

Electronic Governance

Gaurav Sahni

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CONTENTS

S.No.	Page
1. E-Governance: Concept and Significance	1
2. Information and Communication Technology:	13
Concept and Components	
3. ICTs: Roles and Applications	25
4. Role of ICT in Administration	35
5. Administrative Organization Culture: Towards ICT Based Reforms	45
6. Role of ICT in Rural Development	54
7. Panchayati Raj Institutions:	62
Improving Self-Governance Through ICT	
8. E-Learning: Role of ICT in Education and Training	74
9. E-Commerce	83
10. Delivery of Citizen Services: Role of ICT	91
11. ICT in Indian Railways	100
12. Saukaryam: ICT Project in Visakhapatnam	109
Municipal Corporation, Andhra Pradesh	
13. E-Seva: ICT Project in Self-help in Andhra Pradesh	121
14. Information Policy: Right to Information Act, 2005	129
15. ICT Implementation in Governance: Issues and Challenges	142

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E-GOVERNANCE

*INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGIES AND GOVERNANCE*



E-Governance: Concept and Significance

INTRODUCTION

E-governance is a process of reform in the way governments work, share informations, engage citizens and deliver services to external and internal clients for the benefit of both government and the clients.

Government harnesses information technologies such as Wide Area Network (WAN), Internet, World Wide Web, and mobile computing reach out to the citizens, business, and other branches of the government to improve. The delivery of services to citizens, businesses and employees, engage citizens in the process of governance through interaction, empower citizens through access to the knowledge and information and make the working of government more efficient and effective that results in enhanced transparency, convenience and empowerment; to fight against corruption; revenue growth; and cost reduction.

This chapter mainly deals with different concepts, models and stages of the e-governance. This chapter also highlights the legal and policy framework related with e-governance.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

CONCEPT OF E-GOVERNANCE

The term e-governance refers to the processes in which Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a significant role. The role played by ICT could be wide-ranging: in delivery

and standards of governance services, to how people access such services, and the participation of people in the governance. E-governance uses ICT to induce changes in the delivery and standards of governance services and more importantly, in the way citizens interact and participate in the governance.

In case of good governance, information is acquired and used strategically for public good. And in case of bad governance, the same information is used for private gains and for suppression of the citizens. In either forms of governance, the selective use of information creates hierarchal structures on which power gets unequally distributed. The skew in the distribution of power at each hierarchical level is proportional to the critical information residing at each level.

The views of e-governance are helpful in drawing attention to particular elements of the use of information and communication technologies in the public sector, from the online interface between government and citizens to technology's role in reforming public administration.

We all know that e-governance of ICT in the working of government imply SMART governance: Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent.

“SMART Governance” is about the future of the public services, it's about greater efficiency, community leadership, mobile working and continuous improvement through innovations.

2 / NEERAJ : E-GOVERNANCE

SMART governance is about using technology to facilitate and support better planning and decision-making. It helps in transforming the ways that public services are delivered. It includes e-government, the efficiency agenda and mobile working.

The objectives of the network are to stimulate ideas, encourage and support experience sharing, and to challenge existing ways of working. It is a new network that is building on, and expanding the scope of the e-champions' network that was formerly operated by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).

It is a largely virtual network with a slim administrative and operational structure. It will be running experience sharing events, providing regular updates on SMART governance issues, and encouraging innovation in public service delivery etc.

E-governance and E-government

The development of e-government and e-governance takes place in a very specific environment and contextual pressure which we must understand and learn, in order to steer at best. This overall change can be identified as manifold, although producing a composed impact on our lifestyle, level of wealth and relationships inter-regionally and internationally.

E-government rests on the pillars of knowledge and recognition of this set of knowledge by the decision-makers and people alike. Digitization of this entire set of knowledge within a network which is open to all individuals (an inclusive network by design) opens up possibilities for all to access and use this knowledge – paving the way for e-governance.

Introduction of e-governance ensures that citizens can participate in, and influence decision-making processes which affect them closely. Citizens no longer remain passive recipients of governance services provided to them, but can proactively decide the types and standards of governance services they want and the governance structures which can best deliver to them.

ICT can influence governance processes possibly in the following three ways:

- **Technical Role:** Automation of repetitive governance tasks and thereby improving efficiency of governance processes. For instance, automated filing of tax forms, e-voting, periodic information reporting etc.
- **Supportive Role:** Use of ICT to complement existing efforts and processes to improve governance. For instance, use of Internet to catalyse existing efforts towards transparency in government information and functioning, or embedding use of e-mails in connecting decision-makers with their constituencies.
- **Innovative Role:** Use of ICT to initiate new governance services or new mechanisms for improved service delivery which would be impossible through non-ICT modes. For instance, online checking of status of an application (from remote and beyond office hours); providing instant access to the same information to all individuals through e-mails and website; ability to instantly access, compare or triangulate information from outside of the constituency or government sources etc.

STAGES OF E-GOVERNANCE

Stage I: Web Presence: The first phase is marked by web presence of public institutions and dissemination of information. This has been facilitated by the Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI) and this has been developed as a basic feature of all public services where type of service and service provider details are made available in a proactive manner.

Stage II: Interactive Presence: The next stage is marked by an interactive interface with stakeholders with proactive solutions to problem-solving and electronic requests for services and financial transactions. The service starts on the Internet, but does not always end there. Applications related to property tax, land registration, property titles and programmes like 'bhoomi' are now being replicated at national level. Efforts to widen the reach of these basic services to ordinary citizens through

community access in several ways – through online sections at government offices, integrated service delivery through one-stop service centres– e-kiosks, e-seva kendras etc, post offices, call centres, cooperative centres etc.

Stage III: Transactional Presence: Completion of transactions on the Internet and access to Internet. This interaction in turn results in vertical and horizontal integration which changes the way a service is delivered, the effort being for completion of the transaction for the service through the Internet with putting in place of back-end integration. The architectural model for this stage requires interoperability and convergence.

Stage IV: Networked Presence and E-participation: The fourth stage is marked by a Government to Citizen (G2C) framework based on an integrated network of public agencies, process certification and participation in basic process design and political processes. Web comment forms, upcoming events, online polling mechanism, discussion forums and online consultation facilities are parts of this stage. Integrated portals are central to this integration. Web-based political participation and institutionalization of stakeholder participation with tools like citizen polling mark important benchmarks in this stage. The promise of inclusion of all is an important hallmark of this stage.

MODELS OF E-GOVERNANCE

Based on different classes of information, their sources and frequency of updation and exchange, various models of e-governance projects can be evolved. The National e-governance Action Plan of the Government of India [NeGP] can act as a model for such projects. The models are classified in the following categories:

- Broadcasting Model
- Critical Flow Model
- Comparative Analysis Model
- E-Advocacy/Lobbying and Mobilization Model
- Interactive Service Model

Now we will discuss these models separately:

Broadcasting Model: The model is based on broadcasting or dissemination of useful governance information which already exists in the public domain into the wider public domain through the use of ICT and convergent media. The utility of this model is that a more informed citizenry is better able to benefit from governance related services that are available for them.

Critical Flow Model: The model is based on dissemination information of ‘critical’ value (which by its very nature will not be disclosed by those involved with bad governance practices) to targeted audience using ICT and convergent media. Targeted audience may include media, opposition parties, judicial bench, independent investigators or the wider public domain itself.

Comparative Analysis Model: Comparative Analysis Model is one of the least used, but a highly significant model for developing a country which is now gradually gaining acceptance. The model can be used for empowering people by matching cases of bad governance with those of good governance, and then analyzing the different aspects of bad governance and its impact on the people.

E-advocacy Model/Mobilization and Lobbying Model: E-Advocacy/Mobilization and Lobbying Model is one of the most frequently used Digital Governance Models and has often come to the aid of the global civil society to impact on global decision-making processes. The strength of this model is in its diversity of the virtual community, and the ideas, expertise and resources accumulated through this virtual form of networking.

Interactive Service Model: Interactive Service Model is a consolidation of the earlier presented digital governance models and opens up avenues for direct participation of individuals in the governance processes. Fundamentally, ICT have the potential to bring in every individual in a digital network and enable interactive (two-way) flow of information among them.

LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

● Information Technology Act, 2000

The Information Technology Act, 2000 was enacted to "... provide legal recognition for transactions carried out by means of electronic data interchange and other means of electronic communication, commonly referred to as "electronic commerce", which involve the use of alternatives to paper-based methods of communication and storage of information, to facilitate electronic filing of documents with the government agencies and further to amend the Indian Penal Code, the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, the bankers' books Evidence Act, 1891 and the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto."

Thus, the focus of this Act is on electronic commerce and electronic records. The Act contains provisions on digital signatures and authentication of electronic records, retention of electronic records, attribution, acknowledgement and dispatch of electronic records, security of electronic records, regulation of certifying authorities, cyber regulation Appellate Tribunal etc. To facilitate the implementation of e-governance projects at various levels across the country, a more holistic legal framework is required.

● Report of the Working Group on Convergence and E-governance, 2002-07

This process involves major changes in the structures of the computer industry, information and content industry, and the communication industry and has three major aspects:

Convergence of Carriage: Maximum convergence is expected in the area of access network (tele-communication including data communication) or local delivery services (broadcasting) as technology now permits the use of the network for carrying broadcasting signals.

Convergence of Content: Content convergence focuses on fully developing web content into an integrated online experience that enhances the value of the printed and online products to both readers and advertisers. Creation of content that is useful, interesting and empowers the user calls for the resolution of contradictory interests.

Convergence of Terminal: Technology and industry are moving towards achieving the ultimate aim of global coverage to provide anywhere and at any time communication of voice data and images.

The success of the convergence would lie in ensuring a seamless transition to the new services and information delivery systems. Both in government funded projects and the private sector, returns in terms of better and cheaper deliveries, scalability and coverage would determine as to which medium would lead the convergence process. The single biggest area of "convergence" could be the integration of the Internet with the broadcast market.

● Common Minimum Programme

E-governance is a fairly complex process of creating and harnessing the right environment that consists of people who are committed to the cause and who have the right knowledge, skill sets and attitude. Taking note of the potential of e-governance in improving the quality of life of the masses and the learning associated with earlier initiatives, the Government of India has come up with a national programme—National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), which has been approved. E-governance is also a part of the government's agenda of governance as mentioned in its National Common Minimum Programme. In this context, the national programme has identified several e-governance projects called Mission Mode Projects (MMP) at the Centre and State level, which are to be implemented by the respective line ministries.

● National E-Governance Plan

The National E-Governance Action Plan comprises of core components and 27 Mission Mode Projects to be executed across the country. Certain mission mode projects (MMP) are to be implemented by the line ministries at the national level, some by the state governments and certain integrated projects. Major activities proposed in NeGP include:

- (a) Core Policies
- (b) Core Projects – Mission Mode Projects (MMP)
- (c) Core Infrastructure
- (d) Support Infrastructure