
Automation in Government establishments: Lower-level Management Concerns

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ABSTRACT

India presently, is in a phase of revolution in e-governance. Institutions, corporate world, offices, organizations and other establishments are all looking at computerizing their environment to bring about transparency and efficiency in their functioning and output. While private establishments have gone very far in computerizing their activities, government organizations are lagging poorly behind them. In this paper issues that are encountered when an attempt is made to computerize the office environment of a government establishment, are discussed. In particular, focus is kept on the issues related to the lower level cadre. A point wise discussion has been presented in this paper on the concerns of the lower-level management in the government institutions, whenever there is a drive for its automation. The discussion has been presented with illustrations as case study in general and education institutions, in particular.

Keywords

IT management, E-governance in India, Automation of Government offices, Capacity Building

INTRODUCTION

India presently, is in a phase of revolution in e-governance. Institutions, corporate world, offices, organizations and other establishments are all looking at computerizing their environment to bring about transparency and efficiency in their functioning and output [4] [5] [6] [7]. While private establishments have gone very far in computerizing their activities, government organizations are lagging poorly behind them [1] [2] [3]. Even in private organizations, large establishments are far ahead of small and very small-scale enterprises on this front. Small and very small scale enterprises normally show hesitation in adapting to a computerized environment primarily because they need the ease to do business and also because they have a tradition of saving (evading) their tax liabilities through unaccounted cash transactions. The recent push towards computerization has come on a large scale due to two major events. Firstly the ease of doing business through cash transactions suffered a major setback due to the demonetization of higher denomination currency in India [8]. The next push came when the present government took a major decision of implementing country-wide uniform and transparent Tax regime under GST (Goods and Services Tax) [9]. These two reasons have given a major drive to all kinds of private commercial establishments to work towards creating an automated environment.

In this paper issues that are encountered when an attempt is made to computerize the office environment of a government establishment, are discussed. In particular, focus is kept on the issues related to the lower level cadre.

LIST OF ISSUES

Government establishments have hitherto shown much greater initial reluctance in stepping into an automated environment at various levels primarily due to the reasons listed here:

1. **Top level-management personnel**
 - a. Lack of vision

b. Financial constraints

2. The middle-level management personnel

- a. An overall lazy approach in the absence of a short term incentive
- b. Fear for losing ease in corrupt practices and
- c. Due to lack of funds and resources

3. The lower-level management personnel

- a. Lack of urge to take up the challenge in shifting
- b. Fear of redundancy of skill
- c. Fear for losing ease in corrupt practices and
- d. Fear of losing manpower requirement

A point wise discussion is done in the next section on the four concerns of the lower-level management in the government institutions, whenever there is a drive for its automation. The discussion has been presented with illustrations as case study in general and education institutions, in particular.

CONCERNS OF LOWER LEVEL CADRE

Point wise discussion:

a. Lack of urge in the low-level management cadre to take up the challenge of shifting from manual to automated environment by itself is a major challenge to address. While the private organizations are not likely to feel this problem as they generally achieve this by connecting this with adequate long-term or short-term incentives. In a government organization however, it is also not possible to offer incentives to those who would show the desired urge. Payment of overtime or an additional honorarium may work some time but is hardly enough to drive them. The right urge would get generated only if they can be convinced that routine, repetitive and boring jobs would become very easy to execute. To convince them, they can be made to work in an automated environment at another place. A short term incentive by sending them on deputation at a place where the environment is already automated can work wonders in preparing them for such a challenge.

Case study:

Automation in many government organisations has been achieved either after privatising the establishment as it was done in the case of Delhi Electricity Supply Undertaking or by employing lower level cadre on contract basis such as in the case of Delhi Transport Authority.

Education Institution:

Education Institutions in the Government sector have moved very slowly on the task of shifting to an automated environment. While private institutions have shifted to online fees long ago even the prestigious Delhi university has shifted to such a platform only last year. Accounts keeping and maintenance need to be done in an automated environment first and then the other modules such as administration, examination and library need to work in an integrated and automated environment. In the case of Delhi University, automation is being done in a planned manner. Instead of making an effort to develop an integrated module to connect all possible activities automation is being done in isolated way. While each of the colleges is required to keep their accounts in the same way as the university, all the colleges work on different platforms and independently.

b. Fear for redundancy of skill is a real fear and that must be handled by the middle and top level cadres with adequate concern and sensitivity.

Case Study:

Someone who is very good at totalling figures in a column would find that the edge is lost the moment people start working on a calculator. But then to be able to execute manual totalling faster than others has actually a skill that you do not require today. To be able to write calligraphically on a certificate is another such redundant skill. To be able to draw a geometrical figure with a pen is also no longer a skill that an office may require now. To maintain a manual account, to efficiently update stocks and inventories are similar skills that are losing their demand. Counting cash is another such skill. The list can continue endlessly. But these are facts and are real issues. In order to handle these concerns the low level management personnel must be given

confidence that if they keep themselves open for skill enhancement, they would continue to remain in demand. In the automated environment, more than skilled persons the organization need persons who are willing to enhance skills. The higher cadre must show concerns and sensitivity towards this aspect and must take timely measurements to give them opportunities to get trained in new skills.

Education Institution:

With the arrival and extensive use of Google like search services, teachers require to develop skills to keep their utility in education institutions. Being available for consultations and inspiring students with their behaviour and willingness to interact with sensitivity are now the new skills that are required as compared to the earlier skill where they just needed to perform well and impress the students in the classrooms.

c. As automation often ends up in limiting the opportunities of personal interaction between the government officials/servants with the consumers, it restricts them to have the opportunity to indulge in corrupt practices. This fear is of course real, but for obvious reasons is kept hidden. It is easier to handle this concern as it is never expressed openly. The higher level cadre must handle this tactfully by making use of the limitation of the lower-lever personnel in not able to spell them out openly. One may actually discuss such concerns in a positive way by showing them the benefits of automation as it would not allow even the 'rare' corrupt practices to continue.

Case Study:

With e-governance in place at many government offices, such practices have faced major set-backs. Biometric attendance system and Adhaar cards have improved the availability of government officials and clerks in their respective offices. Government schools are showing improved activities and many salaried employees have turned ghosts. These corrupt practices could be stopped only due to computerization.

Education Institutions:

Admission procedure can be made completely transparent to stop all corrupt practices in schools and colleges. Getting certificates, marks sheets, filling up examination forms, submitting fees and all such activities can be automated to minimise the interaction of students and parents with the office. This may reduce the opportunity that they usually get to indulge in corrupt practices.

d. This fear is not real at least in Indian environment. The political parties who play the role of opposition often exploit this fear to mobilise support and political strength.

Case Study:

DESU (Delhi Electricity Supply Undertaking) worked under manual environment until NDPL (North Delhi Power Limited), TPDDL (Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited) and BSES Rajdhani Power Limited & BSES Yamuna Power Limited took control over the functioning of these organizations. Private Banks started working under automated environment much before the nationalized banks. Private schools and other higher education institutions started functioning in automated environment much before their government counterparts.

However the case I would like to present here will be the computerization of Railway reservation centres. A large scale opposition was met against such a computerization because of all the reasons that has been discussed in this paper but the most prominent of them was fear of losing jobs. A case was made out that once the reservation system will get computerised, employees would not be needed for such a job and people would lose their jobs. Time is a witness to the fact that exactly opposite has happened. Ticket counters that existed in a countable number and that too only in major cities have exponentially multiplied. We have ticket counters on the streets of all the cities of this country and even outside. The wide-scale corruption that existed earlier when the reservations were done manually could not have been controlled otherwise. The corrupt practices that were developed in automated environment were not only traceable and track-able but it also provides ways to curb and stop them.

Yes, skills changed but only for better. Reservation that can now be done simultaneously at two different and disconnected places have thrown opportunities that could never have had been there with manual system. Now reservations can be done with ease and with adequate transparency.

Education Institution:

Admission process of Delhi University with more than eighty colleges and more than three dozen courses is quite a complex exercise to be done manually. Ironically, this was being done manually till a few years ago. Thankfully, some colleges made local efforts to automate the process but the real benefit could be felt only if the complete process gets automated centrally. An attempt is being made for the last two years to automate this process. Although this exercise still needs improvement but the benefits are already there in the open to be seen and appreciated. The usual unmanageable crowd visiting colleges are now not seen. Fees submissions are done online for the ease of the applicants. Transparency has improved to a great extent.

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