Involving Citizens to Reimagine Governance

By: Rajdeep Sahrawat

Abstract

Existing governance models seldom allow citizens to play a significant role in the period after they have cast their vote during an election and before they cast it again at the next election.

An almost negligible role in policy making and enforcement often leaves them with unfulfilled expectations and a host of grievances.

Governments need to bring in more citizen-centricity, which can be achieved through service personalization, co-creation of services, and ensuring transparency of operations. Citizens have the right to know how public resources are being utilized for their welfare. They need greater visibility into how grievances are addressed and into the new measures that are introduced for their benefit. It is imperative to design and deploy a collaborative model that allows citizens ample participation in policy formulation and public service delivery.

Limited participation of citizens that ends at the polling booth is undesirable. They need to play a more active role in governance.

A departmental approach to e-governance initiatives, instead of a whole-of-government approach, inhibits true transformation.

Redefining Good Governance

The structure of the government in a democratic setup is typically three-tiered – federal, state, and local. Elected representatives undertake policy formulation and enforcement on behalf of citizens, but quite often, there is limited interaction between citizens and their representatives post elections. Existing governance models, where citizens are unable to provide feedback on public service delivery and have negligible audience for suggestions and critiques, need to make way for a more collaborative approach.

Understanding the Gaps in Current Governance Models

In contrast to the government sector, retail, banking and financial services, telecom, hospitality, and manufacturing sectors are rapidly transforming the enterprise-consumer value chain. Enterprises in these consumer-centric sectors are moving away from treating consumers as a homogenous mass and focusing on enabling personalized interactions. On the other hand, a one-size-fits-all approach, used by government bodies, often leaves citizens feeling disconnected and disenchanted. The non-participatory governance model further alienates citizens who are not involved in policy formulation or public service delivery. The absence of adequate feedback mechanisms further exacerbates the trust deficit.

Recognizing the need to increase citizen involvement, governments have introduced several measures such as toll free help lines, call centers, and web portals. However, these media are unilateral and static, and rarely help address the non-participatory nature of the citizen-government value chain. In addition, current e-governance initiatives are transaction-centric and focus on ensuring compliance rather than increasing citizen participation. In most instances, e-governance is just about automating processes. Re-architecting the citizen government value chain is vital to drive broader and long-term transformation.

According to a report by the UK government on digital efficiency, the cost of an online interaction is only 2% of a face-to-face interaction and 16% of a phone-based interaction[1].

The future of public service delivery calls for a paradigm shift from 'pull' to 'push' governance.

Digital technologies such as social media, mobility, analytics, and cloud will soon be at the epicenter of public service delivery.

Ways to Enhance Citizen Engagement

To deepen citizen engagement, governments have to rethink the entire public service delivery process, right from design to implementation. The aspects that can help governments sketch a blueprint for the much needed transformation program include:

- Personalization of public services where citizen-centricity supersedes transaction centricity
- Anywhere, anytime, anyhow service delivery such as mobile applications, web portals, self-help kiosks, and telephony
- Co-creation of public services where citizens play an active role to make public services truly relevant, personalized, and citizen-centric
- Openness and transparency via a multi-faceted approach that integrates several individual threads such as open standards, open data, and open source technology, allowing citizens to access documents and proceedings, thereby enabling societal oversight of government administration

The Future of Public Service Delivery

Public services of the future will have to achieve a paradigm shift from a 'pull' to a 'push' governance approach. Examples of public services based on the 'push' strategy include:

- Automatic renewal of statutory documents
- Seamless flow of information across systems
- Consolidation of citizen entitlements

Leveraging Digital Technologies to Transform Governance

Transitioning to a push-based approach requires governments to go beyond offering mobile interfaces to existing public service portals or aggregating several government websites into single window portals. They need to recognize that digital technologies such as social media, mobility, analytics, and cloud offer truly transformative possibilities, such as:

- Better collaboration through social media
- On-the-go access to public services with mobility
- Insights driven public service delivery through analytics
- Building new business models with the cloud

A simple example of an integrated digital strategy

Conclusion

Governments have to recognize the need to include citizens in policy formulation and public service delivery to ensure good governance for one and all. The future of public service delivery due to the evolving technology solutions and the opportunities they offer holds definite benefits for governments and citizens alike. Acting in unison, social media, mobility, analytics, and cloud will help reimagine governance, by creating platforms of collaboration between governments and citizens. This will go a long way in supporting democratic values such as openness, transparency, empowerment, agility, and participation.

Modern, flexible, and integrated technology platforms deployed across government departments hold the key to transforming from a transaction-centric to citizen-centric governance.

References

[1] GOV.UK, "Digital Efficiency Report" (November 2012), accessed March 3, 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-efficiency-report

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