Preface

Governments across the globe are trying to take advantage from the opportunities offered by Information and Communication Technology based solutions for improving internal functioning and strengthening interfaces with citizens. The phenomenon, termed as e-governance or e-government as per varying country contexts, has been instrumental in the launching of many projects over the years with the intention of addressing the needs of a variety of stakeholders. A number of path-breaking initiatives have been reported in the literature. However, many projects—particularly in the context of developing countries—have failed to mature and deliver as per expectations. In a country like India, the federal government system adds further to the e-governance planning and implementation-related challenges as the complex interplay of situation, actors and processes is influenced by multiple organizations operating at different layers. For example, the mission mode projects conceptualized about a decade back under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) of India continue to face serious challenges even during the extended execution phase. Acknowledging that the projects under NeGP could not be implemented as per the planned deliverables and timelines, the Government has formulated yet another programme, viz. 'Digital India' with an astronomical budgetary outlay of INR 1000 billion and a far more ambitious scope. The Government intends to transform its functioning and service delivery mechanism in a big way through the enhanced scope of e-governance under the new programme. However, if the conventional top driven planning and implementation framework is continued to be relied upon, the new mega programme may be perceived as a greater risky proposition as it shall also be subjected to similar challenges during execution phase. For the success of various ongoing or new e-governance projects, it is necessary to take strategic measures based on learning from in-depth cross-case analysis of a few large projects. The research based book intends to bridge this gap related to lack of a synthesized framework for improving performance of e-governance projects. The main proposition of this book is that inadequate emphasis on strategic management aspects during planning and implementation of e-governance projects are the reasons for their unsatisfactory performance.

The book is based on experience gained during planning and execution of e-governance projects in India coupled with an extensive research work based on six national/multi-state level agriculture related projects. The words e-government and e-governance are used interchangeably in the context of this book. Unlike the traditional approach, the performance is viewed in terms of intended project outcomes and analyzed from the perspective of three key stakeholders, viz. planners, implementers and beneficiaries. Further, it explores as to whether the performance is influenced by extent of planning, comprehensiveness of strategy formulation, effectiveness of strategy implementation, changing situation, competence level of actors, and flexibility of processes. A set of significant strategic variables influencing performance have been identified based on independent opinion surveys of the key stakeholders. The variables have been interpreted to conduct a strategic gap analysis of six large projects of national importance. Learning issues from cross-case quantitative and qualitative analyses have been synthesized and brought out in the form of a generalized strategic framework for improving performance.

The book is organized into ten chapters. The first chapter presents general background and evolution of e-governance in India. It discusses important e-governance projects spanning across various government organizations with particular reference to agriculture related projects in the Indian context. It further highlights the key issues dealt with in the book, viz. developing insights about situation–actor–process interplay in e-governance context, exploring suitability of the conventional planning and implementation framework for handling the dynamic context of e-governance, and building strategic alliances across government organizations for effective e-governance.

The low success rates of e-governance projects on the one hand and the underlying opportunities on the other call for deeper insights into the performance of these projects. The importance of devising suitable measures for analyzing expected outcomes of various e-governance projects is discussed in Chap. 2. This chapter brings out a performance construct and demonstrates its application for cross-analyzing performance from the perspectives of three key actor segments, viz. planners, implementers and beneficiaries.

The popularly accessible e-governance literature is dominated by case studies by practitioners and government officials which showcase only project achievements without elaborating gaps related to planning, implementation and performance. Chapter 3 bridges this gap by presenting an empirically validated strategic framework. It further discusses the constituting driver and enabler components, methodology adopted and practical relevance of the framework in terms of implications for government officials and beneficiaries.

With the situational changes due to shift in focus from internal computerization to citizen centricity, new challenges have cropped up in the context of e-governance projects. Chapter 4 deals with 'Changing Situation' which has emerged as a driver of e-governance in the synthesized strategic framework. It uses illustrations from various projects and interpretation of analysis based on survey data to explain the

concept in terms of shared mission and vision, accessibility to service, changing user needs and feedback loops, and their relationship with performance.

In India, most of the past or ongoing e-governance initiatives have been undertaken as part of the conventional planning and implementation framework. Chapter 5 explores gaps in the prevailing system and discusses its unsuitability in coping with the dynamic context of e-governance. It explains the measures to be taken for effective strategic planning of e-governance projects. In the synthesized framework, 'Strategic Planning' has emerged as an enabler of e-governance and is perceived in terms of 'Extent of Planning', 'Comprehensive of Strategy Formulation' and 'Flexibility of Processes'. The chapter further discusses these variables and their linkage with performance based on analysis of the three base surveys.

In order to achieve the intended outcomes of a project, the planning has to be supported with effective implementation. 'Strategy Implementation' has emerged as an enabler of e-governance in the synthesized framework. Chapter 6 explores gaps in the prevailing set-up of strategy implementation and uses illustrations from projects and analysis of survey data to explain the significance of constituting variables, viz. 'Effectiveness of Strategy Implementation' and 'Competence level of Actors', and their influence on performance.

Chapter 7 presents three case studies of agriculture related projects. The first case study (Government to Citizens) analyzes AGMARKNET project. It includes highlights of a pilot field study conducted to understand the prevailing strategic gaps in the project. The need of collaborative efforts for building an effective agricultural marketing information system is also addressed here. The second case study (Government to Citizens) analyzes Kisan Call Centre project of the Department of Agriculture and Co-operation (DAC) for providing agricultural information extension support to remotely located farmers. The third case study (Government to Employees) discusses the DACNET project which was launched to usher in e-governance in the widely distributed but disconnected field offices of DAC. The empirically validated frameworks presented in Chaps. 4–6 are interpreted in the context of each of these three case studies using Situation–Actor–Process (SAP) framework. The chapter further brings out measures for improving performance using Learning–Action–Performance (LAP) framework.

Chapter 8 presents case studies of three Government to Business e-governance projects. The first case study discusses the Grapenet system of Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA). The second case study analyzes the Computerized Registration of Pesticides (CROP) system of Central Insecticides Board and Registration Committee which involved amendment of a legal act. The third case study looks into an Integrated Fertilizers Management Information System (IFMIS) aspired by the Department of Fertilizers (DoF) since 1993. The methodology used for these case studies is the same as indicated in the previous chapter. The Situation–Actor–Process–Learning–Action–Performance (SAP-LAP) framework is used to interpret empirically validated linkages and suggest measures for improving performance in respective cases.

Chapter 9 emphasizes upon the need for building collaborative linkages among various government agencies for effective e-governance. The illustrative context is taken as establishing a sound Agricultural Marketing Information System (AMIS) in India by presenting a strategic alliances based framework linking four different central government organizations, viz. the Directorate of Marketing and Inspection (DMI), the Directorate of Economics and Statistics (DES), the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) and the National Horticulture Board (NHB), which have independent systems of collection and dissemination of market information on agricultural produce.

Finally, Chapter 10 presents a way forward for effective e-governance in the form of strategic recommendations based on insights developed through the research conducted and practical experience of e-governance projects.

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It is hoped that the book will be of interest to the practitioners in government well as corporate who are engaged in planning and implementation of e-governance projects spanning across various layers of government. In Indian context, the learning issues are likely to trigger appropriate corrective measures for generating a better value from the several flagship projects envisaged under the Digital India Programme, Further, it will be of interest to the academic audience who would like to work on the strategic framework and the constituting constructs presented in the book for further improvement. It will also be of interest to business students and application software architects who aspire for a consulting career in the area of e-governance.

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