

Importance of E-Governance in Indian Public Administration

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Abstract

In public administration science and practice, the debate on e-government concentrates on service delivery, information and technology. This article argues that we need a broad public administration approach towards e-government that surpasses this technocratic emphasis. Public administration theory helps us to escape from the conceptual prison of the information management ideology that currently dominates e-government. Both the locus of e-government (the parts of public administration that are being touched by it) and its focus (its approach towards governance) can be used to broaden the concept. If we do not enrich e-government, many of its possibilities will remain unexploited. Also, if we stick to the information management approach, e-government will endanger the very foundations of the legitimacy of public administration.

Keywords: e-governance, public administration, models, challenges

Introduction

Reinventing government has been a dominant theme since 1990s, wherein governments world over are attempting to improve the systems of public service delivery. Rapid strides made in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have facilitated the reinvention of governments and prepared them to serve the needs of a diverse society. In other words, the information age has redefined the fundamentals and transformed the institutions and mechanisms of service delivery forever. The vision is the articulation of a desire to transform the way government functions and the way it relates to its constituents. The concept of electronic governance, popularly called e-governance, is derived from this concern. Democracies in the world share a vision of the day when e-governance will become a way of life. India has been at the forefront of the IT revolution and has had its effect on the public administration systems, as we would see later in this Unit. In fact, if the potential of ICTs are harnessed properly, it has a lot of opportunities, especially, in the social and economic growth of the developing world.

Objectives

The objectives of the present research stated as follows

- To analyse the meaning of e-governance.
- To examine the importance of the e-governance in public administration.
- To study the problems to implementing e-governance.

Methodology

The Present study is descriptive in nature and mainly emphasis on E-Governance in public administration. The study used secondary source of data, which were collected through of Journals, Periodicals, Books and Website.

E-governance and E-government

E-governance and e-government are often used interchangeably, so distinguishing between them at this stage is imperative. According to Thomas B. Riley government and governance are both about getting the consent and cooperation of the governed. But whereas government is the formal apparatus for this objective, governance is the outcome as experienced by those on the receiving end.... E-government can be more productive version of government in general, if it is well implemented and managed. E-governance can evolve into participatory governance, if it is well supported with appropriate principles, objectives, programmes and architectures. E-government is, thus, the modernisation of processes and functions of government using the tools of ICT as to transform the way it serves its constituents. As per the World Bank, e-government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as wide area networks, internet and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses and other arms of government. It is the use of technology to enhance the access to and delivery of government services to benefit citizens, business partners and employees. E-governance, on the other hand, goes beyond the service delivery aspects and is seen as a decisional process. It is about the use of ICTs in the systems of governance, that is, using ICT to involve multistakeholders in decision-making and in making governments open and accountable.

Stages of E-Governance

Different stages of e-governance are identified on certain set of criteria.

These stages are:

- **Simple information dissemination (one-way communication)**- is considered as the most basic form, as it is used for merely disseminating information;
- **Two-way communication (request and response)**- is characterised with e-mail system and information and data-transfer technologies in the form of website;
- **Service and financial transactions**- is online services and financial transactions leading to web based self-services;
- **Integration (both vertical and horizontal)**- in this stage the government would attempt inter and intra-governmental integration; and
- **Political participation**- this stage means online voting, online public forums and opinion surveys for more direct and wider interaction with the government.

Another classification of e-governance has six stages of which the first two are similar to that of the above classification. The remaining four are:

- **Third stage**- refers to multi-purpose portals, which allow customers to use a single point of entry to send and receive information and to process transactions across multiple departments;

- **Fourth stage-** consists of portal personalisation, wherein customers are allowed to customise portals with their desired features;
 - **Fifth stage-** is when government departments cluster services along common lines to accelerate the delivery of shared services and clustering of common services; and
 - **Sixth and final stage-** technology is integrated further to bridge the gap between the front and back office.
- After our discussion of the concept and stages of e-governance, we will now deal with significant models of e-governance that can be used in designing e-government initiatives.

Models of E-Governance

Prof. Dr. Arie Halachmi in his paper, namely, ‘ E-Government Theory and Practice: The Evidence from Tennessee (USA),’ has given five important models of e-governance, which can be used as a guide in designing e-government initiatives depending on the local situation and governance activities that are expected to be performed. These models are:

- The Broadcasting Model
 - The Critical Flow Model
 - The Comparative Analysis Model
 - The E-Advocacy/Mobilisation and Lobbying Model
 - The Interactive-Service Model
- We will now discuss these models individually.

Importance of E- Government

According to the World Bank (2002) E-Governance has the following benefits;

- It greatly simplifies the process of information accumulation for citizens and businesses.
- It empowers people to gather information regarding any department of government and get involved in the process of decision making.
- E-Governance strengthens the very fabric of democracy by ensuring greater citizen participation at all levels of governance
- E-Governance leads to automation of services, ensuring that information regarding every work of public welfare is easily available to all citizens, eliminating corruption.
- This revolutionizes the way governments function, ensuring much more transparency in the functioning, thereby eliminating corruption.
- Since the information regarding every activity of government is easily available, it would make every government department responsible as they know that every action of theirs is closely monitored.
- Proper implementation of e-Governance practices make it possible for people to get their work done online thereby sparing themselves of unnecessary hassles of traveling to the respective offices.
- Successful implementation of e-Governance practices offer better delivery of services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, better management, greater convenience, revenue growth, cost reductions etc.
- Furthermore, introduction of e-Governance brings governments closer to citizens. So much so that today it becomes extremely convenient to get in touch with a government agency. Indeed, citizen service centers are

located closer to the citizens now. Such centers may consist of an unattended kiosk in the government agency, a service kiosk located close to the client, or the use of a personal computer in the home or office.

Challenges of Implementing E Governance

There are several challenges that can delay progress towards realizing the promise of e-government. The variety and complexity of e-government initiatives implies the existence of a wide range of challenges and barriers to its implementation and management.

ICT Infrastructure

The implementation of e-government initiatives face some technological difficulties such as lack of shared standards and compatible infrastructure among departments and agencies. ICT infrastructure is recognised to be one of the main challenges for e-government. Internetworking is required to enable appropriate sharing of information and open up new channels for communication and delivery of new services (Ndou, 2004). For a transition to electronic government, an architecture providing a uniform guiding set of principles, models and standards, is needed. Sharma & Gupta (2003) point out that implementation of the whole e-government framework requires a strong technology infrastructure. In order to deliver e-government services, government must therefore develop an effective telecommunication infrastructure.

Privacy

Privacy and security are critical obstacles in implementation of e –government. Privacy refers to the guarantee of an appropriate level of protection regarding information attributed to an individual (Basu, 2004). Government has an obligation to ensure citizens' rights regarding privacy, processing and collecting personal data for legitimate purposes only (Sharma & Gupta, 2003). Concerns about website tracking, information sharing, and the disclosure or mishandling of private information are universally frequent. There is also the concern that e-government itself will be used to monitor citizens and invade their privacy. Both technical and policy responses may be required when addressing the privacy issue in an e-government context. In addition, there is a need to respond effectively to privacy issues in networks in order to increase citizen confidence in the use of e-government services. Citizen confidence in the privacy and careful handling of any personal information shared with governmental organizations is essential to e-government applications Basu (2004).

Security

Security of an information system means protection of information and systems against accidental or intentional disclosure to unauthorized access, or unauthorized modifications or destruction (Layton, 2007). It refers to protection of the information architecture including network, hardware and software assets and the control of access to the information itself. Sharma & Gupta, (2003) asserts that, security can be classified into two elements: network security and documents security. It should include maintenance and e-infrastructure protection in the form of firewalls and limits on those who have access to data. Furthermore, the use of security technology, including digital signatures and encryption, to protect user IDs, passwords, credit card numbers, bank account numbers, and other such data being transmitted over the Internet and stored electronically is essential to fulfilling security goals in e-government applications (Feng, 2003)

Policy and Regulation Issues

Feng (2003) points out that e-government is not a technical issue, but rather an organizational issue. Implementation of e-government principles and functions requires a range of new rules, policies, laws and governmental changes to address electronic activities including electronic archiving, electronic signatures, transmission of information, data protection, computer crime, intellectual property rights and copyright issues. Dealing with e-government means signing a contract or a digital agreement, which has to be protected and recognized by a formalized law, which protect and secure these kinds of activities or processes. In many countries, e-business and e-government laws are not yet available. Establishing protections and legal reforms will be needed to ensure, among other things, the privacy, security and legal recognition of electronic interactions and electronic signatures.

Digital Divide

The ability to use computers and the Internet has become a crucial success factor in e-government implementation, and the lack of such skills may lead to marginalization or even social exclusion. The digital divide refers to the gap in opportunity between those who have access to the Internet and those who do not. Those who do not have access to the Internet will be unable to benefit from online services ((UNPA & ASPA, 2001).). In the case of the digital divide, not all citizens currently have equal access to computers and Internet, whether due to a lack of financial resources, necessary skills, or other reasons. In fact, computer literacy is required for people to be able to take advantage of e-government applications.

Conclusion

According to Traummuller 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 harmonise the emerging multitude of technical and organisational 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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