

ELECTRONIC OFFICE GOVERNMENT: FROM E-GOVERNANCE TO I- GOVERNMENT

Abstract: This article describes an experiment, done in the State of Andhra Pradesh, India, to reinvent office policies, procedures, and practices based on the concept of integrated governance that goes beyond mere introduction of computers in Government. A holistic approach was followed, which included modifying office procedures, using information technology to standardize routine activities, and making office practices open and transparent.

This paper describes an experiment that was done, in 2003-04, in the Industries Department of Andhra Pradesh to apply the concept of i-governance, developed by Heeks (2001), to office policies, procedures, and practices. In this experiment the concept of e-governance is expanded and called integrated governance (i-governance). Unlike e-governance, i-governance integrates processing and the communication technologies, and combines people, processes, information and technology. Information technology is a key lever of change, but part of an overall systemic package (Heeks 2001; Figure 1).

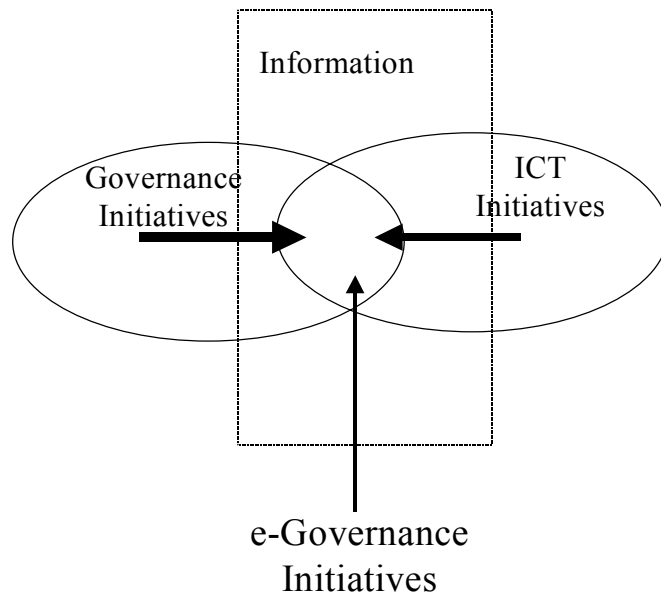


Fig 1: Integrated approach to e – Governance (Heeks 20, 2001)

In the integrated model, the concept of i-governance consists of three overlapping domains - (1) e- Administration: improving government processes, (2) e- Citizens and e- Services: connecting citizens, and (3) e- Society: building interactions with and within civil society (Figure 2)

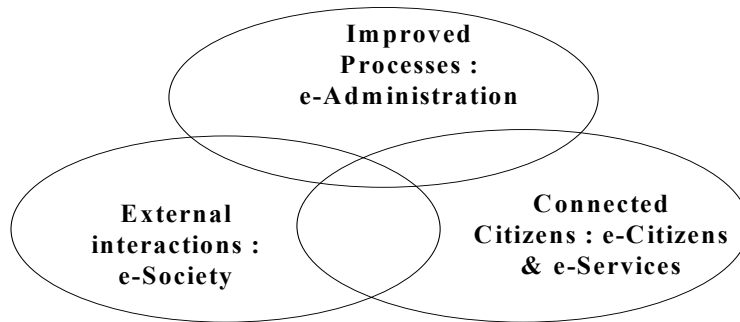


Fig 2: Overlapping domains of e-Governance (Heeks 15, 2001)

Each domain consists of a set of policy initiatives. The detailed activities, within each domain, are given below.

E-ADMINISTRATION: IMPROVING GOVERNMENT PROCESSES

The focus of these policy initiatives was on the internal working of the Industries Department and consisted of making strategic connections in the Department, empowering managers, and improving process efficiency and managerial performance. The Industries Department consists of a Central Office directed by a Commissioner of Industries and 23 District Offices headed by General Managers. Commissioner of Industries and the General Managers are the decision points in the System.

Making Strategic Connections in the Department

Making strategic connections in Government meant connecting vertical and horizontal managerial levels with the data available in the department. The first step was automation and informatization to provide hardware to managers of industries department. The Central Office and the Districts were equipped with computers, scanners, laser printers and overhead projectors and connected by high-speed internet. Electronic connectivity, therefore, was established between all decision points. Within the Central Office electronic channels were established to process files and papers. The electronic movement of papers is given in Figure 3.

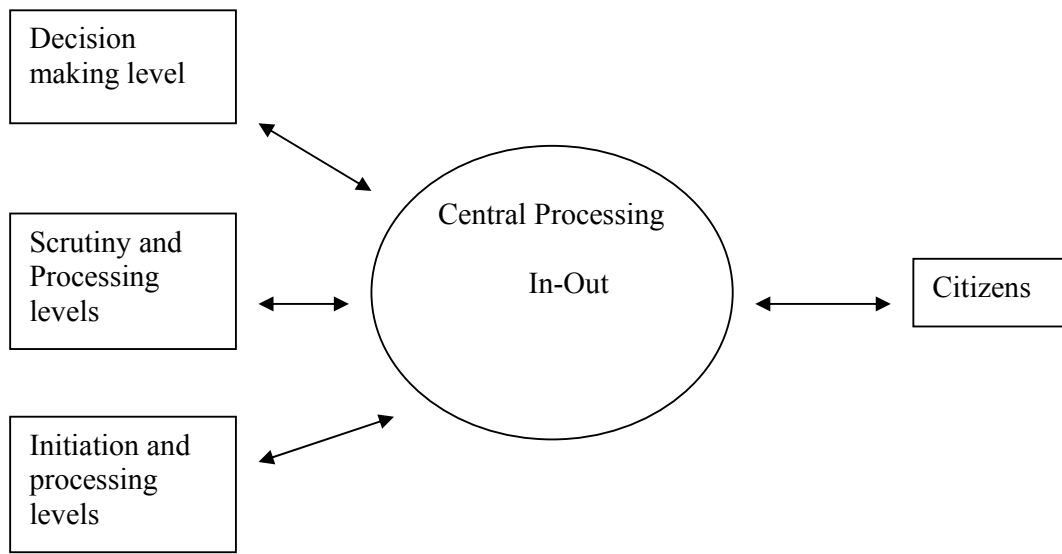


Fig 3: The Electronic Pathway

Citizens' interface occurred with the Central Processing Unit. Papers from the Central Processing Unit went to the initiating levels, which were in turn processed to the decision making levels. From the Central Processing Unit, citizens could obtain information about the progress of their case.

Empowerment

Empowering meant the transfer power, authority, and resources for processes from the existing locations to new locations. Reducing processing levels and creating managerial groups to improve the processing and quality of decisions were used to empower managers. Empowered managers were expected to own the decisions made in the Department, and therefore make the changes sustainable. Processing levels were reduced to two or three. Groups instead of individual managers initiated papers. For movement of papers, customized flow charts and standard processing procedures were developed for all sections in the department. Electronic personal registers, to track papers, replaced manual ones. Now it was possible to locate and track papers, electronically.

A file in the Government has two parts- the correspondence part and the note file component. The correspondence part contains all the papers received from external sources and the note file part is the analytical section, containing the factors and reasons that led to a particular decision. A customized document management software enabled movement of electronic note files from the initiating group to the decision making levels. However, correspondence part continued to have back-up paper files. This had two advantages; (a) saved costs as a large number of correspondence papers need not be scanned to be placed in the electronic channels, and (b) managers felt more confident to dealing with hard copies of the original correspondence. As part of document management system, a file tracking system enabled the citizens to find the status of any file at the transparency desk (office reception) without going

to individual managers. Ultimately all information about file movement was to be placed on the net.

Closely connected with the electronic movement of files was the creation of an institutional memory. Institutional memory is information of procedures, past decisions, Government orders, laws, and rules on similar or equivalent issues. This is the basic building block in file processing (Figure 4). To permit managers to locate relevant material in the institutional memory, a search engine, similar to Google, was developed. Another innovation was to place the “back to office” reports – managerial field inspection records – on the website. The inspecting officers keyed their inspection report into the website on return from inspections and this report was could be accessed by citizens. This made field practices transparent and increased managerial accountability and responsiveness.

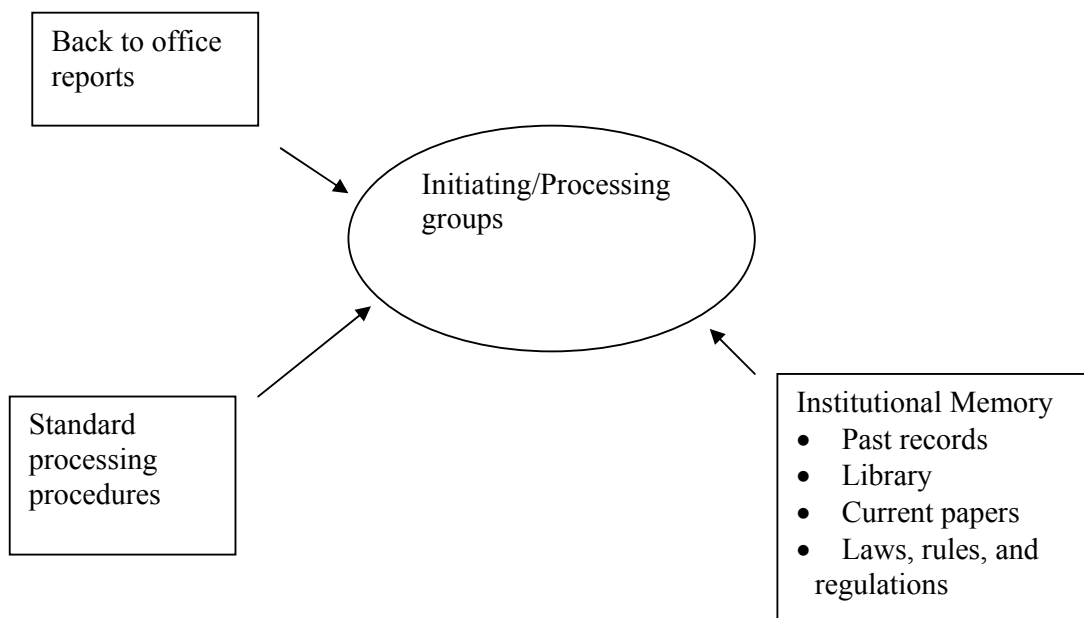


Figure 4: The basic block of electronic processing

Improving Process Efficiency and Managerial Performance

Oversight, to make effective and efficient use of process resources, was accomplished by developing a Performance Monitoring and Evaluation system. Relevant and measurable indicators were developed to evaluate managerial performance. An interactive online web based performance tracking system measured and graded managers’ performance. The next step was to include stakeholder feedback, through the web-based performance tracking system.

Reduced paper use and savings in postage due to increasing use of e-mail, balanced costs made office processes more efficient. An office practices work analysis identified locations where electronic copies could replace paper. Improved quality and reduced processing time, and therefore waiting time were the citizen benefits.

E-CITIZENS AND E-SERVICES

The e-citizens and e-services component include three policy initiatives - talking to citizens, listening to citizens and improving public services.

Talking to Citizens

The purpose was to make managers more accountable for their decisions - by creating awareness among citizens about services offered by the department, choices available to them and the mandated time limits to make these decisions. A Citizen's Charter was formulated that set the standards for all the services offered by the department. It was an expression of an understanding between the citizen and the public service providers about the quantity and quality of services the citizens expected to receive in exchange for their taxes. Another rationale for the charter was to help change the mindset of the manager, from a bureaucrat to a manager.

Governments generate information, much of it potentially useful to individuals and businesses. Using the internet and other advanced communication technologies this information can be quickly disseminated directly to citizens. Enabling citizens and businesses to readily access government information, without having to travel to Government offices, was an objective of e-governance. One strategy was to set up publish sites, which disseminate information about, and compiled by, government to as wide an audience as possible. Published sites, therefore serve as the leading edge of e-government. The industries department updated the official portal www.apind.com to make it more useful - contained detailed data, information, statistics and knowledge (DISK) on a wide range of topics.

A monthly monitoring of manufacturing activity in the State was done through an interactive web based data transmission system that permitted data entry at the enterprise level. Similarly the exports online data collection system captured online data relating to exports at enterprise level.

An important activity of the department was to offer guidance to entrepreneurs to set-up businesses. According to the service standards spelt out in the Citizens' Charter, project ideas were given to entrepreneurs during face-to-face meetings. The library was modernized and a library search engine helped to locate investment related information immediately.

Improving Public Services

Online registration of small businesses was introduced. Earlier small businesses had to apply to the General Managers and wait for approval. Now the entrepreneurs submitted online applications and received immediate approval. The single window was set up to give all permissions, at one point, to start businesses. The single window Act was formulated in the state as a one-stop shop for all investor services. After filing the application the entrepreneur tracked the approval of his application online.

To attract investments, the State of Andhra Pradesh offers numerous incentives. To bring transparency and reduce leakages online processing and disbursement of incentive claims was established. The flow chart for the electronic processing claim is given in Figure 5. This

removed the interface between the entrepreneur and the manager, therefore reducing leakages.

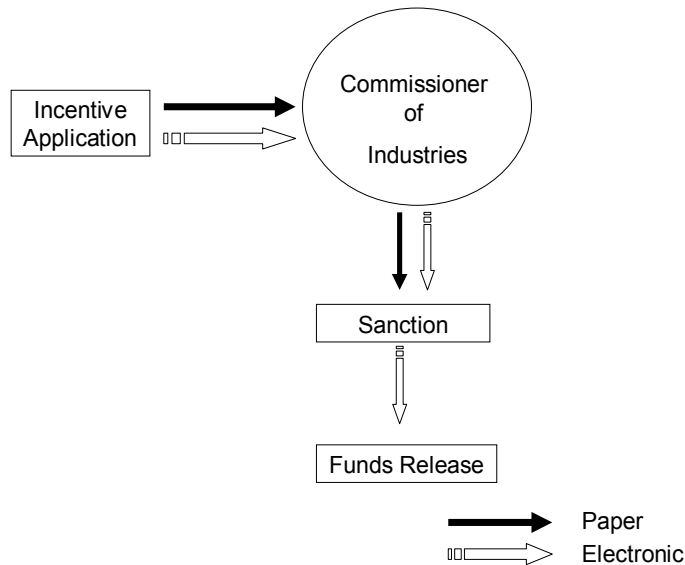


Fig 5: Electronic processing of Incentive claims

Listening to Citizens

To increase citizen input into decision making, a feedback procedure was developed to identify gaps in service delivery. Citizen responses were received with respect to the Citizens' Charter –quality, implementation, and monitoring office processes and mechanisms. The Charter was evaluated on these key components and monitoring led to - two way communication and interaction, citizen involvement in decision-making, equal access to departmental services and dissemination of information to citizens.

E-SOCIETY

Building an e-society means strengthening external interactions. One of the policies was to establish a trade exchange build partnerships between the Industries Department and firms. The trade exchange was conceived to facilitate boundary-less and barrier-less trade between global buyers and local manufacturers. Promoting brands, creating product catalogues and effective communication between local manufacturers regional and global customers were identified as the key activities of the trade exchange.

Author: Sameer Sharma, worked as Commissioner of Industries, between 2003 - 2004, before joining the School of Planning in the University of Cincinnati, OH to do graduate and doctoral degrees.

References

Heeks, Richard., 2001, Understanding e-Governance for Development. Manchester: Institute for Development Policy and Management (March 2007)
http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/publications/wp/igov/igov_wp11.pdf