

Governance in Digital Era

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The seeds of Digital Governance in India were sowed in early 90's but over the years, especially in the last decade, Digital Governance has emerged as an effective tool to prevent corrupt practices besides speeding up delivery of citizen services. Before January 2020 Digital Governance was perceived largely as a necessary instrument to minimize administrative delays, red-tapism and enhance accountability and transparency in Government and Private sectors. Post January 2020 and with the advent of COVID 19 crisis digital working has emerged as the new normal for conducting government, business and personal activities. Lockdown and social distancing have forced people to interact and work digitally and actively adopt to the norms of digital governance in personal and professional lives. Innovations and technology are considered to be enabling factors for promoting digital governmental effectiveness and promptness to bring about desirable change in day to day administration and behavior. Technology ensures efficiency and effectiveness but following it blindly can become counter-productive. Each and every organization shows different version of understanding and interpretation as far as their organizational structure and digital related policies are concerned. Digitization is the need of the hour and the future but while individuals, corporate, state and center have gone ahead and gladly adopted the new digital platforms, there is a stark absence of a common digital strategy platform for the nation to come together and the garden of digital India is growing as a

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garden of weeds rather than beautiful Garden. One can easily lose way in this garden of weed.

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1. Introduction

In the digital age with the growth and extension of democratic ideas to the online realm, there is a growing need to make governance more participative and bidirectional. Here technology is expected to play a fundamental role in bringing about this paradigm shift. In today's world, Digital Governance is the need of the hour to minimize bureaucratic delays, redtapism and to enhance accountability in an organisation. Digital technology ensures responsiveness by making the administrative activities transparent and hassle-free. ICT enabled websites, internet related services and online transactions are not only convenient and effective for clients but also leave no scope for unethical practices and wrongdoings

Good governance is defined as an ART where each word has a significant definition such as A stands for Accountability, R for Responsiveness and T for Transparency. Technology and innovation are the guiding forces of this entire process to instill efficiency and performance among government staff. NDA Government has initiated, promoted and even lawfully imposed online management of official activities in education and several other economic sectors to ensure transparency leading towards corruption free India. On 1st July 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched an ambitious plan called Digital India. It aimed at taking nation digitally and electronically ahead to accelerate the economy and transform our society. It emphasized on empowering Indian society digitally and coaxed Indians into the digital era with open access to information in different fields - health, education and economy. Digital India visualized many things - e-governance (electronic delivery of government services, common service centers (CSS), two way communication between government and citizens(Mygov.in), universal mobile connectivity by increasing network penetration . This e-kranti reduced paperworks and increased cashless transactions in all government sectors. In 2015 no one could have ever imagined that after years everyone of us would be forced to lean on digital connectivity for availing different services and more

importantly for our livelihood in times of corona. Digital networks emerged as savior to meet many of our day to day needs and helped connect citizens to the government for assistance.

The adoption of digitization by the government is touching every individual, private and government sector today. Starting from something as common as Araogya Setu, a user friendly tool which is helping India to track and fight the pandemic in a more informed manner, to introduce telemedicine in hospitals including AIIMS and thus ensuring healthcare availability to all without risking unnecessary exposure. Technology and digital governance is fast changing the way we work today. NIC is playing a pivotal role in ensuring effective Digital governance and strategy and even government departments as complex as Trade, Commerce and Finance are now functioning digitally. Digital strategy articulates an organization's approach to understand the capabilities of the Internet and the World Wide Web and make use of them to enhance value for different stakeholders. A digital strategy has both guiding principles and performance objectives. They ensure highest possible digital quality and effectiveness. A well planned and well implemented digital governance framework create more transparent, accountable and productive work environment with higher quality result.

Digital governance does not require bureaucratic handling so it is very effective. A Properly designed strong program framework and its effective communication and engagement can make online business machinery sing. It establishes a sort of digital development DNA ensuring digital presence in a manner that is in harmony with the organization's strategic objectives. Digital governance provides an effective channel that leads to good governance. Digital governance or e-governance has become instruments of our activities -administrative, private or public sectors.

2. Factors shaping Digital Governance Framework and its Design Process

Following factors are responsible for shaping digital governance framework and its design process :

2.1 Corporate Governance Dynamics

Digital governance is considered as compartment of corporate governance imbibing its dynamics.

2.2 External Demands

Digital framework and its design are also shaped by market needs and geographical demands. As the global world is moving at a fast pace adopting digital governance models, it is imperative for our government to do the same and be a frontrunner in the global economy or perish. State and Region wise needs and constraints of technological developments also affect effectiveness of e governance.

2.3 World Wide Web Governance and Internet Collaboration

World wide web governance and internet collaboration has now become a necessity during COVID 19 crisis.

2.4 Organizational Culture and Demands from its stakeholders

Organizational culture and demands from its stakeholders also determine digitized environment.

2.5 The Existence and Presence of Digital Team, its Constitution and Nature, Roles and Responsibilities

These are important factors shaping digital administration of any institution. Many organizations don't even bother to update their websites and this is very much prevalent in Government organizations. Uploading of Citizens charters on the websites are generally opposed by the staff of private as well as government sectors. Most of the government organizations do not upload Grievance Redressal Mechanism, complaints received and resolved despite of several notifications and reminders from the higher authorities

2.6 Social Media in Governance

Social media is increasingly becoming a fertile ground for new initiatives such as spreading awareness about governance schemes and gauging public reaction through instant feedback. During COVID crisis 2019-20 entire world was relying only on electronic media for news and government support system.

2.7 Developing Innovation and Technology

Developing innovation and technology requires impetus in three key thrust areas :

Education and research : It is generally perceived and now acknowledged also that advanced education aims at innovative

research and development. This perception changed into reality from January 2020, when the education sector throughout the world totally changed from class room personal interaction to digital platforms. All the stakeholders of education sectors initially with resistance and later with compulsion adapted to this digital technology.

ICT enabled machineries : Government sponsored research activities, education; economy all needed ICT enabled machineries and world today is not an exception.

Industry-academia collaboration : Industry-academia collaboration to commercialize the innovations and to continue with economic and academic activities.

2.8 Involving People in Governance

Involvement of People in governance can be achieved by three ways 1. Managerial - Vertical flow of information focused on speedy delivery for specific areas or services 2. Consultative - Understanding societal interest and opinions on proposed schemes through portals by citizens 3. Participative - Receiving information and analysis of interests' inputs from citizens and creating a cyber society having social network.

3. Challenges Ahead

Digital India programme had to face many challenges due to ambiguity in plans and policies. Due to digital illiteracy among people, low internet connectivity and lack of interest and coordination in the government departments, it was difficult to implement it successfully. In remote villages people couldn't enjoy even mobile connectivity due to poor response by service providers, who could not find these locations commercially viable for their business. Government had made its best efforts to address these challenges but until March 2020, not much success was achieved. Some challenges which can be witnessed even today are:

The first and foremost challenge in the path of successful implementation of an effective digital economy is the lack of a common, well defined, bureaucratic hassle free, e governance framework. A strong, effective and efficient e governance model needs a strong core digital team which has the authority to adopt and implement new technical platforms and technology without red tapes while staying within the policy framework. Today the core

digital team, both in government and private sector is stuck in the web of red tape. So it is important and imperative to be proactive in designing the framework in advance

Many organizations hesitate to change and also to improve their digital governance. The reasons for this resistance are manifold. Sometimes many organizations refuse to adapt digital technology for fear of failures and they being unfamiliar with technology. Other factor of resistance to it is Political patronage and corrupt practices. We are well aware that in an environment governed with digital technology nothing can be hidden so at times organizational leadership also express reluctance to adopt digital process lest hidden skeletons start falling out of the cupboard. The automation of official and business processes (for e.g. e-tendering) can monitor their day to day activities and lessen their discretion and relaxation in performing their roles. This problem is also found in powerful or influential business units. Biometric attendance of staff is strongly opposed in all sectors leading to indiscipline and absence from the office. Too often, organizations choose to ignore the call for transparent governance, even when the organization is at risk and the problems need to be addressed. They prefer to be silent in order to be non confrontational and not blowing the whistle to expose adverse practices going on in the organisation. Government employees also do not want to expose governmental lapses for fear of victimization from powerful seniors. Public officials neither show their desires to develop digital strategy nor want to use the technology in an efficient and effective manner. Government offices badly need technology friendly environment and transparent web based official practices. Needless to say all organizational sectors-education, economic and government needed digital practices and the Covid 19 crisis has left NO Option for them but to become web friendly and web monitored

Lack of proper support and infrastructure is also impacting the adoption of technology in the new digital age creating gaps in effective digital governance. A simple example of this is that while we have introduced online classes, government and municipal school teachers and children do not have the skills or resources to participate in the e learning process thus widening the gap between the education and learning. It is important for the designers of the digital strategy to focus on the lack of skills and resources for a huge section of the Indian population and provide proper budget, support

and infrastructure to ensure that they can participate in and benefit from the new digital strategy and become active participants of the new norm of digital governance.

However it all appears like putting a Lipstick on a pig ,we cannot deny the truth even if you put a lipstick on a pig, the saying goes, it is still a pig. In a rush to join the digitization bandwagon several organizations, private public and government, have created a digital external presence by reaching out to the people through beautifully designed websites. However, merely looking good online does not ensure its effective operation until and unless there is a real digital strategic thought process behind the scenes to ensure ease of business flow, ensuring real time data availability, and promising trust, transparency, data security to the external users. I have come across many organizations having well maintained website and digitally maintained details but there is no real digital strategy nor coordinated digital team to update data and relevant information and governance is in a bad shape.

Whatever be the reason for reluctance to adopt a strong digital framework, the present day crisis has necessitated the adoption of digitalization for each of us and it has become the new norm. Today no one can resist digital governance and risk the possibility of perishing in the new digital world.

4. Way Out : Making Technology Effective and Efficient

No doubt, technology promotes effectiveness ,promptness, transparency and ease of doing business but if not properly managed with proper controls and guidelines, technology can prove to be a very powerful tool in the hands of people who can misuse the same. Every day we read and hear of technology misuse for cheat and fraud dealings. While it is easy to adopt a digital platform but doing so without a 360 degree digital strategy that provides a safe framework for the organization as well as the customer, the new normal will be more of a bane than a boon for the coming generations.

Digital policy, digital strategy and digital standards are essential for any good organization and what is needed is creation of real online values and commitment for the organization and also from the team working for it. We need to identify and design Organizational Digital Team in a much more planned manner to assure authority and accountability.

Not just each organization as a separate entity, the government has to proactively, and at a very fast pace develop a strong framework of controls to ensure data sanctity and security so that the organizations and individuals in the new normal digital work can have peace and prosperity.

5. Conclusion

We have moved from stone age to space age, humanity has progressed on the strength of innovations and technology. Our Governance like a living organism has been - constantly adapting and evolving. If we sow the seed of change today, tomorrow we and our future generations will be reaping benefits. Therefore, we need dynamic and excellent leadership to initiate and promote changes and holistic reforms which can be goal oriented, change oriented and client oriented because after all Governance is all about being People centric and change oriented for better tomorrow. This stands true in the wake of crisis when COVID 19 did not give us choice to choose rather forced us to become digital friendly in our personal and professional lives.

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