

Chapter 5

E-Governance as a Paradigm Shift in Public Administration: Theories, Applications, and Management

Muhammad Muinul Islam
Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh

Mohammad Ehsan
University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

The ICT-blessed e-governance is transforming public administration systems worldwide and forcing a paradigm shift. E-governance renders a new way and style in each and every aspect of public administration. It brings about changes in the structure, functions, and processes of public service delivery, ushering transformation in the system through effectively connecting, engaging, and streamlining the relations among government, businesses, citizens, and other relevant stakeholders. Irrespective of certain obvious limitations and challenges, it not only attempts to ensure economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in service delivery, but also offers unlimited potential for combating corruption and many other bureau-pathologies in public administration. Based on secondary sources, this chapter offers brief theoretical discussions on e-governance, including, among others, its emergence, types of service delivery, and transformation stages.

INTRODUCTION

An effort to claim for a paradigm shift in an academic discipline is daunting. Without a firm-rooted trend, distinguishing characteristics and evidence-based transformation, the claim for a paradigm shift would be futile. How far e-governance has provided and managed a space for a shift in paradigm is still debatable in the

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academic circle. But the trends and applications are so widespread, inevitable and visible that a modest claim for a paradigm shift is timely and due. The fundamental reasons and clues for such a ‘claim’ are justified by the transformation that occurred not only in the processes and practices of public administration, policy and management, but also in the structure that shapes it. From a systems approach, the changes are evident in both

inputs, throughputs and outputs thus bringing out a holistic transformation in public administration functionaries. No doubt that a system of public administration is all-pervasive and has been ubiquitous since times immemorial. Today, what we understand as the public administration existed even before the birth of modern states. The nature, functions, and mode of public service delivery, however, have gone through radical changes from those earlier times. This chapter offers an extension of public administration paradigms proposed and postulated by Henry (1975) and Golembiewski (1977). It also deals with the basic theoretical backgrounds of e-governance, its types of ICT-driven service delivery and transformation phases.

The birth of public administration as a separate field of study is marked by Wilson's seminal publication in 1887. Since then to the late 1970s, Henry identified five paradigms of public administration. These are: paradigm one: the politics/administration Dichotomy 1900-1926; paradigm two: the principles of administration 1927-1937; paradigm three: public administration as political science 1950-1970; paradigm four: public administration as management 1956-1970; and paradigm five: public administration as public administration, 1970-? Henry did not mention the exact end year of the fifth paradigm as it was still dominant in the intellectual discourse of the discipline of Public Administration. But we can cautiously suggest the finishing line of the fifth paradigm to be the early 90s. Since 2001, a new idea¹ slowly permeated in the theories and practice of public administration forcing a paradigm shift in the discipline. The sixth paradigm, as an extended version of Henry's paradigm, can thus be called as "*Public Administration as New Public Management (NPM), 1991-?*" However, as others suggested, we can also think of another paradigm shift in the discourses of public administration that concurrently exists with the sixth one and is very likely to be a dominant one for years to come. This

seventh paradigm can be called "*Public Administration as E-governance*² 1995-?" By now, there is widespread agreement among the academicians and practitioners of the role that information and communication technology (ICT) plays in the day to day operations of public administration. ICTs dramatically revolutionized the structure, processes, and radically transformed the way public administration systems work around us (Roy, 2011). E-governance has been ubiquitously adopted and adapted, to various degrees, by the governments of developed, transitional and developing countries.³ The glaring transformation that public administration so far has undergone through e-governance has been remarkable.

In fact, over the past three and a half decades, information and communication technology has brought changes in the operations of government organizations both in developed and developing countries. This is due to the process of converting information from analog to digital forms. The life-blood of government is information and the digital revolution has allowed government organizations to store, analyze, and retrieve information more effectively and efficiently. This process has also been strongly affected by changes in telecommunications technology and the convergence of computer and communication technologies. The most striking manifestation of this process of technological change is the advent of Internet or World Wide Web (Bretschneider, 2003).

This reform of government administration and the provision of improved services to citizens have long been acknowledged as a major criterion for development and today's drive towards e-governance in many parts of the world can be considered as a part of this wider developmental goal (Madon, 2004). Throughout the world, governments, businesses and NGOs are working together to adopt e-governance – from Singapore to South Africa, Andhra Pradesh to Washington, or Bangladesh to Malaysia. These are not just

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