

E-Governance in India – A Study with specific reference to Indian Railways

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Abstract: The enabling role of the Information and Communication technology (ICT) in the delivery of services in the public and government sector has gained acceptance. As a result, a revolution in terms of governance is taking place all over. E-Governance assumes greater importance in the context of management of today's governmental structures to achieve rapid economic growth and improved quality of life. The technology and the methods used in E-Governance project provide a roadmap for efficient delivery of services at the door step. In today's time the development of any country depends on the uses of E-Governance and also their penetration. Development of any country can be judged by the scope of E-Governance in that country. It has ushered in transparency in the governing process; saving of time due to provision of services through single window; reduction in corruption, convenience and empowerment. There are many challenges which create problems for Indian government to run E-Governance. In this paper an attempt has been made to explore the usefulness of E-Governance for the government businesses and citizen of India. This paper also focused on benefits of E-Governance, critical issues for India and how Indian Railways in specific get benefited through E-Governance policy in India.

Keywords: E-Governance; Indian Government.

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I. Introduction

E-Governance is nothing but use of internet technology as a platform for exchanging information, providing services and transacting with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. E-Governance provides a sound strategy to strengthen overall governance. It can not only improve accountability, transparency and efficiency of government processes, but also facilitate sustainable and inclusive growth. E-Governance also provides a mechanism of direct delivery of public services to the marginal segments of the society in the remotest corners, without having to deal with intermediaries. E-Governance is the application of information & communication technologies to transform the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of informational & transactional exchanges with in government, between govt. & govt. agencies of National, State, Municipal & Local levels, citizen & businesses, and to empower citizens through access & use of information.

Objectives

1. To understand the concept of E-Governance.
2. To know the benefits of E-Governance
3. To analyze the role of E-Governance with reference to Indian Railways.

E-Governance in India

India's central and state governments have tended to follow a silo approach to E-Governance - some implementation has taken place but has tended to be piecemeal and disjointed and, consequently, having little impact. This has prevented the absolute necessity for the benefits of IT to percolate to the grass root level and has left the disjointed silos ineffective and (relatively) unused. Today, there is a proliferation of portals in India. Most states have their own portals. But a majority of these portals cannot be considered to be anywhere near the 'one-stop-shops' that should provide end-to-end services to citizens. Ministries and individual departments have

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separate websites. But, again, these are not always linked and joined up in any meaningful way. The official website for the Delhi government is a case in point. The website makes available information and downloadable forms to citizens and businesses. There is also a provision for filling up forms and checking their status online. However, the next step involves sending the printed copies of these filled up forms by post to the concerned government official or department. Moreover, citizens or business representatives have to go personally to collect the certificates or licenses requested. The site, instead of functioning as a one-stop-shop for all government information and services, directs citizens to the websites of public bodies like Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Delhi Development Authority, Land and Building Department, Delhi Transportation Corporation and Delhi Metro Rail. Ideally, the official website should serve as a single window for providing all government information and services, thus negating the need to visit multiple websites. The site should also allow submitting application forms and carrying out transactions online. In a majority of government departments, computerization exists to the extent of having desktop computers for the required staff and department-wise applications. These applications, however, cannot interface with each other and significantly impact interoperability not only currently but also in future when integrated and holistic IT implementation will become the norm of the day.

Benefits of E-Governance

- 1. Fast, Convenient and Cost Effective Service Delivery:** With the advent of e-Service delivery, the government can provide information and services at lesser costs, in reduced time and with greater convenience. For instance, after the computerization of land records in Karnataka, farmers can obtain a copy of their Records of Rights, Tenancy and Crops (RTC) within 30 minutes, as against 30 days that it used to take earlier. Moreover, a printed copy of the RTC at kiosks costs ₹ 15 only, as against heavy bribes that one had to pay earlier.
- 2. Transparency, Accountability and Reduced Corruption:** Dissemination of information through ICT increases transparency, ensures accountability and prevents corruption. An increased use of computers and web-based services improves the awareness levels of citizens about their rights and powers. This helps to reduce the discretionary powers of government officials and curtail corruption. For instance, land registration requirements in Andhra Pradesh after computerization can now be completed within an hour without any official harassment or bribes.
- 3. Increased Participation by People:** With easy access to the government services, the faith of the citizens in the government increases and they come forward to share their views and feedback. Increased accessibility to information has empowered the citizens and has enhanced their participation by giving them the opportunity to share information and contribute to the implementation of initiatives.

Critical Issues of E-Governance for India

E-governance is a big challenge and a far bigger opportunity to bring services to all citizens. The most significant characteristic of any successful e-government application is its quality and accessibility. The issue (Cost, Time) of integration of legacy systems comes onto the scene. As the information collected by governments may be politically sensitive, installation of appropriate security mechanisms may be an important technical consideration. At the same time, many other policy issues need to be resolved, such as authentication and confidentiality.

Technical issues: IT infrastructure is the backbone of E-governance. Interoperability with existing software and hardware platforms is a key success factor. It is unlikely that available resources can support a full replacement of existing applications. Hardware should be fully compatible with future technologies as well. Finally, some legal aspect, like security and privacy, must be considered, as personal data are processed and stored, and financial transactions must be executed. To cope with such requirements, appropriate technical changes must be done. Multi-model application can make it more successful.

Privacy: Citizens' concern on privacy of their life and confidentiality of the personal data need to be technically supported. Privacy and confidentiality has to be highly valued in establishing and maintaining websites. An ideal Cyber policy and strict appliance of it is the backbone for citizen's support.

Securities: The financial transaction demands for transactional security. Few recent cases have raised the issue once again. All support for full security is necessarily needed to maintain. An ideal Cyber Security Policy will ensure the existence of a sound and secure e-governance and critical infrastructure base in India. The security and safety of various ICT platforms and critical infrastructures in India must be considered on a priority basis before any e-governance base is made fully functional.

Social issues: Acceptance and usability by a large variety of people make e-governance successful. Since the social disparity is very high in India, so this issue needs a careful observation. This implies that the interface must be usable by rich or poor, disabled or elderly people, understandable by low literacy or non-native language people, etc.

Infrastructure: Social, geographical and economical disparity issues have to be removed and proper infrastructure is required to establish e-governance. The ICT facilities need to be developed and should be available to one and all citizenry. Internet connection through satellite, phone lines or through cable or Television should be accessible for all specially to the people in rural areas.

Accessibility: Any service should be accessible by anybody from anywhere at anytime. Even if Internet population is exponentially growing in India, still there is a significant portion of the people who may not be able to access services for various reasons like limited access to ICT technologies and devices, low literacy, or phobia for Computer etc. Therefore, universal access is still a mirage.

Usability: People especially in rural areas are often non-expert users and need guidance and support for their transaction. Governmental websites must be user friendly, to be effective. In India English speaking percentage is very low, so the web sites should also have the facility to access in native or local language.

Acceptance: A reconceptualization of government services is mandatory for successful implementation and to get social acceptance. This will happen only if government processes will be organized for citizens' convenience instead of the convenience of the government. A relevant issue will be to have all the citizens well aware and acquainted of the facilities offered by the e-government infrastructure, and have them to trust in it. The demand is appropriate marketing actions and education for less skilled people.

Political will power: E-governance means less interaction with government servants, it will be helpful in reducing bribery issues. The strong objections of the government officers also need a careful and wise approach. This task may require an honest and strong will power of the politicians and leaders.

Economical issues: Economical issues are mainly concerned with return of investment and safeguard of the previous ones. Cost of implementation, operational and evolutionary maintenance must be low enough to guarantee a good cost/benefit ratio.

Maintainability: Maintenance of ICT is a key success factor for long living systems in rapidly changing technical regularity environment. A well skilled labour force and strong will is need of the hour for timely and regular maintenance.

Reusability: Full fledged e-governance is for the whole nation. Some modules at least should be re-usable.

Portability: Independence from hardware/software platforms is primary requisite for portable application, to help in possible reuse by other administrations.

Legal Issues: Strong and effective rules related with IT has to be formulated and strongly implemented. This presupposes the adoption and use of security measures more particularly empowering and training judiciary and law enforcement manpower with the knowledge and use of cyber forensics and digital evidencing.

Literacy: In India where literacy rate is low, e-governance is a real challenge. Lack of IT Literacy and awareness regarding benefits of e-governance has to emphasize.

Role of E-Governance in Indian Railways:

After enactment of IT Act 2000, Railways in the year 2001 decided to conduct trial of web based e-Procurement. Trials were started in 2005 in ASP (Application Service Provider) mode on Northern Railways and considered successful as about 5000 tenders were successfully floated during July'05 to Jul'08. Based on this experience, another project was sanctioned in the year 2006 for implementation of e-Procurement system on eight zonal railways and five production units through railways own society CRIS. This was sanctioned to improve the transparency in procurement process and also to eliminate various problems of manual tendering. It was also decided that initial investment made by the railways in IT infrastructure for Materials Management Information System (MMIS) should be protected and e-Procurement system should be dovetailed with this not only for economic considerations but also for better acceptability among Railways personnel who are familiar and used to the existing system. The project of e-Procurement on Indian Railways (handling about 10,000 tenders per month) has been a great success mainly due to thrust on training, education and hand holding the users and successfully handling security concerns of the stake holders to bring confidence in them. It has improved competitiveness and image of the buying organization apart from being of immense use to vendors. As a result of this implementation, the processes have also been standardized and streamlined.



II. Conclusion

E-governance is an evolutionary phenomenon, and requires a change in the mindset of one and all – citizen, executives or the government. With the support of the Internet, the government processes defined by specializations can be made efficient, effective, and citizen friendly. There are many challenging issues lying ahead. Security is the main concern for the citizen, and redefining rules and procedures, information transparency, legal issues, infrastructure, skill and awareness, access to right information, inter-departmental collaboration, tendency to resist the change in work culture, are the main concerns for the government to address. Other than all these factors, the government needs to make significant investments in areas such as government process re-engineering, capacity building, training, assessment and awareness. The beneficial impact of ICT and of e-governance on the rural economy and quality of life is now widely recognized. An apex committee under the Cabinet Secretary is already in place for providing the strategic direction and management oversight. The need is to maintain a proper database of all the citizens and well developed infrastructure. Security issues need to be tackled very carefully supported by technical security. Most important is the strong political will power and the social acceptability of e-governance not only in urban areas but rural areas as well.

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