



BPM in India

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BPM in e-Governance: Towards Citizen-Centric Processes

It is probably no exaggeration to indicate government as one of the last frontiers for operational transformation. As with business sectors, transformation in government operations needs to be an effective amalgam of multiple elements; namely, process change, organizational structural changes, leadership, change management, training of employees, creating awareness among citizens, in addition to technology. As might be expected, ICT interventions have been at the core of these transformations in government processes. Popularly known as e-governance, ICT-led transformations have brought in significant, positive changes in government departments, both in developed countries and in several developing countries as well.

BPM and e-Governance in India

After a sedate beginning, government departments in India are speeding up a transformation from within. Today, it is in a hurry. Possibly related to the speed of economic growth in India, the last few years have seen a significant rise in the number, scope, and speed of ICT-led operational reforms in the Indian government. The Government of India launched the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) [1] in 2006, with the intent of supporting a citizen-centric and business-centric environment within the country. The Plan envisages creation of the right environment to implement G2G, G2B, G2E, and G2C services (i.e., Government to Government, Business, Employee, and Citizen). The NeGP has 27 mission mode programs that are either focused on central government departments or state government, or integrated projects covering both of these. These projects are large, complex, multi-year programs and cover multiple aspects of functional and technology dimensions.

The interesting aspect of the government projects is the typically larger scope of change, complexity, and coverage of the initiatives and the nature of transformations needed (process, technology, structural, etc). Additionally, the unique nature of government services to citizens makes e-governance implementations a fairly new experience for the government departments and the IT service providers. Indian government departments have traditionally been process focused but heavily paper-based. In the last couple of decades, automation has been introduced to varying degrees. Still, at best it can be classified as islands of automation with little integration between departments. As with government departments elsewhere, a lot of the low hanging fruit is around automation of paper-based file transfers between roles and departments. The other interesting aspect is the effect of these transformations on citizen services, impacting the lives of millions across the country.

The transformation initiatives in the Indian government can be dissected from different angles; from a functional angle, for example, delivering citizen centric services of the government; supporting e-commerce, such as payment of taxes, license fees, etc.; and management of inter-departmental processes in the government. Another dimension is based on the use of technology – automation of processes, information, and status to the citizens, and interaction between the government and citizens/businesses. The scope of the projects, whether at the national government level, state government, or local government (city/town council levels), has a bearing

on the process change and technology interventions required.

While not very evident on the surface, these transformations involve a significant number of changes in processes: process re-engineering, process standardization, use of BPM technology, etc. We explore four different scenarios of e-governance initiatives in the Indian government in different sectors; two at the national government level, a third involving both national and state governments, and the final one at local city council levels. In this analysis, we make an attempt to uncover the underlying process dimensions and process technology dimensions of the operational transformation, the progress made, and the opportunities waiting.

Case 1: Passport Services

The Passport Seva project [2,3] launched by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) focuses on streamlining the passport services in India. The objective is to drastically reduce the time taken for issuing a passport from the existing 45 days to three days. The long-term goal of the program is to make the move to an e-passport system that makes the passport difficult to duplicate and also simplifies the immigration procedures. This project covers the entire spectrum of a BPM program – process improvement, standardization, technology implementation, program governance, process operations, and outsourcing. The project is being executed in a Build-Own-Operate-Transfer (BOOT) mode where the vendor is responsible for most of the operational processes of accepting applications, answering queries, ensuring application and document completeness, etc., while critical functions like verification, indexing, and approval of passport are performed by the Central Passport Organization. On one hand, the number of walk-in centers for citizens to submit applications in person are being increased, while in parallel, the project will also provide an online channel to enable applicants to complete a lot of the paper work electronically. The technology capabilities required for this program include workflow management, document management, and tracking for the functional process automation and integration at the back end with existing and new systems. Security requirements being very stringent, compliance to ISO 27001 has been mandated at all levels (user level, application data center level, and network level). The project is currently in pilot implementation in seven locations in the country.

Case 2: Income Tax

Another NeGP project is the Income Tax initiative of the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) [4]. This involves automation of a gamut of services with the objective of providing a web-based, single-window, 24x7 service delivery model for the citizen facing services of income tax transactions. The initiative involves three components, namely, e-delivery of taxpayer services, augmentation of departmental computer infrastructure, and setting up of a Tax Information Network (TIN). This program involves providing services to tax payers, integration with businesses who deduct tax, and setting up the required infrastructure like a National Data Center (NDC), and an All India Virtual Private Network (VPN). The end to end program covers process reengineering, implementation, and operations. The unique challenge to this project is that there are several income tax rules and acts that need to be codified into the IT systems. The rules have a high probability of changing with every financial year's budget announcements. While the process remains the same or changes only marginally, the rules are large in numbers and change at least once a year, or more rules get added. The IT group has less than 12 months time to implement the changes in the system. Additionally, the number of tax returns being filed increases every year and the process and systems need to be scaled to handle this increasing volume.

Case 3: Investor Single Window

The eBiz Project from the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) [5] within the Ministry of Commerce is another NeGP initiative. This program seeks to integrate services from central, state, and local governments and automate government workflows to provide a single window of G2B services for investors during the business lifecycle. The services covered include licenses, permits, registrations, approvals, clearances, and permissions, reducing the points of contact between the business entities and the government agencies, standardization of requirement information, reporting, filing, and reducing the burden of compliance. The eBiz

initiative aims for a customer-centric, service oriented approach, and focuses on process standardization. For the service oriented aspect, this project will need to integrate seamlessly with the National e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (NSDG) being implemented by DIT (Department of Information). The pilot phase of this project provides 29 services covering central, state, and local government, and integrates various departments across these governments. A program of this nature requires processes and information to be standardized across the various functions. These come under different states and local governments, each having their own laws and acts, which makes the standardization a big challenge as it requires modifications to the relevant laws and acts. The eBiz platform by itself does not provide any services but enables the workflow and tracking across the various departments and services. In addition, it also acts as the sole e-commerce platform for collecting the relevant fees and charges for all the G2B services offered on the platform, which implies that the accounting processes for the various government departments involved in the service delivery would need changes. Again, as the eBiz Platform contains sensitive information related to businesses and government departments, security is a key issue. It is a vital requirement for success that the project involves various departments at central, state, and local levels for getting buy in and commitment from the relevant stakeholders. The DIPP has put in place the required governance for monitoring, tracking, and reviewing the progress of the initiative with the direct involvement of senior members of the relevant departments.

Case 4: City and Town Council Management

While central and state government projects are complex projects, the local city governing bodies pose different challenges. The city or town municipalities are focusing on automation of processes providing citizen services, which include birth and death registrations, requests for various certificates and documents, payment of property taxes and utility bills, public grievances, and resolution and building plan approvals. The national government provides financial funding for cities and towns to launch appropriate E-governance projects, while requiring them to adopt appropriate financial and other key governance practices. The implementation challenges in this space are related to lack of IT infrastructure, absence of process documentation, non-availability of data in digital formats, getting the stakeholders commitment, program management, and governance.

The Technology Angle

Most of the government processes, being originally based on management of work through the movement of paper files, have common requirements like the ability to route the activities to the specific departments/persons, the ability to track the steps, handling exception situations, request advice and consultation from a specific person, and monitoring the current status of a process instance. Document handling capabilities become critical as “everything is a file or a document” in the government. There is also a need to integrate with the existing IT systems of government departments and with the NSDG (National eGovernance Service Delivery Gateway). In some cases, the entire process has to be automated where existing processes are totally manual. The requirements can be summarized as workflow/process automation, exception handling, case management, process visibility, tracking, and reporting. While *Agility* is not a key requirement, as government processes do not change so often/so quickly, the other requirements are suited for a BPM technology implementation. As there are no packages and products that address the Government of India project requirements, most of the NeGP projects are custom-built software implementations using various technologies like BPM, ECM, CRM, EAI, ESB, etc. This has spawned the growth of interesting entities such as the eGovernments Foundation [5], which is a social enterprise with an ERP product for city municipalities in India. The product has been implemented in all 213 urban local bodies of Karnataka state in addition to a few other city municipalities.

Posers

As government processes get on the fast track towards modernization, efficiency, and effectiveness, it is worthwhile to pause and reflect on a few points. Are processes being treated

as first class citizens? In the initiatives we have seen, the primary goal appears to be data integration, digitization, and improvement of customer experience. There is not much evidence of conscious effort towards improvement of the back end processes before system implementation. For instance, we noticed that it is not so common for government departments to identify and maintain process definitions, although now the National Institute of Smart Government (NISG) [7] is putting some effort into documenting high level As-Is Process Maps for the mission mode projects. Further, management of processes through the lifecycle does not seem to be evident. There is ample scope for exploration and adoption of standard, best-in-class processes and practices from across the world, from the corporate sector and from other sectors as well. On a similar note, the e-governance initiatives are showing up the lack of inter-departmental process coordination. In addition to internal process management, a clear understanding of cross-departmental process linkages and governance around these processes will help both in internal functioning as well as helping the Indian citizen to have a better experience.

Winds of change are blowing in the management of the operations in the government sector. Time, perhaps, to open the process window wider to bring in more fresh air.

References

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