

E-Govt - first step towards modernised governmental structures

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We are very well aware that the public sector of our country having complaints that government of our country delivers too little costs too much and is not sufficiently responsive or accountable. Information and communication technology can only improve government processes, connect citizens, and build interactions with and within civil society.

The challenge of transformation and the increasing need to modernize government structure and management systems has become a major goal to Governments Worldwide. This is more so in the last one-decade and especially the last four years in Pakistan. Government can improve the system as well as economic conditions of our country, by focusing on e-government.

Nowadays, the wealth of a nation is not judged by its physical assets. It is determined by the technological gaps between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. The transition from manual to IT culture will require government agencies to review their current system, process and work procedures and consequently modify or redesign them to suit electronic service delivery.

It is appropriate time to introduce information and communication technologies which can make a significant contribution to the achievement of good governance goals. This e-government can make government more efficient and more effective, and bring other benefits too.

I believe that the use of electronic technologies can help to reverse that decline in trust, by making governments more open and accessible. As governments put more information about policies, programs and services on line, they become more transparent. Secrecy breeds distrust, and this increased transparency should have a double-edged impact: it should help citizens to appreciate the challenges governments face, and it should also encourage public officials to make decisions in a manner that withstands public scrutiny.

E-government enable multiple means of service delivery to customers while upgrading the quality of service provision. Customer will not only have a wider choice but will also be able to access these services at any time and from any location. This information and communication technology involves access to government information and services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in a way that is focused on the needs of

our citizens and businesses. E-Government relies heavily on agency use of the Internet and other emerging technologies to receive and deliver information and services easily, quickly, efficiently, and inexpensively.

In this regard the Electronic Government Directorate (EGD) was established in pursuance to a decision of the federal cabinet in 2002. It has been established to prepare of e-government projects as well as the standards, guidelines.

The main objectives which the government would like to achieve out of the implementation of this programme are to improve services delivery to citizens by reduction in the cost of service to citizen by providing government information to the public through a government portal: www.pakistan.gov.pk and to improve the internal efficiency of government operations of all departments of the government so that government functionaries become well versed in the use of ICT to provide service in a speedy, efficient and transparent manner.

In my view establishment of EGD is just like building a new stool for government to sit on with three legs making it extremely sturdy and difficult to tip over. The three elements are the changing in the process by which government does its work as well as changing the culture or behavior of those doing the work and we can use Communication and Information Technology to enable both of these changes.

All three elements need to be present if want to implement the e-government. Take away any one element and the stool will fall over. For instance changing work processes and culture without using IT produces less than optimum results. Using IT to enable process change leads to disappointment with the outcomes when the culture prevents the changes from taking effect. And using IT and cultural change programs only ignores the need to shift work processes from a top down orientation to one that focuses on customers and workers.

In Pakistan, e-government is near to complete the infancy stage and very soon it will enter in growth stage whereas it has following four stages:

In the infancy stage, e-government means being present on the web, providing the public (G2C & G2B) with relevant information. The format of the early government websites is similar to that of a brochure or leaflet. Internally (G2G) the government can also disseminate static information with electronic

means, such as the Internet. In the growth stage, the interaction between government and the public (G2C & G2B) is stimulated with various applications. People can ask questions via e-mail, use search engines, and download forms and documents. Internally (G2G) government organisations use LANs, intranets and e-mail to communicate and exchange data. With stage three, the complexity of the technology is increasing, but customer (G2C & G2B) value is also higher. Complete transactions can be done without going to an office. Examples of online services are filing income tax, filing property tax, extending/renewal of licenses, visa and passports and online voting. In this phase, internal (G2G) processes have to be redesigned to provide good service. Government needs new laws and legislation to enable paperless transactions. The fourth stage is the when all information systems are integrated and the public can get G2C & G2B services at one (virtual) counter. One single point of contact for all services is the ultimate goal. The complex aspect in reaching this goal is mainly on the internal side, e.g. the necessity to drastically change culture, processes and responsibilities within the government institution (G2G). Government employees in different departments have to work together in a smooth and seamless way. In this phase cost savings, efficiency and customer satisfaction are reaching highest possible levels.

The majorities understanding of e-government is electronic delivery of government services to the people whereas the potential for e-government is beyond electronic delivery of government services to the people.

It is essential to know that there are few who have access to ICTs, to digital information and knowledge. We can thus talk of an 'e-Government Divide' that is increasingly separating developed and developing countries, and elites and ordinary citizens within developing countries. However, the potential remains largely untapped to date due to poor human, organizational and technological infrastructure and because of the inappropriate approaches taken by donors, vendors and the government.

If electronic technology is changing all aspects of society, from the levers of economic and social growth to citizens' expectations of government, governments have no choice but to respond and adapt in order to remain effective and relevant. Recognizing the power of information and communications technology (ICT), Pakistan can promote it as a way of helping businesses improve efficiency, create jobs and reduce poverty.

ICT's has already shown its potency in increasing the productivity and effectiveness of organizations. The ultimate test is whether governments can use e-governance as a technology to operate more efficiently, to design and implement better policies, and to provide programs and services more effectively.