# E-Governance : Issues and Challenges

***Shrinivas Meghashyam Athalye***
*Librarian*,
Swami Vivekanand Night College,
Chhatrapati Bhavan, Datta Nagar, Ayre Road,
Dombivli (East) *421 201* **INDIA**
*E-mail : smathalye42@gmail.com / Mobile No. 9223 374 300*

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## ABSTRACT

Government is working body selected among the people, by the people, for the people. It helps the people in smooth working of their day today routine work with the bureaucracy. Every time it is not possible to government to reach to the people within a short period of time. So it happens to delay the work. Here e - governance helps the government. With the use of Information Technology, it can reach immediately to the people and get their work done. But e - governance has also some issues and challenges which are discussed in this paper and also some remedies are suggested.

**KEY WORDS:** Information Technology, E-governance, issues, Challenges

## INTRODUCTION

E - governance is a technical support or online helping hand from the government to the people and vice versa. Properly use of e - governance is helpful to run the democracy smoothly. But it has many issues and challenges which are to be faced by the government and the people as well.  Let's have a look on these issues and challenges and discuss the remedy to overcome.

## WHY E-GOVERNANCE?

Several technologies have provided support to the governance function over the centuries. They include:
a) Printed paper to circulate government decisions among citizens.

b) Audio-video support in the conduct and transmission of legislative proceedings.

c) Simultaneous translation of parliamentary proceedings.

d) Transportation including air travel to take elected representatives closer to the citizens.

e) Telecommunications to reach individual citizens.

The various essentials for a good vision and objectives for e-governance are as follows :

1) The citizen should be at the center of the e-governance vision of the country.

2) The vision should be close to reality.

3) Even though the citizen is at the center, the other stakeholders should not be forgotten.

4) Citizen should have access to various delivery channels and should not be limited to bring online.

5) Service improvement and process efficiency are key objectives of e-governance.

## ISSUES IN E-GOVERNANCE

### A) Technical Issues

1. Interoperability : The interoperation of various state governments, the various ministries with in a state government is a critical issue. Integration of data is main problem, how to capture the data in web based form and how to transfer it in common format for processing and sharing the information.

2. Privacy : privacy of any transaction or information provided by the citizen to the government agency must be ensured. Otherwise the information can be misuse by the private sector or competitors and the users may be reluctant to access the services provided.

3. Security : Transaction security is another major problem in e-governance. The tax, fine and bill payment must be secured and the system design should be full proof.

4. Authentication : The authentication of citizens requesting services, needs to be verified before they access or use the services. The digital signature plays an important role in providing the authenticity but this is expensive and requires frequent maintenance.

**B) Economic Issues**

1. Cost : Implementation, operations and maintenance cost of service provided should be low enough for high cost benefit ratio.

2. Maintainability : IT has been continuously evolving and software are frequently upgraded. Thus the system must be compatible and maintainable for easily fulfillment of emerging needs.

3. Reusability : E-governance should be considered as nationwide plan and the implemented modules must be reusable by other administrations.

4. Portability : The primary requisite for portable applications is independence of components from hardware or software platforms, to help in possible reuse by other administrations.

**C) Social issues**

1. Accessibility : E-governance service should be accessible for anybody from anywhere at any time. Even if internet population is growing exponentially, there is a very big portion of the population who may not able to access e-governance for various reasons.

2. usability : All the users may not be expert of ICT transactions or the technology used for e-governance. Therefore the service provided must be usable or user friendly. To make the system usable, the guidance of operation may be provided to the users.

3. Acceptance : E-governance requires reconfiguration of internal and external structure of public sectors. The main aim is to improve the system efficiently and to provide high quality services to the citizens. E-governance is for citizen convenience, instead of convenience of government. The power conflicts over the departmental and functional boundaries become more prominent in integration process.

4. Use of local languages : The access of information must be permitted in the local languages for user comfort.  There should be language software or some other technologies to translate the information from English to local languages.

5. Awareness in rural areas : in India, there are very high percentage of villages where awareness of e-governance is required since large portion of rural populations are not aware of new technologies and computer educations.

## IMPLEMENTATION ASPECTS OF E-GOVERNANCE

The implementation of e-governance system has many aspects. For e.g. normally e-governance services are non-profit making services and most of the time, their payback period is very high which makes them capital intensive. The 7-C model aptly indicates various implementation aspects of e-governance. This 7-Cs are as under.

1. Capital : E-governance services meant for providing faster and effective services to the citizens and profit considerations are not very prominent aspect of these services. Many services which were implemented long ago are yet to break even due to high cost. The operational cost with a subsidy to users makes it tough to generate operational profit.

2. Connectivity : Success of e-governance service depends on its reach to the people. A good system can be good, only when it can benefit a large section of the connectivity till the last mile.

3. Commitment : As e-governance is no viewed in terms of accounting profits and shorter payback period and even one of the great motivators , money, is absent, it is at the different hierarchy of the system. It is needed to push, through the project, to its logical end.

4. Competence : Competence is required to gather the intelligence at the grass root level. Understanding of people's problem as well as those who are going to provide e-governance services (mainly operators and clerks) needs more than understanding of software engineering.

5. Content : In India the lack of customized content is one of the hurdles in implementation of the e-governance services. The content is not available in local language, which can capture understanding of people at the gross root level.

6. Citizen interface : Interface should be illustrative and easy-navigating, so that even native users do not find it tough to avail of the services.

7. Cyber laws : Services should be backed by cyber laws to make the documents or information legally valid. Indian IT act 2002 was one of the endeavors towards this, which made e-mails and other digital documents valid as a legal documents.

## E-GOVERNANCE EVOLUTION IN INDIA: CHALLENGES BEFORE STAKEHOLDERS

1) Lack of IT literacy and awareness regarding benefits of e-governance: There is general lack of awareness regarding benefits of e-governance as well as process involved in

implementing successful G2G, G2C,G2B projects. The administrative structure is not geared for maintaining, storing and retrieving the governance information electronically.

2) Urbanization of existing ICT infrastructure:      To a larger extend, the computers in the department are used for the purpose of word processing only. This is resulting in the underutilization of computers in terms of their use in data mining for supporting management decisions. The time gap between the procurement of the hardware and development of custom applications is so large that by the time application is ready for use, the hardware becomes obsolete.

3) Attitude of government departments:      The Psychology of government servants is quite different from that a private sectors. Thus any effort to implement Database Management System and workflow technologies or bringing out change in the system is met with the resistance from the government servants.

4) Lack of coordination between government department and solution developers: Designing of any application requires a very close interaction between the government department and the agency developing the solutions. Consequently the solution developed and implemented does not address the requirements of an e-governance project and hence does not get implemented.

5)Resistance to re-engineering of departmental processes:   Successful implementation of e-governance project requires a lot of restructuring in administrative processes, redefining of administrative procedures and formats which finds the resistance in almost all the departments at all the levels. The content collected or maintained by various e-governance portals in unreliable or full of gaps. It is difficult for any e-governance solution to achieve its intended results.

6) Lack of infrastructure for sustaining e-governance projects at national level: Infrastructure to support e-governance initiatives does not exist within government departments. The infrastructure creation is not guided by a uniform national policy, but it dependent on the needs of individual officers championing a few projects. Therefore, the required networking and communication equipment is either nonexistent in government departments or if it exists at all, it does not serve any tangible purpose as per the requirement of e-governance project is concern.

**REASONS OF FAILURE OF E-GOVERNANCE**

E-governance projects may fail due to multiple reasons. The reasons usually listed are neither comprehensive nor complete. Some of these reasons are as under.

1) Planning to fail or Failing to plan: The first step in any project is planning. The success of the project will depend on the skill and expertise with which it is planned and conceptualized. The plans are finalized without clear objectives, unclear roles and responsibilities. There are no parameters for financial controls. Areas like risk assessment, feasibility assessment, prioritization and strategy are not even thought about. So where as no plans exists in some projects, in others, the plan is doomed for failure.

2) Mission Impossible: Another cause of project failure is to visualize the impossible. The project consultants hired by various government departments generally promise the moon to the dep. They expect that whatever they suggest will be implemented by the government without realizing the fact that the government has its own limitations. The reality and the vision gap is the second step towards e-governance failure.

3) Misunderstanding governance: The consultant hired by the government at times totally misunderstands the governance process and the institution of the government. They do not realize that the government will be governed by the constitution and the laws therein. Consultants feel that the government will change according to the solution suggested by them. They have an impression that the government has to fit into their solution and not vice versa. In reality they have no ensure that their solutions fit the government needs. Further the consultants do not realize that the government is the complex structure which has existed over the years and any big changes are very difficult to implement. Misunderstanding the government and governance is the third step leading to the failure of e-governance projects.

4) Bottleneck is at the top of the bottle always: The various departments in the government of India are mostly headed by individuals who are nearing their retirement. The top officials are lovers of status quo and develop resistance to change. With no support from top leadership, the e-governance projects do not get any encouragement.

5) Focus on 'e' rather than 'governance': Every seminar, every author, every government officer stresses that e-governance is more about governance than 'e'. However the implementers in the government have not realized the importance of the same. The team for this programme management unit must comprise individuals with experience in diverse government background. Focus on IT and electronics is the another most important cause of failure of e-governance.

6) Employees as stakeholder universe:        Majority of the projects take government employees as the only stakeholders. The consultation process happens with the senior government employees and rest of the stakeholders are neglected. The government departments feel that they know all the requirements of the stakeholders and therefore it is useless spending time on such projects. The stakeholder universe being limited to employees, is another cause of failure.

7) Let's build Rome in a day: Most of the e-governance projects are given unachievable timelines. Most of the time ministers or leaders make announcements and the deadlines, then the quality becomes the key challenge in project implementation. It may take time for an e-governance project to actually be ready to be launched and it may take time for training and adoption of the project by all stakeholders. A change is not easy to implement and we must be patient in implementing change via e-governance. The time taken will further help to improve and rectify the project. Unachievable timeless and the race to achieve them is a further cause of failure.

8) Individual projects:        Most of the e-governance projects are individual-driven. The approach of individualizing the project is not appropriate and this leads to failure. The project which are driven by individuals die after the individuals leave the organizations. But project which have been institutionalized stay forever.

9) Procedural loops:  The procedural loops are another hindrance in the e-governance project implementation. All projects need to go through a competitive bidding process which may take even more than the implementation of the project. Sometimes even, the project approval time is more than the implementation time. The project files keep on moving from one department to another and from one table to another. This causes to failure.

10) From office vs. back office e-governance:        Unless the backend integration of systems take place, the frontend efforts may not lead to any success. The true e-governance applications will be achieved only when the front office is integrated with the backend application. Creating front offices without any back office integration is another cause of e-governance failure.

## E-GOVERNANCE ACTION PLAN : STRATEGIES FOR TODAY; VISION FOR FUTURE

Government of India is now beginning to realize that e-governance is the key to drive today's economy with an increased participation from citizens. Providing services online is no longer going to remain optional for local and central government, as demand for providing services at internet speed has been coming from citizens. The real challenge is how to develop and sustain successful e-governance projects and deliver state of the art e-services to citizens. Some of the requirements for implementing successful e-governance across the nation are as under.

1) E-governance framework across the nation enough bandwidth to service a population of one billion.

2) Connectivity framework for making the services reaches rural areas of the country or development of alternative means of services such as e-governance kiosks in regional language.

3) National citizens database which is a the primary unit of data for all governance vertical and horizontal applications across the state and central governments.

4) E-governance and interoperability standards for the exchange of secure information with non-repudiation across the state and the central government seamlessly.

5) A secure delivery framework by means of virtual private network connecting across the state and the central government departments.

6) Data centers in the state and the central government to handle the departmental workflow automation, collaboration, interaction, exchange of information with automation.

### SUGGESTIONS  FOR SUCCESS OF AN E-GOVERNANCE

For success of an e-governance and superior service delivery, it is imperative that the government agency focuses on whole citizen experience. The government agency needs to integrate information from all points of citizen integration. The e-governance applications that are emerging as islands of success have to be interoperable. Following are some suggestions for the successful transformation.

a) Create literacy and commitment to e-governance at high level:  The  most  important requirement in e-governance is a training programme for policy makers, politicians and IT task

force members. The training programme needs to be focused according to the requirements of the policy makers at the top.

b) Conduct usability surveys for assessment of existing e-governance projects:     There is a varying degree of development of e-governance among the different states. A few states have leapfrogged into a digital era, whereas a few are yet to start with any initiative. Therefore an e-awareness exercise should be carried out in all state government departments, to understand their level of acceptability of the e-governance.

c) Starting with implementation of pilot projects and replicating the successful ones: The pilot projects taken in various states should be accessed for their achievement levels. They should be classified as success or failure according to the desired output written down before implementation of the projects. The successful projects should be replic over the nation with members drawn from the implementing team. The projects, which could not achieve the desired outcome, should be documented for possible causes of failure.

d) Follow the best practices in e-governance: The study of the best practices will bring forward the best practices followed nationally and internationally. The national and international beat practices study will give a great momentum to the process of e-governance.

e) Build nation resource database of e-governance projects: This     would     allow     any organization planning an IT project to instantly ascertain whether any such project has already been implemented anywhere in the country. And intending implementers would know who the people in similar projects are and how to reach them.

f) How clearly defined interoperability policy: The e-governance architecture needs to ensure that the components are scalable and adaptable to the future requirements. It has also to ensure that the local architecture fits into state level and the same into national and global architecture. Interoperability is a major criteria while defining the architecture.

g) Manage and update content on government websites efficiently and regularly: Content is the 'heart' of any IT project. The process of content development encompasses a whole range of activities starting with a comprehensive study of the system and identification of the objectives. It ends up with delivery of the intended benefits to the citizens or other users of the system. The government agencies must ensure that the data on the sites is always updated and relevant.

**SUMMARY**

Though, government is trying to give its best services to the people, there are many problems like illiteracy, large population, poverty etc. E - governance helps the government to avoid these problems and reach to the people. But it has also some issues and challenges. With the proper use of e - governance these problems can be solved and people can get better services from the government.

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