Simplifying Government

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The rising expectation of people for better service delivery requires a fundamental re-examination of the government's priorities, structure, processes and policies. It is essential to align the structure of Government to the structure of the demand for services. Many Government departments are encumbered with processes that are rooted in the past and aimed at demands of yesteryears. In order to serve the citizens better, government departments will have to redesign their processes and should look at widespread use of Information Technology which is proving to be of great use in facilitating access to information, simplification of procedures and in better delivery of services. This paper explores all these major challenges and finally outlines how performance measurement in government can help in determining how effectively resources are used.

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Introduction

Today governments face a plethora of challenges that involves transition to a knowledge-based economy due to rapid technological advances, and changing demographics. These challenges require a fundamental re-examination of the government's priorities, structure, processes, policies, and programmes to effectively address changing and increasing public expectations, needs, and fiscal pressures. A mixture of critical resources is needed for the government to deliver better public services. As the public expects demonstrable results from the government, government leaders need to harness strategic planning, address management challenges and high-risk issues, use integrated approaches, enhance departments' performance for results orientation and also ensure accountability.

The challenge of meeting rising public expectations in the context of decreasing public expenditures is significant for many governments. The citizens are expecting better quality and more accessible public services from government. This is primarily due to developments in technology and communications (citizens are better informed and expect quicker services); education (citizens are more discerning); secularization (citizens are more individualistic and critical); and wealth accumulation (citizens have the means to exact the level of service they feel they deserve, as well as to pursue alternative service delivery options). Citizens want to have their say in the way the public administration is run and expect the best services. Because of these higher expectations and the fact that there are simply not enough resources, government is challenged to do more with less by allocating resources more suitably and making better use of them. The changing economic and social scenario after the liberalization era and due to various influences of globalization make it imperative for the government to reorient its structures and processes to suit the raising demands and expectations of the people. Better service delivery can be achieved only if public management can leverage technological advancements and simplify its processes that have become complicated over the years. The simplification cannot be done in isolation but has to be complemented with structural changes.

Structure of Government

Developing countries like India inherited a colonial Government structure based on a command and control model. The structure operated vertically rather than across Government having, been set up, as a response to a particular need. As society got more and more sophisticated, rules and procedures got added to the layers of staff. Soon Governments become characterized by large amount of paper work and file handing, with time-consuming processes and many levels of explicit controls and approvals. As greater interventions in the interest of development and improving citizen welfare measures became necessary, Governments moved from just governance to becoming pro-actively involved as social reformers and providers of employment. Government hierarchies grew along with the associated costs and bureaucracies.

Government provides a wide range of services to citizens – both individual and corporate. These services are currently provided by a large number of departments and units – which we may call the administrative "components" of government. These administrative components may also provide various "internal" services to one another. (Human resources, administration, information and communications technology are just some examples of this.) Integrating these services has the effect of changing the relationship between the components that provide or manage them. In some cases, these components will need to be more closely coordinated, and this may be achieved by a combination of new technological mechanisms and organizational/ administrative measures, or even by reorganizing the structure of government. If the responsibility for delivering a service is split between several departments, this is likely to result in higher costs as well as greater opportunities for error and delay. It is therefore essential to align the structure of Government to the structure of the demand for services.

But this is easier said than done. While it is tempting to define the services in a way that preserves the existing structure, this typically fails to accommodate external demands and changes. Sometimes, a radical regrouping is called for, using sophisticated mechanisms to find the optimal shape of the Government. A mere change in the structure may not deliver the results unless processes aligned in the structure are refined and reengineered.

Processes

Government which consists of several departments runs by procedures and processes. As demands from citizens and other service recipients are increasing, government and the various departments will have to reexamine at the way they organize and work. It is necessary to develop ways and means of working that will ensure more reliable performance for better service delivery. But most government departments are finding it difficult to meet these changing demands. The reason being, many of them are encumbered with structures and processes that are rooted in the past and aimed at demands of yesteryears. In order to serve the citizens better, government departments will therefore have to redesign their processes. Process redesign must keep in view a *simple and easy to implement approach* to increase efficiency, decrease costs, and improve overall citizen satisfaction levels. If we examine the case of e-Seva, introduced by the government of Andhra Pradesh, we can see how the redesigning of processes, along with Information Technology (IT), can greatly improve the performance, efficiency and transparency of various department(s).

The methodology for carrying out the process redesign is simple, yet comprehensive; covering the Vision, objectives, strategies and finally processes. Depending on the need of the department, a decision about how much of the methodology has to be used can be assessed.

The methodology, in principle consists of the following steps:

a. Developing the Vision
b. Culling out the Objectives
c. Drawing-up the Strategies, and
d. Designing the Processes.

To what extent each of these aspects has to be looked into, will depend on the degree of change that is proposed to be brought about. If comprehensive change, covering all aspects is what the department aims at, then it would have to start from the Vision

onwards. Every department may not necessarily have to start from the point of Vision; some situations may warrant that the department start directly looking at the processes, after preparing some kind of draft document on the Vision, objectives and strategies.

Departmental Vision and Objectives

A Vision statement is by definition, a vivid statement of the future, a compelling description of what the organization/department is and what it wants to be in future. Though many private organizations and larger entities like States have had Vision statements, it is only in the recent times that government departments also have started drawing up similar documents. Though it is not necessary that an organization should have Vision statement in order to carry out a process redesign study, it suggested that for a comprehensive department wide redesign, a Vision would of great help.

Having developed the Vision for the Department, the next step would be to develop the objectives, in line with the Vision. Setting of the objectives is the method by which, the Vision is translated into some concrete form.

Departmental Strategies

While Vision is long term in nature and serves as a guiding light, the strategies are the road maps to get to the destination. Usually departments or organizations, which are progressive in nature, may invest a lot of time and energy in drafting the Vision, but many of them fail in developing the appropriate strategies, that will enable them in achieve the Vision.

Process Redesign

It is not sufficient to have a Vision and the strategies in place. Equally important will be to have the *right* processes which would enable implementing strategies and achieving the Vision. Process redesign is about analysing the activities and reconfiguring them so as to ensure that required objectives are met, which in this example is about reaching the entire target group.

There are six steps involved in the redesign process:

Key Process Identification

All the strategies that an organization or department develops, will not have equal impact on the Vision. While some may tend to have a larger impact, the others may have lesser impact. It should be noted that the words lesser and greater are relative and are not to be construed as meaning important and unimportant. The need to prioritize the strategies usually becomes necessary as departments/organizations have limited resources, and therefore would like to utilize them so that the results are higher and quicker.

Process Visioning

Just as the departmental Vision directs every one in the organization towards a common objective, the process Vision also sets the direction for process. It is important that resources deployed and people engaged, work towards the process Vision. The process Vision has to be set in such a way that when achieved, along

with key processes constituting the strategies, the Vision of the department will be realized. So, utmost care should be taken in crafting the process Vision to avoid the risk of *under setting it or over setting it*.

AS IS Process Mapping

The process of improvement cannot be carried out until and unless the present state (of activities and process) is fully understood. In order to gain this understanding, it is necessary to plot the activities as they are being carried out in the present way/method of working. This method of graphical representation of activities is known as mapping and helps in analyzing the process from multiple perspectives. One of the most commonly used methods for process mapping is flow-charting. One of the biggest advantages of a flow chart is that it allows for easy understanding of the whole process and the related activities associated with it. Moreover, because of the usage of standard symbols, the flow chart method will be an ideal communicating methodology about the process information.

Redesigning the Process

Before commencing the redesign process, it is important to ensure that most or all of the information pertaining to the AS IS condition of the process is collected. In case the key process (es) which is being redesigned has multiple sub-processes, then this information has to be collected for all the sub-processes. An important step in the redesign process will be to look at information technology and how it would impact the measures of performance of the process or sub-process. Most activities in the government departments can be automated and their efficiencies increased by usage of contemporary technologies. However, cost would be a main consideration in evaluating the application of such solutions. Apart from cost, the issues of Security, Scalability and Reliability aspects and Integration with existing applications need to be considered when considering information and communication technology solutions.

Drawing up the TO BE Process

Once all the required information about the AS IS process and the analysis of the issues pertaining to activities, people and technology have been collected, the TO BE process can be drawn up. The TO BE process may involve changes in the activities (elimination or reconfiguration) and they will necessarily have an impact on people and their responsibility. Consequently, once the TO BE process has been drawn up, a new matrix for roles and responsibilities also has to be developed. Changes in the Job Profile or Job Chart for various positions, due to the changes in the process should also be captured.

Implementing Change Management effectively

Once the TO BE design has been formulated, and also discussed and deliberated upon for all probable issues that may arise during implementation, the next step would be its effective implementation. In taking up the implementation of process redesign, there are two approaches –

a. **Big bang approach**: where all the processes which have been studied and redesigned are simultaneously taken up for implementation.
b. **Incremental approach**: in this method, one or two processes are initially taken up for implementation in a phased manner. After taking up these processes for implementation, the Department can then decide to either

take up the remaining problems altogether or sequentially based on the time and resource availability.

The choice for the above approach should be made based on the following –

a. **Time availability**: Does the department have the luxury of time to take up processes in a sequential manner?
b. **Resource availability**: Here the resources refer to both men and material. Does the department have the required resources to take up the process (altogether) for redesign? The phrase resource availability here connotes the resources that can be deployed for this redesign exercise. Most times, the department may have the resources, but they many not be able to engage them in such interventions. It is in these cases, that the departmental head should make a decision about using external resources (facilitators) for this purpose.
c. **Readiness**: It is possible that the required time and resources are available, but the departmental readiness may be low. There could a number of reasons for this; lack of readiness is often an important reason in the absence of any perceived need for change.

Having made a choice on the type of approach that the department would like to take, that is incremental or big-bang, the implementation process can be initiated. But, whatever approach is adopted, one of the crucial aspects that will have to be given careful consideration is the communication plan. For process redesign exercise, especially of the type where it is department wide, it becomes necessary to draw up comprehensive communication strategy. By using the word *strategy* here, the emphasis is on the need for adopting an approach that is spread over time, as against a one-off exercise.

Apart from communication, people development (in terms of both the hard skills and soft skills) is an important aspect of the change management process. The redesign process, usually will call for people to take up additional roles and responsibilities – not necessarily those of others, which will entail re-skilling. Until and unless adequate measures are taken to address the attendant training and people development aspects, the redesign process is bound to fail. This is essentially because, without the requisite skills, people who will be manning the process will not be able to perform and deliver to the required levels of performance. As a part of the change management program it will be necessary to draw up the required training calendar well in advance i.e. immediately on finalizing the TO BE processes.

The utilization of contemporary Information Technologies are proving to be great use in facilitating access to information, simplification of procedures and better delivery of services to citizens. e-Governance is about the use of information technology to raise the quality of the services governments deliver to citizens and businesses. It is a technology mediated tool that is changing both the delivery of public services and the broader interactions between citizens and government.

e-Governance

During the last few years, the Government of India, as well as various State Governments have taken major initiatives towards the use of information technology for ushering in e-Governance. There are striking examples of e-Governance initiatives

in the delivery of basic services including health and education; social services including pension, registration of licenses and certificates; rural services, like the accessing of land records; services in the agricultural sector that include weather forecast and information on market prices; redressal of public grievances etc. e–Governance facilitates open and transparent governance, thereby supporting people's right to know - to know what their Governments are doing and how they are doing things. It is therefore, an important tool for citizens to access information.

e-Governance can vastly extend access to education, health care, markets, financial services, vocational skills, administrative services and other aspects of the modern society, to many more people at far lower costs. It can dramatically reduce the cost of communications, improve access to technology and marketing capabilities for the rural poor, eliminate intermediary exploitation in the production and distribution chains, increase government accountability, and stimulate democratic participation.

The Government of India and several other states have introduced electronic means to computerize their activities and take IT to the masses. The Passenger reservation system of Indian Railways, Citizen Services through e-Seva in Andhra Pradesh, Land Records through Bhoomi in Karnataka are examples of how improved efficiency and reduced transaction time can be achieved through the effective use of IT. Various non-government players – Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), private foundations and corporate houses – have also demonstrated the powerful developmental impact of IT on the lives of ordinary people through experiments in different locations.

However, the progress on e-Governance to date has been slow and not linked to Government reinvention. Rather, most IT applications have focused on improving the efficiency of existing operations or providing one-way information dissemination, instead of on fundamentally changing the way businesses and citizens interact with Government. Automatic the existing processes only breeds further inefficiencies. Process reengineering has to be attempted by eliminating unnecessary steps and optimizing the process at the backend before a service is delivered.
There should be a single web based front-end for all government services to the public. All Government departments should ensure that they operate web sites which provide upto date information, forms etc. Transactions between various departments of the government of India and other Government organizations should be networked so that a substantial part of transfer of files and paper can be replaced by an intranet within the Government.

It is also imperative that the present paper based system be transitioned to an electronic environment. This paradigm shift will benefit all key stakeholders, facilitate quantum increase in workforce efficiencies, reduce the burden of paperwork and bring about qualitative improvement in exercising surveillance on functioning of the Government and various departments under its ambit. An essential step in bringing about a transformation in the efficiency of the entire system would be to review the existing processes to eliminate redundancies in work processes and data storage and rationalize the work flow to ensure certainty and speed in the information delivery processes.

Old economy Government was organized around departments and bureaucracies that operated like "stove pipes" with little information flowing between them, and with operations developed to meet the requirements of departments and ministries, not the needs of citizens. New economy Government will have to be organized around the functions and the needs of citizens; with information and communication technologies a key enabler of this reinvented Government.
The challenge in any e-Governance initiative is in unifying disparate technologies to easily search, retrieve and extract the rich information contents stored in various data elements that have different data representations and semantic implications. A unifying infrastructure and a standards-based approach both in the data contents and accessing mechanisms therefore become sine-quo-non. In such e-Governance initiative, the primary focus is on communication; communication between Government departments, communication within a department and communication between the Government and the citizens, businesses etc. Therefore, it is critical that a critical infrastructure be set up that enables this communication and separates the concerns of the front end applications (presentation layer) from the back end application layer.

Data standardization is an essential pre-requisite to ensure a smooth transition to the process of e-Governance. Many times, the same information is asked by different departments where the information contents are the same, but are captured and stored in different fields and data formats, making it virtually impossible to share such data across the Government departments. Therefore an essential step would be to rationalize the data items and data values to ensure consistency in their semantics and usage. e-Governance standards relating to inter-operability between departments within the states and between states and the Government of India need to be developed and maintained.

Redefining structures and processes will be effective when a sound performance management system is devised and implemented. The measurement of performance will enhance accountability of the government and thereby lead to better service delivery.

Performance Measurement

Public sector performance has often been measured in terms of what the government has done (e.g. amount of funding provided, number of kilometers of road paved, number of new hospital beds). Such measures focus on how "busy" the government has been rather than on what it has achieved. They highlight means rather than ends. This is not to say that keeping track of means (as opposed to ends) isn't important. Governments need to measure how much they spend and "do". But when performance measurement focuses too heavily or exclusively on how much is spent – "inputs" – or done – "outputs" -- as opposed to impact on society -- "outcomes" -- the result is often that public sector organizations lose sight of why they were created in the first place. Public organizations may be very "busy" but be accomplishing little from society's perspective. Imagine a Public Works Department building thousands of kilometers of roads to places where no one goes.

That measurement systems in the public sector often focus on inputs rather than outcomes is no accident. It reflects the fact that performance measurement in the government is a difficult business. Performance measurement works best when there

is clarity about what is being measured and why. Consider the private sector, where the "bottom line" is clear. Companies exist in order to sell goods and services profitably and to create wealth for their owners.

The Government is different. It exists to improve people's lives in ways that can't often (or easily) be measured in Rupees and Paise. Public servants face ambiguity over what the "bottom line" is in the first place. Hence the room for disagreement over appropriate performance measures is much greater in the Government than in the private sector.

Government programs are *instruments* for achieving social goals; they are means to an end. A complete performance measurement system tracks both the "instruments" themselves *and* provides evidence of their impact on society. Government organizations therefore must not only develop indicators that measure resources used ("inputs") and activities completed ("outputs"), but also need indicators that provide information on results("outcomes"). The way the processes are carried out can be measured through indicators designed to capture the quality of work (process). A measurement system must also monitor the efficiency with which resources are used, i.e. the transformation of inputs into outputs, and of outputs into outcomes.

Simplifying Government is a Herculean task, as the complexities involved at every stage have to be studied and re-engineered for better service delivery. Leadership at different levels of Governance/Administration is needed to take this process forward. The Leaders have to leverage the potential of technology such as e-Tools to make the simplification process easy and citizen centric.

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