TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES

Digitally Reimagining Public Service Delivery

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Abstract

A 'Digital by Default' approach can fundamentally transform the way citizens interact with government departments and agencies.
A shift from traditional to digital channels is a win-win proposition for both citizens and governments. For citizens, benefits include better user experience, convenience, speed, personalization, and affordability. Governments can take advantage of lower cost of service and improved citizen outreach.

Consumers are increasingly choosing digital channels to buy products and services. According to a report published by the UK government in 2012, 60% of consumers in the UK accessed online banking in 2011, compared to 45% in 2005. Online bill payment grew from 39% in 2005 to 57% in 2011, and online shopping increased from 74 to 86% during the same period[1].

The key to digitization of public services is to shift the focus from compliance and transaction fulfillment to designing online services that meet citizen needs and improve user experience.

Bridging the Digital Divide between the Private and Public Sector

Online services in the government sector are not at par with those in other sectors in terms of ease of use, convenience, and responsiveness. The increasing consumption of online services by consumers in the private sector is not matched by a similar adoption of the public sector services. This can be attributed to:

- Dependence on legacy systems
- Piecemeal approach
- Low interoperability
- Outdated policies and legislations

A Citizen-Centric Approach to Digitization

According to the UK Government[2], the Digital by Default Service Standard translates to delivering high quality digital services that are intuitive, convenient, and fulfill citizens' needs effectively. It also aims to make digital services the first choice by default, while not excluding citizens who prefer traditional channels.

Government services can be broadly segmented into information and transactional services. The information services segment involves publishing and communicating on websites, portals, and other online channels. Transactional services relate to service requests and fulfillment such as applying for birth or death certificates, licenses and passports, paying taxes, and so on.

Governments are quick to adopt online channels for communication and publishing services, especially through an increasing use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. However, digital transactional services continue to trail their private sector counterparts. While transacting with the government through offline channels, citizens often have to act as 'public service integrators'. In other words, they have to request information from one department to conduct a transaction with another department.

However, such transactions often come at a huge cost. The average cost of citizen interactions incurred by municipalities in Copenhagen is 80 kronor for an in-person interaction, 40 kronor for a telephonic interaction, and 3 kronor for a digital self-service interaction[3]. Similarly, in the UK, the average cost of a transaction involving the central government through the

The manufacture of smart phones is expected to touch one billion in 2016[5]. It is therefore likely that internet access through smart phones will overtake internet access through traditional devices such as desktops and laptops. In addition, the growing affordability of smart phones could make it the universal channel for Internet access in the near future.

The UK Government's 'Red Tape Challenge' is examining over 6000 regulations and plans to amend or delete 3,000 of them through a consultative process involving citizens and businesses.[6]

digital channel can be almost 20 times lower than that of a telephone-based transaction, and 50 times lower than a face-to-face transaction[4].

A Digital by Default approach makes it easier for citizens to find and access services. It also enables departments and service providers to deliver integrated, cross-departmental services. Moving transactional services to digital channels enables citizens and governments to save both time and money through faster and accurate transactions, simplified end-to-end processes, and a reduced rate of failed transactions. It also makes government services transparent and efficient, by reducing the dependence on government staff. Therefore, transactional services are a good candidate for Digital by Default strategies, as they offer significant scope for enhancing the efficiency of governance and improving citizen experience.

Best Practices for Digitizing Government Service

To match the adoption of online services in other sectors, governments will need to architect and design digital public services from the ground up, while prioritizing citizens' needs. Some best practices for designing effective digital services include:

- Dematerialization of documents
- Transactional service availability on mobile platforms
- Amendment of legislations and regulations
- Focus on digital inclusion

An Integrated Approach to Implementing Digital by Default Services

Successful implementation of Digital by Default services requires a multi-faceted and integrated approach that involves:

- Focusing on services design, which should be co-created with citizens from the ground-up to address citizens' needs
- Providing incentives to citizens to use digital channels over traditional alternatives
- Ensuring citizen awareness through campaigns that emphasize the benefits of using a digital channel
- Enabling technology environments that should be available across multiple platforms
- Enhancing citizen privacy, data security, and confidentiality

The Indian government's Passport Seva Project has transformed the delivery of passport services to citizens while making the system efficient and easy to use for government employees. Key benefits for citizens include well-defined service levels, improved transparency, closer access points, online availability of all passport-related information, and an effective grievance redressal mechanism.

Moving regular services to digital channels is expected to sav £1.7-1.8 billion annually for the UK economy.

- Defining digital service standards to deliver a consistent and high quality experience

- Developing an analytics-based measurement framework to monitor and evaluate digital services to enable continuous improvements

- Creating new digital roles that are responsible and accountable for more efficient service delivery

- Ensuring change management by proactive and early engagement with staff and unions across government departments and agencies

Conclusion

Digital by Default entails reimagining public service delivery through citizen-centric governance. It requires a fundamental re-architecting of how public services of the future will be designed and delivered. It transforms the traditional unilateral citizen-government interaction into a multi-lateral, multi-channel interaction based on citizen choice.

Digital by Default presents an opportunity for governments to provision public services that are convenient, cost effective, and provide citizens with a high-quality experience, at par with other sectors. It also improves interaction and engagement between the government and citizens, resulting in collaborative policy-making and high-quality interactions across the government-citizen value chain. Most importantly, it extends an opportunity to transform public service delivery by placing citizen satisfaction at the center of governance.

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