

Transforming Governance In India: E-Governance Applications And Global Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

ICTs have revolutionized governance by erasing the distinction between the online and offline worlds. E-governance, in which the IT facilitates in terms of government operations, public-reaching activities, and services, has become a core feature of governance in the modern world. This change is best illustrated by India's National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), which seeks to improve service delivery by embracing technology. This research explores how e-government might help India achieve better efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement in the country's quest of good governance. The study looks into how ICT has changed institutional structures, improved accessibility for marginalized groups, and changed the way public services are delivered. The report also discusses infrastructural limits, financing restrictions, and cultural impediments that arise when establishing e-governance.

Keywords: E-Governance, ICT, Good Governance, India, Public Service Delivery, Digital Transformation, Citizen Engagement, National e-Governance Plan (NeGP).

Introduction:

With the emergence of Information & Communication Technologies (ICT), governance has entered into a new sphere of globalization. Previously online and offline governance were treated as two different spheres but with the emergence of ICT, this distinction has been made quite indistinctive.

There is an already existing prevalent viewpoint to e-governance as the automation of government services, yet, there is much more to e-government. A practical definition of e-government is that it is: "the use of information technology to support government operations, engage citizens, and provide government services" (D. Sharon, 2003). The formation of this new cyber regime must incorporate good e-governance to deliver effectively and efficiently to the citizens. The Government of India has composed the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) to expedite disposition of Information Technology in governance with an aim to improve delivery of government services to citizens, business and other stakeholders. It has been observed that a huge jump in the quality of services is possible only by adoption and implementation of the principles of e-Governance. While initially the political and managerial focus was on developing e-services within each public institution, with limited consideration being given to cross-organizational coherence, the focus today has clearly shifted towards coordinated services offering one-stop shops to citizens and businesses (OECD 2007). This study deals with e-governance and the impact it had upon the Indian context of good governance.

Literature review:

According to the UNESCO Governance is defined (n.d.) as the "structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation" – key characteristics of good governance - as well as "the norms, values and rules of the game through which public affairs are managed in a manner that is transparent, participatory, inclusive and responsive." In a broader context, UNESCAP (2009) explains governance as "the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)". UNESCAP (2009) is also of the view that good governance is the ideal state of governance that can be best described as being participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and

efficient, equitable and inclusive, and following the rule of law. Adding the digital dimension to the concept of governance, electronic governance is the process-oriented counterpart of the institution-oriented concept of electronic government. E-government is defined by OECD (2003) as being “the use of ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies), and particularly the Internet, as a tool to achieve better government” through increased efficiency, improved services, increased trusts, and overall enhanced possibilities to achieve specific as well as broad objectives. Both concepts are often indistinctly – albeit not necessarily correctly - grouped under the common label e-gov. For the purpose of this article, we will define e-governance as being the use of information and communication technologies in the processes through which decisions are informed, taken and implemented, in the pursuit of good governance.

Research objectives:

1. To analyse whether e-governance is an outcome of digitalisation in the Indian administrative sphere and the impact it had upon the Indian context of good governance.
2. How was ICT helpful in bringing the public services to the doorsteps of our citizens and businesses on the basis of revolutionary changes in our institutional structures, procedures and practices and whether that was responsible in transforming the relationships between our three tiers of our government?
3. What impact did the E-Governance/ICT initiatives have in the enhancement of improving accessibility, cutting down of costs, lessening corruption, extending help and increasing access to un-served groups in India?

Discussions:

Attempts on e-Governance in India

India in the recent context has witnessed the most ambitious E-Governance plan. At the highest level of the Government there is a Secretary level official, there is an approved budget of billion dollar plus (at the Central Government level), Secretary level official in the State, important E-Governance seminars at International and National level, Official visits by E-Governance officials to other countries, that is further addressed by major IT MNCs like IBM, TCS, Reliance etc that have dedicated teams on E-Governance, opening up of NISGs in States and of course the print and the electronic media chanting the slogan of E-Governance and above all the IITs and IIITs having crores of Grants for E-Governance cells and yet the situation is aghast and every major player is working in random fashion trying to outsmart the other and take the planners and the taxpayers for a ride! E-Governance is in essence, the application of Information and Communications Technology to government functioning in order to create Simple, Moralistic, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent (SMART) governance. This recent paradigm focuses on the use of ICT to bring public services to the doorsteps of our citizens and businesses on the basis of revolutionary changes in our institutional structures, procedures and practices that would transform the relationships between our three tiers of our government, our businesses and our citizens.

The revolution in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has brought a whole new agenda for governance into the realm of possibility. E-Governance comprises decisional processes and the use of ICT for wider participation of citizens in public affairs. Citizens are major stakeholders in E-Governance. The purpose of implementing E-Governance is to improve governance processes and outcomes with a view to improving the delivery of public services to citizens. E-Governance as the e-business of the India, being the largest democracy in the world, has much to gain from E-Governance, especially when citizen participation in governance is one of the features of the fully evolved stage of E-Governance. Many e-readiness assessments have been carried out at the global level that depict the current state of India's e-readiness. Some of the more recent study findings are as follows:

The May 2001 Mc-Connell ranking of e-readiness assessment indicated that major improvements were needed in the area of connectivity.

Whereas the July 2002 EIU(Economist Intelligence Unit) ranking found that 55 of the countries navigating the information super highway account for 98 per cent of all IT in 150 countries. Therein, India secured the 54th position.

India was among one of the most prompt countries to respond to the possibilities of using ICTs in development communication/administration in the developing world. It may be noted that the Indian State began to design and implement rural development programmes with a relatively visible ICT content in the 1970s, while International attention on the potential of harnessing ICTs for developmental activities is a much new phenomenon. Several ventures have been designed to use ICTs for improvising development planning, a key area of State action in the pre-liberalisation era. The Dharampur Sub-District Infrastructure Planning for Development (1977) is one such early example of an attempt to use computer applications for cost optimization and decision-making. The Karwar Rural Development Information System (1984) was yet another initiative formulated with a focus on reducing delay and curbing corruption through a monitoring programme based on

computer applications (Kaul. et. al, quoted in Bhatnagar, 1990). 'Electronic governance' became a key phrase in the Indian State's efforts to provide a facelift to its administrative machinery in late 1990s. It is now geared for 'good governance' as part of the structural adjustment strategies dictated by the World Bank and other international agencies. Since the institution of the Ministry of Information Technology, the central government has shown substantial interest in using IT for various objectives. The surging numbers of what is identified as e-governance projects since 1999 indicate that most of the State governments and Union Territories in India claim to have accepted the need for undertaking e-governance initiatives.

India is a country of diverse culture, tradition, language, geography and the monetary condition of the people. In this country, there are number of people who are below the minimal socioeconomic benchmarks. This includes rural and urban poor, women in rural areas, street children, people of disadvantaged castes and people living in less developed areas. The susceptibility of these sections of society has increased with globalization and this section is prone to become even more marginalized, economically and socially. According to scholars, India is a developing country with great potential for a speedy development. However, it has undergone the impact of political crisis. These events have severely affected India's growth as well as they have pushed India back by many years.

E-Governance/ICT initiatives has immense role in the enhancement of improving accessibility, cutting down costs, lessening corruption, extending help and increased access to un-served groups in India. In the age of technical advancement, e-government initiatives have reached most of the people belonging to these sections of society. Improved access to information and services has offered economic and social development opportunities, enabled participation and communication in policy and decision-making processes and empowerment of the feeblest groups of society. This has promoted ownership and building of social capital, which in turn, constitute a basis for local revival.

India has taken up major initiative in implementing ICT throughout the Asian subcontinent. India is linked with most of the nations of the world. With the adoption of E governance formation and communication technology, India's tourism is enhanced. Furthermore, the steady changes taking place in the telecommunications industry in India which positively impact in fiscal growth of country and provide better services and lower prices for customers. In India, government is also providing investment incentives in terms of tax concessions and establishment of e-zones for ICT-based industries. There are agencies such as India National ICT Council and projects such as e-government initiatives which are accountable for spearheading, devising and implementing of E governance. The successive establishment of the National Informatics Centre (NIC) in 1976 with the financial help of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) was major step to execute e-Governance in India. After that numerous e-Governance initiatives launched at both national and state levels. These projects implemented to make progress to address major problems related to government service. On the basis of the advice of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission, the Government of India devised a National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2003. The NeGP was initiated with a vision of "Make all Government services accessible to the common man in his area, through a common service delivery channel and guarantee efficiency, transparency and reliability of such services at reasonable costs to meet the basic needs of the common people (NeGP, 2003). After this an array of projects were implemented. Reviewing the academic studies, it has been found that there a hot debate related to e-governance as it does not provide a clear agreement on the requirement to have bureaucratic system change with the use of ICT. Many theorists stated that e-Governance led revolution has good impact on government organisations because they aid to achieve better governance by lessening cost, better dissemination of information, supporting better involvement and interaction and efficient delivery of services (Jaeger, 2003). Other group of researchers argued about the importance of transforming the existing model of government bureaucracy (Kallinikos, 2004). Some researchers raise concern about the impact of information and communication technology applications and bring changes to government processes (Ciborra, 2015). Studies have shown that E governance has potential to bring vivid changes or transform government institutions rather than automate or reform organisational structures (Ho, 2002).

Issues in implementation of E-Governance:

There are many obstacles to execute E-governance policies. These include insufficiency of funds, infrastructural problems, scarce manpower, citizen enthusiasm, data accumulation, legal framework readiness, and maintenance (Jayaradha and Shanthakumar, 2003). According to a NASSCOM report, e-Governance in India is considered as a rapidly growing section with three southern states namely Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu which made significant progress. Experts recommend that in order to get desired benefits, government must have to take several pro-active steps to address the operational, economic, personnel, planning and implementation issues, which are the hold-ups to effective application of e-Governance (Rao, 2003). Advanced technologies requires novel way of thinking about service and business process design, new ways of working, the development of new skills, the use of old skills more effectively and a more flexible approach to working patterns and practices. Robbins (1998) asserted that structural inertia (built-in mechanisms) is major obstacle for transformation process in industries. Another inhibition is people's resistance to any change. It is important to design such employee-oriented Human Resource strategies as would allow the organisation to prepare employees for change and also support them to absorb rather than

adsorb the changed systems. There are also cultural obstacles which refer to values, beliefs, mind-set, practices and customs of people. These hindrances have major challenge to install new system. Cultural barriers exist at employee level, officers' level and political level (Sharma and Palvia, 2004). Changing from being an organisation to become 'e-organisation' greatly impact organisation structure and management styles as it results into re-distribution of power and control. It also changes the alignment of the organisation.

Companies adopting e governance must develop customer orientation which understand the requirements of the user, explore new ways of presenting information to meet customer needs; design feedback mechanisms; manage customer relationships; streamline processes; develop good communication process, organise information, work more flexibly; make better decisions, coordinate activities, focus on major issues in the context of personnel which include doing job analysis again to redefine job responsibilities and other job dimensions of various jobs affected by the change. Organizations also concentrates on redesigning the recruitment and selection process according to changing manpower needs, the identification of competencies of technological environment to facilitate all employees to operate efficiently in a fully electronic working environment, developing a performance management program that would integrate changes in job responsibilities and requirements and which is development oriented, educating employees about their new legal and corporate responsibilities and obligations, developing knowledge workforces capable of multi-tasking (Riley 2003). Companies must evolve an environment that would encourage any positive behaviour exhibited by employees, focus on better management of efforts between various government agencies as it will affect program effectiveness and efficiency. additionally, effective implementation requires changes in decision making processes, involving quicker decision mechanisms, changes in organisation structure making it flatter and higher delegation of authority (Garg and Khataokar, 2003). It is essential to incorporate the new vision with the structure, culture and strategies of the organisation.

Recommendations to Tackle Challenges:

There is a need of appropriate strategies of e governance and information and communication strategies to bring changes in various internal systems of organizations for issues. It has been found in many studies that a highly motivated and satisfied workforce gives better performance than a demoralized and dissatisfied workforce (Prasad). There are some strategies to tackle problems in various areas of human resource management in the changed environment. On the basis of the new profile of employees required for e-governance, new sources of their availability need to be tapped. One of these sources could be college campuses, a source which has been well utilized by private organisations. Feasibility of other sources like HR consultancies, may also be explored. The existing manpower may not be ready to be deployed into e-governance projects. Training costs might be high due to geographical spread. Designing a selection process that would objectively and correctly measure the skills and competences required to handle the changed work style and job responsibilities is required. Such a process should incorporate methods that would objectively assess the knowledge and skills required to handle the redesigned job. The e-governance implementation leader should have strong conceptual and management skills. The leader must be responsible for guidance as well as act as mentor and coach. Leaders need to change their styles and will have to adopt different approaches to manage people in new work settings in the organizations that are characterized by use of current technologies, and continuous change.

Conclusion:

The definition of e-commerce could be the exchange of information across electronic networks at any stage in the supply chain, whether within an organization, between businesses, between businesses and consumers, or between the public and private sector. E-Governance is the use of Information and Communication Technologies by the public sector to enhance information and service delivery, aimed at encouraging inhabitant participation in the decision-making process and making the government more accountable, transparent, and effective. The meaning may be different in the developing world. Changing India's economy to achieve e-governance goes far beyond the mere computerization of separate back-office operations. It means a vital change in how the government works, and this implies a new set of responsibilities for the executive and politicians. It will need basic change in work culture and goal orientation, and concurrent change in the existing processes. A change in the mindset to develop and agree on a distributed and flat-structured e-governance system is required at the higher-level system to take a better position in the world.

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