



TRANSFORMATIONAL SHIFT IN DELIVERY OF SERVICES: DIGITAL INDIA

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Abstract:

Public Administration reformation enabled by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is stated to have the potential to provide several benefits and opportunities for various stakeholders. Examples of such benefits include: transformation of public organizations in terms of efficiency, responsiveness, effectiveness, transparency, reduced bureaucracy, better communication and coordination, and most importantly, it can enable the delivery of, and access to, citizen-centric ICT-enabled government services anytime and anywhere.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technologies, bureaucracy, coordination, transparency.

Introduction:

Although India initiated such reformation in the form of e-government during the late 1990s, which gained further momentum after the launch of the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2006, the country is still lagging behind 117 countries in the World E-Government Development Index (UN e-Gov Survey, 2014). A previous Yojana article by Dwivedi et al. (2013b) identified several reasons that were arguably hampering India's effort towards becoming an equitable information society and knowledge economy. Examples of the reasons identified included: the fragmentation of ICT-based systems at the central, state and district levels; the lack of system integration; the last-mile bottleneck; insufficient locally situated common service centres (CSCs); lack of awareness, access and use of e-government services; poor digital literacy; lack of availability of e-services in regional languages, lack of trust as well as security and privacy concerns.

Recently, the Government of India announced a new exemplary initiative which reflects almost all the aforementioned points. Hereafter, this paper aims to provide an overview of this landmark initiative - known as the 'Digital India Programme' - that, if executed effectively, will have a significant and a positive impact on India's socio-economic development and Public Administration reformation.

Outlining the Digital India Programme

The Digital India Programme (DIP) is a cross-ministry initiative which aims to transform India into a digitally-enabled and empowered information society and knowledge economy (DI Presentation, 2014; PIB, 2014). The Programme, which seems like a larger-than-life-sized reincarnation of NeGP, conceived by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (Deity) of Government of India, has been allocated more than a trillion rupees for its successful execution (DI Presentation, 2014; PIB, 2014). The DIP was approved by the Cabinet on 20th August 2014 and has set an ambitious target to be completed by the year 2018. The main goal of this colossal transformational initiative is to radically redesign and digitize government processes and make government services available and accessible electronically as well as to contribute towards new employment generation (DI Presentation, 2014; PIB, 2014).

The vision of DIP is centered around the following three key areas: (1) Infrastructure as a utility to every citizen; (2) Governance and services on demand; and (3) Digital empowerment of citizens (DI Presentation, 2014; PIB, 2014).



The first key area of 'infrastructure as a utility to every citizen' includes: high speed Internet access to be made available in all gram Panchayats with the view to digitally empower citizens; the provision of vital digital identity (i.e., unique, lifelong, online, and authenticable) to citizens; enabling citizen participation in the digital and financial space by means of mobile phones and bank accounts for their socio-economic empowerment; the provision of easy access to a CSC, which is a locally situated, multi-functional end-point for service delivery to citizens; the provision of shareable private space accessible on a public cloud; and the establishment of a safe and secure cyberspace in the country that would facilitate the wider adoption and use of electronic services (DI Presentation, 2014; PIB, 2014).

The second key area of 'governance and services on demand' encompasses the following: there should be a seamless integration across departments or jurisdictions for providing an easy and single window access of various government services to various stakeholders; and such government services should be made available in real time by utilizing online and mobile platforms. In order to ensure easy access of information, various entitlements of each citizen should be available on the cloud. Furthermore, ease of doing business should be ensured and facilitated by creating digitally transformed government services, which should enable and facilitate electronic and cashless financial transactions. Finally, there should be the utilization of integrated electronic government systems for decision support and development (DI Presentation, 2014; PIB, 2014).

The thrust of the third key area of 'digital empowerment of citizens' entails: imparting digital literacy amongst Indian citizens; making digital resources widely accessible; for easy and ubiquitous access, all government documents/certificates should be made available on the cloud; to encourage widespread adoption and use, digital resources and/or services should be made available in regional languages; in order to develop a culture of participative governance, there should be the provision of collaborative digital platforms; and all entitlements for individuals should be made portable through the cloud (DI Presentation, 2014; PIB, 2014).

DIP has also identified nine pillars that are essential for achieving the three key areas described above. These pillars are: (1) Broadband Highways; (2) Universal Access to Mobile Connectivity; (3) Public Internet Access Programme; (4) e-Governance- reforming government through technology; (5) eKranti - electronic delivery of services; (6) Information for All; (7) Electronics Manufacturing; (8) IT for Jobs; and (9) Early Harvest Programmes (DI Presentation, 2014; PIB, 2014).

Broadband Highways as a pillar will cover broadband for all rural and urban areas and also the integration of the national information infrastructure. The second pillar is focused on creating infrastructure for the ubiquitous mobile connectivity. The third pillar entails the establishment of an adequate number (for a total of 2, 50,000 villages) of locally situated CSCs by March 2017, as well as 1, 50,000 Post Offices to become multi-service centres within the next two years. As a fourth pillar, the government has planned to reform through technology (i.e., e-Governance) coupled with Business Process Re- engineering (BPR), which includes form simplification, online application and tracking, use of online repositories, integration of services and platforms, automation of workflow, and use of an automated public grievance redressal system for resolving citizens' issues (DI Presentation, 2014; PIB, 2014).

The fifth pillar entails the provision of touch points for citizens for accessing government services. It is concerned with the electronic delivery of services using eKranti which is divided into various categories such as e-Education, e-Health, technology for planning through GIS-



based decision making, technology for farmers using online ordering of inputs, technology for security, financial-inclusion through mobile-banking and a micro ATM program, e-Court, e-Police, e-Jails and e-Prosecution. The sixth pillar is information-for-all where the government pledges to provide online hosting of information and documents as well as to proactively engage itself with social media to keep citizens updated with various important information (MyGov.in portal has already been launched for this purpose), and online messaging to citizens on special occasions (DI Presentation, 2014; PIB, 2014).

The seventh pillar encompasses electronic manufacturing where the government's target is to manufacture all electronic items in the country in order to achieve a net zero import target by 2020. However, the existing structures are not sufficient to attain this objective and many ongoing programmes are planned to be fine-tuned to achieve this significant landmark. The eighth and one of the most important pillars of DIP is to create ICT-based jobs. To achieve this objective, the government plans to train people in smaller towns and villages for IT sector jobs, setting up IT Enabled Services (ITES) in the North-Eastern States in order to train service delivery agents to run sustainable business- delivering IT services and to ensure that telecom service providers train the rural workforce to make them ready to help themselves. Finally, the ninth pillar, that is the Early Harvest Programme, has already started functioning with the aim to have an IT platform for messages, government greetings being available through e-Greetings and provisions for biometric attendance in the government offices. The initial phases of the Early Harvest Programmes have already been achieved (DI Presentation, 2014; PIB, 2014).

Conclusion:

The DIP offers an extremely valuable opportunity to involve doctoral students from various disciplines (technology, business and management, the social sciences) and provide a unique and conducive environment to conduct interdisciplinary as well as transdisciplinary research. Such a provision will not only contribute towards the successful completion of the DIP, but would also contribute towards developing an interdisciplinary/ transdisciplinary research workforce and research culture and also bring academia more closely to other public and private sector organizations. Thus, we believe academic involvement and evaluation is an essential ingredient of the DIP which is currently missing.

India's transformational journey which intends to reincarnate today's India into 'Digital India' by 2022. By launching the Digital India Programme, the Government of India has developed a path for this transformational journey. Although the path to achieving the desired state of 'Digital India' seems largely smooth, it is by no means a straightforward one and has some stumbling blocks and impediments as discussed above. The National Informatics Centre (NIC) is largely unprepared for facing stumbling blocks and impediments that Digital India will encounter. Hence, a true metamorphosis of the NIC is essential which, in turn, can lead to a good possibility that the metamorphosis from present day India to Digital India can be achieved. However, a further condition is that this journey has to be continued uninterrupted until reaching the end destination. It is also of utmost importance that during this journey, Indian citizens should be constantly updated, engaged and skilled/trained to appreciate and prepare for the transition to transformed Digital India.

Upon reflection of the Digital India Programme and the various factors that need to be considered at all stages of the Programme - including the development, implementation and adoption - the DIP can be viewed as a truly revolutionary initiative. By providing the opportunity to educate and enhance the digital skill set of potentially the whole population, the Programme



has the potential to create an environment of not just digital but overall social inclusion - the optimal state of a nation is to achieve social inclusion of all citizens which can partially be attained through digital inclusion. Thus, the DIP provides not only a promising but an exciting opportunity for the whole of India. In order to make this vision a reality, nevertheless, requires a cultural transformation of Indian citizens and their habits - possibly the most critical yet enthralling challenge facing the creators of the DIP. We can be confident in asserting that if the Programme achieves the expected results then, in the new economy, India would be in a perfect position to succeed and to sustain positive national growth, which is a crucial element in enhancing India's global competitiveness. The future for India, as the ambitious DIP suggests, is bright.

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