and inter-governmental interactions within the total government body.

Definition of E-Governance

Electronic governance or e-governance has been defined in a variety of ways. E-governance is about a process of reform in the way governments work, share information, and deliver services to internal and external clients. E-governance refers to the use of information and communication technologies (ICT), such as the E-governance, wide area networks, mobile phones etc. to deliver services to citizens that have the ability to transform relations with clients, businesses, and other arms of government. Christopher Baum defines e-government as the "transformation of public sector's internal and external relationship through net-enabled operations, information technology and communications to optimize government service delivery, constituency participation and governance" (cited in Kumar 2004). E-Government is not just "electronic" government. It is "enabled" government, the government that delivers different and better programs and services. E-Government is about people: new skill sets, mindsets and leadership approaches. It will transform how public servants work, relate to each other, do business, and engage citizens and others. E-government is a process that requires a sustained commitment of political will, resources and engagement among the government, private and public sectors. However, if e-government practitioners follows the Roadmap, they potentially can develop a system of e-government that not only makes current government practices more efficient, but also transforms the very relationship between the public, the private sector and government. E-government is more about government than about "e". It enables better policy outcomes, higher quality services and greater engagement with citizens. Governments and public administrations will, and should, continue to be judged against these established criteria for success E-governance is defined as the application of electronic means in (1) the interaction between government and citizens, and government and businesses, as well as (2) internal government operations to simplify and improve democratic, government and business aspects of governance (Backus 2003). Rogers W'O Okot-Uma opines "e-governance seeks to realize process and structures for harnessing the potentialities of information and communication technologies at various levels of government and public sector and beyond for the purpose of enhancing good governance" (cited in Kumar 2004). The term 'e-government' refers to the use of ICT by government agencies to transform relations with citizens and businesses (Venkatesh 2003; cited in Barthwal 2003:288). E-governance has different interpretations. It implies a smoother interface between the government and the citizen's governance is nothing but good governance. The 'e' is only a means. E-governance is to augment the use of the information technology and to help develop lives of the citizens. E-governance enables active citizen participation by informing the citizens, demonstrating the citizens, encouraging them to vote consulting them as required and encouraging their participation (Patel 2001). E-governance, is becoming the backbone of any country's growing economy in today's world of internet enabled systems and processes. The word "electronic" primarily indicates the usage of technology in all matters of governance. This includes Government-to-citizens (G2C), Government-to-Business (G2B), Government-to-employees (G2E), Government-to-Government (G2G) as well as exchanges and processes happening at the back office system levels within the entire government frame work. Government tries to influence technology to make all its services accessible to its diverse stake holders namely citizens, businesses and government itself in competent, successful and apparent method.

Even though, the E-governance is replacing the spectrum of governance; in a country like India, there are certain educational, social and cultural issues which affect the progress of E-governance. Even after creating world class Information Technology (IT) units in private sector in India is going with the slow pace in providing services and transactions online from the point of view of implementing E-governance in public sector. India as a developing nation still lacks an E-governance enabling legal framework.

Information technology (I.T.) has experienced an exceptional growth over the recent couple of decades. It is pragmatic that the developed countries spend a record budget in supporting its e-government initiatives. The trend of enhanced spending on e-governance programs is catching up in developing countries and Indian government has dedicated large part of budget to e-governance programs

E-governance Initiatives in India

Central and State governments have initiated many strategies to promote ICT in all walks of life. The Central Government announced the IT policy in 1998 to make IT available to all Indians by 2008. The policy aims to make India and IT super-power and make it the generator and exporter of software within the next 10 years. A high power national task forces on IT and software development was set-up in 1998. The policy envisages the creation of a government-wide information infrastructure, which would simplify service delivery, reduce duplication and improve the level and speed of services to the public. This would provide the public with the opportunity to send and receive information through electronic terminals instead of by writing or paper communication. Efforts are taken to increase ICT accessibility through computers and internet to reach wider sections of society with the help of civil society organizations (CSOs). Government processes and procedures would be reengineered to bring about several benefits, such as transparency at work, reduced constraints, increased efficiency and productivity and reduced cost of service delivery. Projects are integrated across departments to provide a single point of electronic delivery of services to citizens. Maximum transparency in government has been ensured through citizen charters available over the internet, for every government department. The government has already passed the Information Act, 2002 within the scope of Article 19 - a fundamental right – in our constitution enabling the citizens to get the information from the government. A number of projects are in operation in different states for promoting electronic governance in India. The significant ones among them have been discussed below.

Some E-governance Initiatives are as follows

- **Andhra Pradesh** : e-Seva, CARD, VOICE, MPHS, FAST, e-Cops, AP online—One-stopshop on the Internet, Saukaryam, Online Transaction processing
- **Bihar**: Sales Tax Administration Management Information
- **Chattisgarh**: Chhattisgarh Infotech Promotion Society, Treasury office, e-linking project
- **Delhi**: Automatic Vehicle Tracking System, Computerisation 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 R book online, census online, tender notice.
- **Haryana** : Nai Disha
- **Himachal Pradesh**: Lok Mitra
- **Karnataka** :Bhoomi, Khajane, Kaveri
- **Kerala**: e-Srinkhala, RDNet, Fast, Reliable, Instant, Efficient Network for the Disbursement of Services (FRIENDS)

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- **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, RajSWIFT, Lokmitra, RajNIDHI
- **Tamil Nadu** : Rasi Maiyams–Kanchipuram;

Development of e-governments is directly proportional to the IT infrastructure that is capable of supporting and enabling the execution of e-government. An e-government infrastructure in general comprises network infrastructure, security infrastructure, application server environment, data and content management tools, application development tools, hardware and operating systems, and systems management platform However, large parts of India do not have the infrastructure necessary to deploy e-government services throughout its territory.

Apart from the availability of the infrastructure, the other key challenge on this front is to design interoperable systems. Subhasis Ray and Amitava Mukherjee in their study on development of a framework towards successful implementation of e-governance initiatives in health sector in India identify that lack of standardization of system components and services such as health information systems, health messages, electronic health record architecture, and patient identifying services may be a hindrance for Interoperability of e-healthcare systems.

Following are the challenges of not following a standardized planning for e-governance programs. These challenges are:

- It will lead to a large pile-up of diverse IT infrastructure.
- Interoperability issue with the different systems being required to talk with each other.
- Adapting to rapidly changing IT software and hardware technologies and "Technology Obsolescence".
- Under-utilization of the IT capacity, hence leading to wastage and ever accruing maintenance cost.

The above issues are even more critical for the developing economies where the resources are limited and hence require prudent expenditure on the part of the government.Furthermore , the challenges faced by governments in providing e-governance solutions on technology infrastructure front, which were highlighted as follows

- **Infrastructure challenge**: It is a gigantic task to put proper infrastructure in place so that all public services are made available to citizen online. It requires to install hardware at different places in villages, cities, districts and state to cater to different stake holders. Linking all the installed infrastructure over a network is indeed a tedious work. Moreover, a regular updation and maintenance of hardware and software consume s lot of money on a regular basis.
- **System Management complexity**: Once the infrastructure is in place, management of the system is next critical and complex activity. There are very rapid changes and advancements in the technology which makes our hardware and software obsolete. This is a big challenge because the budgets are directly linked with this activity and huge cost is involved in replacing or upgrading the hardware / software.
- **Human resource management**: The complete system and infrastructure is installed, commissioned and maintained by highly paid information technology professionals. Government is required to recruit such people and support the IT dept with a high salary cost. Also, the movement of IT professionals within the industry is very common; hence, it becomes very difficult to retain them.

Conclusion

The success of any e-governance model depends upon various factors. The challenges primarily focus on system availability, infrastructure complexity, application management and people management. These challenges amount to various complexity during the implementation of e-governance model by any government agency. India is a developing country, and still needs to go far ahead in terms of implementing and evaluating the E-governance initiatives .If the above challenges are tackled in the right way , then we can reap the benefits – of corruption free nation !

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