Strategies for Effective E-Governance Readiness

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Abstract

The essence of e-Government is to be able to seamlessly integrate the disparate Information and Communication Technology initiatives of government agencies to provide integrated services to all the objects targeted like the citizens, businesses and even the Government itself. It is the unification of back-ends of agencies on the one hand and the front-end delivery channels on the other. The process of governance has been and is continuously impacted by the developments in various technologies. It brings down the cost, improves the process quality and makes a speedy reach to all the objects targeted. E-Governance is generally considered as a wider concept than e-Government, since it can bring about a change in the way how citizens relate to governments and to each other. The objective of e-Governance is to engage, enable and empower the citizen. E-Participation, e-Voting, e-Transparency, e-Accountability are some of the dimensions of e-Governance. It considers social, economic and environmental aspects in the decision making of its policies. E-Readiness is the ability to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to develop state's economy and to foster state's welfare. While e-readiness is a larger concept that measures a nation's comprising of citizens, businesses and government taking advantage of the digital revolution, it mainly relates to the processes involving the government transformation using the tools of ICT. E-readiness touches upon the state of all interfaces viz. G2G, G2B, B2B, B2C and C2C. This paper stretches its objectives for a critical review on the concept of e-Readiness in Governance with special focus to developing countries to be implemented with Information and Communication Technology. The main goal of this paper is to bring out the concerns related to Effective E-Governance Readiness.

Keywords: E-Readiness, Information and Communication Technology, E-Governance, E-Governance Readiness

Introduction

Modern administrative systems have become more and more information-based. This has profoundly altered the environment in which governments, citizens and other organizations operate. It has also impacted the way in which new systems are being designed. E-Governance is the outgrowth of the efforts made by the governments to improve relations with their citizens. With its ingrained transparency and openness, given the principles of Internet, E-Governance brings governments more closely to their citizens. Therefore, E-Governance has a larger social angle, as it ensures a more wide and representative democracy.

Governments have also embraced Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the form of E-Governance for better service delivery and information dissemination to citizens (G-2-C) and for intra government transactions (G-2-G). With technological revolution, it is easier for the governments to maintain consistent and cordial relationship with citizens and other government departments. It is a strategic opportunity for the governments to harness Information Technology to provide service excellence by increasing the efficiency of service and information delivery to citizens; build and strengthen the links and cooperation between government; its citizens and stakeholders; realize operational and financial efficiencies; assist in community building and outreach; and build an environment which encourages innovation.

New technologies demand new types of implementation models. In the conventional approach of e-governance, the project ownership lies with the public sector itself along with the responsibility for funding it and bearing the entire risk. Readiness is the degree to which a community or government is prepared to participate in the Networked World. It is gauged by assessing its relative advancement in the areas that are most critical for ICT

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adoption and the most important applications of ICTs. When considered together in the context of a strategic planning dialogue, an assessment based on these elements provides a robust portrayal of its Readiness. Government may be well poised for some applications of ICTs, but unable to use others. E-Readiness measures a state's capacity to participate in the digital economy. An e-Ready society is one that has the necessary physical infrastructure. It is a measure of the degree to which a country or economy may be ready, willing or prepared to obtain benefits which arise from the ICTs. The Economist Intelligence Unit's rankings are commonly used in defining a country's e-readiness as a measure of its digital participation. The rankings are based on assessing readiness along four fronts – policy, infrastructure, resources and usage. This paper mainly focuses on the strategies for effective E-Governance Readiness as a case study methodology.

Conceptual Framework

Electronic Governance is the application of technology by government to transform itself and its interactions with customers, in order to create impact on the society. According to Dawes (2008), E-Governance comprises the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to support public services, government administration, democratic processes, and relationships among citizens, civil society, the private sector, and the state.

Dimensions and Elements of Electronic Governance

GOVERNMENT	TECHNOLOGY	INTERACTION	CUSTOMERS	SOCIETY
Mission	Equipment	Channels	Information needs	Demography
Role	Infrastructure	Channel Strategy	Service needs	Digital Inclusion
Value	Data	Interoperability	Producer roles	Institutional change
Operation	Social Media	Partnerships	Consumer roles	Social tension
Service	Services	Goals	Accessibility	Participation
Institution	Applications	Governance	Change	Globalization
Inspection		Transactions	Trust	Migration
Enforcement		Participation		Public value

E-Governance for sustainable development is the use of ICT to support public services, public administration, and the interaction between government and the public, while making possible public participation in government decision-making, promoting social equity and socioeconomic development, and protecting natural resources for future generations.

Framework below depicts a mapping of four primary and their sub components contributing to E-Governance Readiness. The primary components are: Policy, Infrastructure, Resources and Usage. Below is the table giving weightage on the e-Readiness.

E-readiness Component	Weightage	E-readiness Sub components	Weightage
Policy	20	ICT Policy	5
		e-Government Policy	5
		Architecture & Standards	3
		Regulation	7
Infrastructure	25	Networks	10
		Access	8
		ICT Hardware	7
Resources	30	Political Resources	8
		Human Resources	7
		Employee Resources	3
		ICT Resources of private Sector	3
		Financial Resources	9
Usage	25	Usage by Citizens	6
		Usage by Businesses	7
		Usage by Government	12

This table gives an indication whether a state stands with regard to development of ICT sector and its usage. It is also observed that some of the sub components are specific to e-government and some to the e-commerce. It is possible to develop a different model adopting the above components with same weightage. The Ministry of Information Technology under Indian Government has developed a model shown below to assess e-government readiness.

E-readiness Component	Weightage	E-readiness Sub components
Preparedness	15	Understanding of e-Government
		Importance of IT in the functioning of the department
Policy	20	IT Action Plan – availability and quality
		Adherence of IT Action Plan
		IT Spending
People	20	Computer literacy
		IT education
		IT training
IT infrastructure	20	Hardware/Software Infrastructure
		Networking Infrastructure
		Web site Infrastructure
Processes	15	Business Process Reengineering
		Mode of Interaction
		Status of Automation
		Status of Integration
		Database maintenance
		Security
IT Benefits or Outcomes	10	Benefits
		Return on Investment
		Impact on Productivity

This model gives the measuring or assessing of several macro and micro indices across different state projects and agencies involved or implementing the E-Governance projects.

Discussion

There are various models globally to implement the Electronic Governance in each sector. The above framework or models on e-readiness reveals that there are differing perspectives on the usefulness and credibility of the existent tools. Hence for a clear understanding the steps for e-readiness and the various known issues are discussed below. It is necessary to look at three issues described below.

***People readiness*:** We can program processes but not people. People readiness has four stages of evolution viz. readiness to think, learn, act and transform.

***Reform readiness*:** Reform is triggered by the need to introduce new services and to provide the existing services in a new way to the citizens, in a manner that is convenient and cost effective from the citizen's viewpoint.

***Back Vs Front End readiness*:** The conflict between development of services, establishment of infrastructure and readying the people Vs the creation of a delivery channel policy, establishing service centers and portals needs a perfect plan which is back Vs front end readiness. In other words it's the design Vs implementation.

Based on the above issues, to go higher up on the e-readiness index, some of the steps suggested in e-Governance readiness are given below.

1. Articulate e-Government vision and strategy

2. Review the policy

3. Prioritize the services

4. Design the functional and technical architectures for each service

5. Initiate each project with a pilot approach

6. Implement change management programs across all agencies

7. Public – Private Partnership could be adopted

8. Publish policies on security and privacy

9. Establish data centers with gateway

Obtaining e-readiness in governance requires a multi pronged effort which may be possible by a structured approach but it should overcome the issues stated above. The steps discussed above should overcome the above mentioned issues in e-Government Readiness.

Applicability

Unfortunately, there are numerous limitations to e-readiness measures, a lot of which have already been identified with the literature. This is largely due to the fact that these indices are often regarded as overly simplistic solutions to extremely complex problems. According to Bridges.org (2001), each tool has its own impact, benefits and limitations and therefore to be carefully selected in order to fulfill the required goals. In large implementation, the models may be lacking and hence every model should require redesigning in order to be a comprehensive assessment tool.

The fact that a society rates highly in e-readiness does not automatically mean that it will adopt e-government readiness. Chu and Tang (2005) exemplified this by using the case of Hong Kong. Despite the high levels of e-readiness in the city, majority of the environmental projects could not achieve targeted outcomes. Similarly Altman (2002) found that there was no direct link between those states with high potential readiness and those with actual broad use of e-governance. This implies that the link between a state's e-readiness with that of e-government readiness involves many factors between them.

The success of any project is gauged by the extent to which it achieves its predefined goals. The findings on above models show that the Readiness in E-Governance related research pursues a clear multi-disciplinary approach. According to Kajikawa (2008), the challenge ahead is to explore if such research could become inter or trans-disciplinary. To this end, despite the maturity of many disciplines contributing to the E-Governance, Readiness in Effective E-Governance related research; there is a clear need to strengthen the theoretical foundations.

Conclusion

The success of e-government lies in applying the principles in a coherent and holistic way by infinite people across agencies, states consistently over a period. E-Government has already occupied a significant place in the global economy. The various agencies of United Nations Organization (UNO) and the World Bank provide huge support in e-government initiatives. It is quite useful for states and agencies to make a quick assessment of their e-readiness and/or e-government readiness without huge investment of resources in doing this. The fairly simple methodology given above could yield successful outcomes and sustainable results in Electronic Governance Readiness. There is always a need and transformation in the existing structure. New technologies demand new types of implementation models. Hence there is always a way and necessity for betterment in this. In order to make progress in a new research area like Electronic Governance Readiness, there is a need to build a good understanding of the underlying concepts and to assess the state of this area and its immediate neighborhood. In order to fulfill this need, this paper presented a conceptual framework for Electronic Governance Readiness. The framework identified various components and their inter-relationship. The main contribution of the paper is to build a good understanding of the nature and state of the E-Governance Readiness related research, and to establish a foundation for further related research.

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