How Governments can become more Responsive and Accessible through ICT Induction?

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ABSTRACT

Governments the world over recognize the importance of ICT for restructuring their relationships with the citizens and business partners. Re-engineering processes and procedures to cut red tape, facilitate delivery of services, increase productivity of the bureaucracy, and increase savings are benefits inherent in e-government. It is not enough to induct ICT and deliver services efficiently by compressing the steps required to accomplish certain procedural requirements. What is more important is to simplify government processes altogether, change the concept of procedure oriented governance to citizen-centric governance, and thereby transform the relationship between government and citizens.

Keywords: Electronic Governance, NeGP, ICT Induction, Project Management, Citizen-Centric Government, Government Transformation

1. Introduction

Governments across all the levels in the country- central, state and local bodies- have been inducting information and communication technologies (ICT) to provide citizens and organizations with more convenient access to government information and services. The larger goal of ICT induction is to provide delivery of public services to citizens, business partners, and those working in the public sector, efficiently and effectively. Governments both at the centre and the state level aspire to provide the people the governance which is open, transparent, easily understood and accountable. Governments want to become more effective, through ICT induction, in delivering maximum value for taxpayers' money. E-Governance viewed as a strategic tool for transforming governance and improving the quality of services provided by the government to its people. Keeping these goals in mind, the Government of India has launched the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) with the intent to support the growth of e-governance within the country However, many a time the larger goal of transforming governance is overlooked at the ground level and more importance is given to technology induction, both hardware procurement and software development. Technology is no doubt provides the foundation for Electronic Governance, but more attention should be paid to devising optimal solution for solving the problems through ICT. This paper discusses some of the issues related to management of ICT induction in the Government and offers some ideas how governments can become more responsive and accessible through ICT induction.

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2. Rationale of e-Governance

Governments are adapting ICT for switching over to Electronic governance primarily for the purpose of: (a) increasing transparency and accountability; (b) allowing greater access to information about government institutions, decisions, laws, regulations, and project/development opportunities affecting citizen's lives; (c) providing mechanism for contacts between citizens and decision-making bodies; (d) establishing an environment for two-way communication, allowing citizens to interact with government officials; and (e) enabling the citizens and business to transact with government online.

Mere adaption of ICT will not result e-Governance. Unless ICT is integrated effectively with Government processes, and if the goals of ICT are not well defined and aligned properly with the goals of good governance, we will not achieve the real e-governance i.e. transparent, accountable, effective and rule-based administration eliminating waste, delay, and corruption. We must realize and understand the fact that E-governance provides us with the opportunity of radical reform of our governing system by transforming it to a truly citizen centric one. It also provides the opportunity of delivering goods and services in the best way.

3. High- Failure Rate of IT and e-Governance Projects

Most Governments experience problems when implementing large IT projects. Budgets are exceeded, deadlines are over-run and often the quality of the new system is far below the standard agreed when the project was undertaken. The Standish Group (2001) estimated that only 28% of all IT projects in 2000 in the US, in both government and industry, were successful with regard to budget, functionality and timelines. 23% were cancelled and the remainder succeeded only partially, falling on at least one of the three counts. In a survey conducted by the well-known E-Governance researcher Richard Heeks (2003), the following interesting facts came to light.

15% are Successes -- Most stakeholder groups attained their major goals and did not experience significant undesirable outcomes

50% are Partial Successes-- Major goals for the initiatives were not attained and/or there were significant undesirable outcomes

35% are Total Failures --The initiative was never implemented or was implemented but immediately abandoned

The above statistics show that a vast number of e-governance projects fail world over. Now since Government of India has launched very ambitious National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) to roll out 27 Mission Mode Projects across the country, it is high time to ponder over why the success is still alluding many government departments to achieve real e-Governance. The prominent reason attributed to sub-optimal performance is lack of citizen-centric approach in identifying citizens' requirements, improper planning of ICT for citizen- centric government and inappropriate alignment of ICT with government work processes.

4. Planning the ICT Induction for e-Governance

Keeping ahead in information and communication technologies (ICT) not only means keeping up to date with rapidly changing technologies. It also means successfully using these new technologies in complex e-Governance systems in which people play a major part. The main purpose of introducing technology in any government organization is to (i) become more responsive and accessible to the citizens and business, (ii) to provide better government services (iii) to enhance its role as a catalyst of economic growth. Also, the government organizations must plan to use the rapidly changing ICT for re-engineering the age-old

processes, for transferring benefits to citizens, improving their healthcare and education, etc. The government organizations needs to plan ICT induction to meet the above mentioned objectives, and design technology solution that must be aimed at:

- Improving transparency
- Providing information speedily to all citizens
- Improving administration efficiency
- Managing voluminous data and information effectively
- Offering new information services
- Making available swift and secure communications

5. Edifice of Citizen-Centric E-Government

The citizen centric Electronic Government, which is a pre-requisite for e-governance, will require a fundamental change in the thinking process and behaviour. A citizen-centric approach to service delivery is one that treats citizens and businesses like customers. It turns the focus of government around—looking at the world through the other end of the telescope. It puts the needs of the citizen and businesses first, rather than operational or other imperatives inside the government machinery. The new approach will not only provide services without human interface but will also take comments from citizens/clients for its improvement. The key principles to remember while planning ICT induction in the government organisations to build citizen-centric E-Government, are as follows:

- A holistic approach to customer focus, while reengineering the government processes
- Building a web portal which can deliver public services online
- Encouraging citizens to avail e-services from web portal.
- Providing easy and affordable access.
- Providing value added services to citizens with right service mix and a good package of services at e-Kiosks

While inducting ICT, the government organisations should not only reengineer the government processes but also aim at perfect information delivery system as an outcome of e-Governance initiative. A perfect information delivery system which would not require a citizen to:

- Fill up same data at multiple places
- Visit government departments, multiple times for information requirements
- Go to multiple places to seek information at times convenient to government functionary
- Stand in a queue and wait for his turn
- Prove that information obtained by him/her is accurate and up-to-date.
- Struggle to get the contact details of right officials to address his queries
- To grumble that his voice was not heard while framing govt. policies for providing services to him.

6. Concluding Remarks

ICT has become an indispensable and very effective tool not only for good governance and more accessible government but also for achieving the goals of poverty reduction and sustainable development. A citizen-centric approach to service delivery is essential if governments are to reap the benefits of previous and future investment in ICT. The future of successful e-government is more citizen-centric government. By appropriate grounding and planning of ICT induction, and designing the technical solutions with citizen-centricity, governments can become more responsive and accessible.

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