# The Role of Technology in Enhancing Transparency and Accountability in Public Sector Organizations of Pakistan

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## Abstract

The wave of adoption of e-government technology is increasingly getting the momentum in the development countries for enhancing the good governance capability of public organizations. The research is aimed to analyze the impact of e-government technology in enhancing the Transparency and Accountability of public organizations. This research has taken the study of eight public organizations where e-government technology is used for enhancing transparency and accountability of public organizations. The research has been taken under two hypothesis related to transparency and accountability. In the context of transparency, it is hypothesized that instant information access positively affects in increasing the transparency of the organization and in the context of accountability, it is hypothesized that Empowerment of employees significantly increases accountability of the organization.

**Keywords:** E-government; transparency; public organizations; ICT.

## 1. Introduction

E-Government is the systemic use of ICTs to support the functions that a government performs for its constituents, typically the provision of information and services. E-Government is the use of ICT to transform the traditional government by making it accessible, transparent, effective, and accountable. E-Government does not mean putting more computers on the desks of government officials and is more than just a government website on the Internet. The political, social, economic and technological aspects determine e-governance. It establishes a relationship between government officials and citizens (World Bank, 2006a). E-Government is also known as digital government, and online government. Here it refers to government's use of ICT to exchange information and services with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government (World Bank, 2006b).

E-Government increases government accountability by making its operations more transparent thereby is reducing the opportunities for corruption. E-Government supports development goals by providing business, rural and traditionally undeserved communities with information, opportunities and communications capabilities (Saidi and Yard, 2002). E-Government innovation and development can position the public sector as a demand driver of ICT infrastructure and applications accessible by the broader economy. The United Nations e-Government Survey conducted in 2012 found that many countries, especially developing countries, have initiated efforts to build ICT for the people to further enhance public sector efficiencies and streamline governance system to support sustainable development (Zukang, 2010).

The Asian continent is the home of 60% of humanity. Asia as a whole has continued to expand e-government services. Investment has been made in the development of infrastructure and at the same time

governments have reached out to provide greater e-government services and improve governance system of the various countries. In the 2012 survey, three of the world's top 20 e-leaders were from Asia. The whole Asian region has had a higher level of e-government development than the world average (Zukang, 2012). E-Government is considered as a means of the realization of good Governance because it changes both, government internal and operation and relations and government relations with citizens and other stakeholders (Kettani, 2009).

Many government agencies use IT to facilitate the public in their accomplishments, achievements, programs and plans. The availability of this information helps people, especially those living in provinces, to gain access to the data that they need without going to the capital of the country (Haque et al., 2012). The information on government operations is a basic requirement for fostering transparency in governance. The use of IT could enable the government as well as society to inform the people of their rights and privileges (Guchteneire and Kristina, 2005). ICTs offer concrete opportunities for local and national governments to improve their performance in terms of transparency, participation and decentralization. The application of ICT in planning and design of development strategies helps to strengthen the establishment of efficient, effective and transparent governance systems (Batista, 2003).

The application of ICT could be helpful to connect important stakeholders of government to provide better governance. According to the research studies undertaken on e-government in the developed and developing countries, it has been found that e-government is one of the potential tools in establishing good governance in developing countries (Basu, 2004).

## 2. Research Methodology

In this research study, the sample population of eight public organizations have been taken under study, where G2G, G2B and G2C e-government applications are functional in the public organizations. The sample size of 80 has been collected on each form of e-government. A research survey instrument has been used for the collection of data. The "Good Governance Evaluation Cards" have been used for conducting the survey of the targeted population. A total sample size of 240 has been collected from the related public organization. Key respondents are the government personnel who have been using e-government at the different levels of federal government organizations and have been involved in online interaction using e-government applications with the purpose of establishing good governance.

## 3. Public Accountability and Transparency

In this era of modern age of information technology, public organizations are under immense pressure and scrutiny to be accountable, responsive and effective. Accountability and responsibility are organizational values interwoven into organizational culture. Responsibility emphasizes a personal commitment to duty (Gortner et al., 2007). Transparency brings these values together. Transparency is visible decision-making that is open to public input and conducted in cooperation with organizations working together for the common public purpose. The process is transparent, and public organizations are accountable to the public and indirectly accountable to elected officials. An organizational structure can foster good accountability through aspects of organizational structure. Accountability occurs when an organization reports to a higher political authority. The accountability, responsiveness and responsibility emphasize control at different levels of the organization (Gortner et al., 2007).

"Transparency" is becoming the term of choice to describe the traditional notions of political accountability, responsiveness and responsibility. Transparency means that public services are both accountable and responsive and are answerable to the public and open to public scrutiny (Gortner et al., 2007). Stirton and Lodge (2001) stated that transparency includes the ability of citizens to exert influence or control on public services. The transparency helps to prevent the abuse of authority and corruption and provides citizens and members with informed choice. Nowadays, the notion of transparency is the product of the Information Age. The access to information is a principle tool to fight against corruption. Technological innovation can provide a wealth of information to stakeholders (Stirton and Lodge, 2001).

Accountability involves giving workers and managers a level of authority commensurate with their responsibility within an organization. Employees could be more effective and accountable if the structure of the organization allows them to solve problems and make decisions within their designated areas of responsibility. Participation and teamwork are the cornerstones of employee involvement and elements of good governance (Gortner, et al., 2007).

The advent of IT has radically changed the working pattern of organization members. It has changed the

means of communication and exchange of information at the different levels of organization. It has significantly improved a manager's ability to monitor individual and team performance. It has provided employees with more opportunities to collaborate and share information. In addition, it has made it possible for the people in an organization to be fully accessible any time regardless of where they are. Now communication and the exchange of information among organizational members are no longer constrained by geography or time. The collaborative work efforts among widely dispersed individuals and teams, sharing of information and integration of decision-making and work throughout an entire organization have the potential to increase organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Robins and Coulter, 2007).

**H1. Instant information access positively affects in increasing the transparency of the organization. The more access to available information, the higher is level of transparency.**

The above hypothesis illustrates that gaining access to instant information increases the transparency of the actions and decisions of the organization. It is asserted that e-government technology has potential to provide instant access to information available in the database of the organization. Consequently, an instant access to information makes transparent the actions and decisions related to the concerned parties and consequently enhance the transparency of the organization. The obtained result in the analysis demonstrates that there is 64% level of enhancement in the transparency. The white bar in following figure exhibits the level of transparency.

The above figure demonstrates that e-government technology has enhanced transparency 64%, which demonstrates a fair level of enhancement. According to the measurement scale of good governance (50%-64 = fair), 62% is a fair level of enhancement. Therefore, it is concluded that H5 hypothesis is accepted and, on the basis of results shown in the above figure, it is asserted that e-government facilitates in enhancing the transparency of the public organizations.

**H2. Empowerment of employees significantly increases accountability of the organization. The higher degree of empowerment, the stronger is the level of accountability.**

The above hypothesis illustrates that empowerment of the employees enhances the accountability of the public organization. The concept of empowerment is based on the idea that giving employees resources, authority, opportunity and motivation holds them responsible for the outcomes of their actions and decisions, which contributes to competence and satisfaction of the employees. It is asserted that e-government technology facilitates employees' and authority to use available resources of the organization and consequently makes them responsible for their actions and decisions. It is asserted that e-government technology empowers employees through their authority and empowerment of the employees enhances the accountability of the public organizations. The result obtained demonstrates that there is 62% level of enhancement in accountability. The orange bar in following figure demonstrates the level of enhancement in accountability.

The above figure shows that e-government technology has enhanced 62% level of accountability of the public organization. According to the measurement of scale of good governance (50%-64% = fair), accountability demonstrates a fair level of enhancement. Consequently, it is concluded that H2 hypothesis is accepted and it demonstrates that e-government technology empowers employees and thus empowerment of employees enhances the accountability of the public organization.

**Conclusion**

The Government of Pakistan, realizing the potential benefits of the IT for the development of the country, has embraced IT as a key to modernizing public organizations. IT has been adopted with the aim of broad-based involvement of the key stakeholders in running the affairs of government.

Since the inception of the Information Age, developing countries such as Pakistan have been striving for bringing the improvement in the functional efficiency and effectiveness of public organizations. Currently, good governance has been the main objective of the government to improve the administration of the

country. For attaining the goal of modernizing the public organizations with the aim of improving their functional efficiency and effectives IT is adopted as tool for development. This goal has been embraced in the establishment of EGD and the formulation of e-government strategy by the federal government. Besides that, government organizations at the provincial and district levels have also started the journey of modernizing their public sector organizations with the purposes of improving functional efficiency and effectiveness in the business operation of government and enhancing good governance capability at the federal and provincial levels of government.

The research findings of the above two hypothesis has concluded that e-government technology has enhanced the fair level of Transparency by 64% and Accountability by 62% of the public organizations. The level of enhancement in the transparency and accountability has asserted that e-government technology has the potential in improving the transparency and accountability of public organization.

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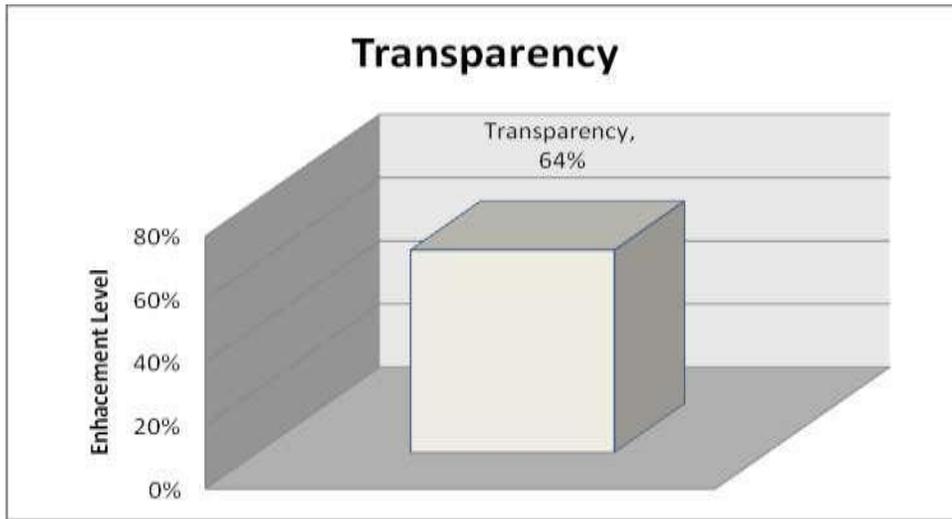
Figure 1: Enhancement in Transparency



Figure 2: Enhancement in Accountability