

# The Digital Governance Blueprint for Unified Compliance Standards

The genesis of e-Governance can be traced back to the 1970s, when the Government of India took a significant step forward by establishing the Department of Electronics, which laid the foundation for what would later become the National Informatics Centre (NIC) in 1977. In those initial years, computers were already present within government offices, albeit primarily for word processing tasks. However, it wasn't until the 1980s that the computerization process evolved, shifting its focus towards the development of in-house government applications. This evolution aimed at enhancing the efficiency of various government functions, spanning crucial domains such as defence, economic monitoring, planning, and the utilization of Information Technology to manage data-intensive operations related to elections, census and tax administration, among others.



## CS Shaily Gupta, ACS

Practising Company Secretary, Chartered Accountant,  
 Founder of SHAILY & CO., Navi Mumbai  
[shaily.co@outlook.com](mailto:shaily.co@outlook.com)

## INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, the world has witnessed an unprecedented knowledge revolution, where the rapid expansion of technology has connected stakeholders on a global scale. This technological transformation, driven by an estimated 45 billion cellular/mobile phones, fibre optic cables, sensors, social media networks and satellites, has forever changed the way we communicate, conduct business and interact with the world around us. Internet servers and networks now link a staggering 5.19 billion online users worldwide, showcasing the remarkable extent of this connectivity. Notably, social media giant Facebook alone boasts a user base of 2.9 billion individuals, representing nearly one-third of the global population. This level of interconnectivity was beyond imagination when e-Governance and internet browsers first became widely available.

## ORIGIN OF INDIAN E-GOVERNANCE

The genesis of e-Governance can be traced back to the 1970s, when the Government of India took a significant step forward by establishing the Department of Electronics, which laid the foundation for what would

later become the National Informatics Centre (NIC) in 1977. In those initial years, computers were already present within government offices, albeit primarily for word processing tasks. However, it wasn't until the 1980s that the computerization process evolved, shifting its focus towards the development of in-house government applications.

This evolution aimed at enhancing the efficiency of various government functions, spanning crucial domains such as defence, economic monitoring, planning and the utilization of Information Technology to manage data-intensive operations related to elections, census, and tax administration, among others. The true milestone in the e-Governance journey emerged when the tax department, both at the state and union levels, embraced this transformative approach to streamline their internal operations, thereby setting the stage for the wider adoption of e-Governance. This transition marked a pivotal moment in the annals of governance, as it ushered in an era of greater efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness in the delivery of government services.

## RECENT LESSONS IN NEED FOR E-GOVERNANCE

The world's recent encounter with the global coronavirus pandemic, which emerged in early 2020, presented an extraordinary challenge to governments worldwide. It also provided a fresh impetus for the application of technology to public services. As social distancing became a critical component of containing the spread of the virus, the utilization of electronic and digital government services witnessed a significant surge. These platforms became indispensable in facilitating online interactions, serving as lifelines for both individuals and organizations during a time of crisis.

Furthermore, electronic and digital platforms have played a pivotal role in developing innovative solutions to promote remote work, social distancing and effective healthcare crisis management. While the pandemic brought many "normal" economic and social activities to a standstill, e-government applications underwent a

massive stress test, demonstrating their resilience and adaptability in the face of unforeseen challenges.

Digital governance not only addresses the challenges brought about by global crises but also paves the way for a more efficient, transparent and interconnected future.

## UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL GOVERNANCE

Digital governance (also called 'e-Governance') is characterised as the use of information technology in a government operation to increase the delivery of public services to people and other government services user, individuals and organisations.

This modernization aims to benefit not only individuals but also organizations that interact with the government. In essence, it's about using technology to make government services more efficient, accessible and user-friendly, ultimately improving the way citizens and entities engage with their government. This shift towards digital governance represents a forward-looking commitment to using technology for the greater good, simplifying and enhancing interactions between the government and its constituents.

Think of it as the high-tech wizardry that transforms traditional government services into sleek, efficient, and user-friendly digital experiences. Whether you're renewing your driver's license, filing your taxes, or simply looking for information on government websites, digital governance is the force behind it all. In this digital realm, government services become more accessible, responsive, and tailored to your needs. It's like having a personal assistant that's available 24/7, guiding you through the maze of bureaucracy with just a few clicks.

So, digital governance isn't just a fancy term; it's the magic wand that makes your interactions with the government as smooth as using your favourite app, all thanks to the power of technology and innovative thinking.

## INTERSECTION OF DIGITAL GOVERNANCE & COMPLIANCE

### The Need for Standardization

In a dynamic and evolving regulatory landscape, compliance with laws and regulations is a critical aspect of running any business or organization. However, it is often the case that various laws in India have different provisions for different entities, leading to a lack of standardization. This lack of standardization leaves a significant gap when the law is silent on a particular issue, creating a need for a common standard to be followed. This is where the concept of compliance standards comes into play, and digital governance plays a crucial role in making this a reality.

In a diverse and complex legal framework, businesses and individuals often find themselves grappling with multiple, intricate regulations that may not provide explicit guidance on every aspect of compliance. This lack of clarity can make it challenging for entities to ensure they are adhering to the law correctly. To bridge

this gap, compliance standards serve as a set of guidelines that individuals and organizations can voluntarily follow when the law is silent on a particular issue.

### Voluntary Compliance

Compliance standards essentially hinge on voluntary actions. Since there may not be specific legal provisions mandating compliance with these standards, individuals and organizations have the discretion to adhere to them voluntarily. This could include self-attestation, declarations, letters in good faith, or full disclosure of their compliance efforts. These voluntary actions can be both one-time efforts and recurring disclosures, as the situation demands.

### The Digital Governance Advantage



Figure 1E-Gov Advantage of Implementing Compliance Standards; Source: Author's Presentation

One of the key advantages of implementing compliance standards through digital governance is that it can absolve individuals and organizations from shouldering the burden of liability for compliance requirements, they weren't aware of in the first place. By providing a clear and standardized framework, digital governance ensures that entities can confidently follow compliance standards, thereby reducing the risk of non-compliance due to ignorance or misunderstanding.

Digital governance, a comprehensive framework for managing and enforcing digital policies, procedures and standards, plays a pivotal role in the implementation of compliance standards. Here's how:

- **Standardization and Accessibility:** Digital governance enables the creation and dissemination of compliance standards in a standardized and accessible manner. With a clear and centralized digital platform, these standards can be readily available to all concerned parties.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Digital governance platforms offer the flexibility to adapt compliance standards to specific contexts and industries. This

adaptability is crucial in addressing the diverse needs of different entities and situations.

- **Transparency and Accountability:** Digital governance promotes transparency by ensuring that compliance standards are clear, easily accessible, and consistently updated. This transparency, in turn, fosters accountability among stakeholders, as they can readily access and understand their compliance obligations.
- **Monitoring and Reporting:** Digital governance systems can provide tools for monitoring compliance efforts and generating reports. This helps entities track their adherence to compliance standards and identify areas that may need improvement.
- **Notifications and Alerts:** These systems can also send notifications and alerts to entities when compliance standards change or new standards are introduced. This proactive approach ensures that individuals and organizations stay up-to-date with evolving requirements.

## Models of Digital Governance



Figure 2: Models of e-Governance; Author's Presentation

Several models of e-Governance can be used for standardizing compliance. Let's break down these different models of digital governance and how they can help:

### 1. Design for Broadcasting:

- In this model, information that the government wants to share is made easily accessible to the public using modern technology.
- This helps people understand what the government is doing and what services are available to them.
- For compliance, this means the government can make its regulations and rules available online for everyone to see and follow. It standardizes how people access and understand the rules.

Compliance standards essentially hinge on voluntary actions. Since there may not be specific legal provisions mandating compliance with these standards, individuals and organizations have the discretion to adhere to them voluntarily. This could include self-attestation, declarations, letters in good faith, or full disclosure of their compliance efforts. These voluntary actions can be both one-time efforts and recurring disclosures, as the situation demands.

### 2. Model for Comparative Analysis:

- This model involves comparing good and bad governance practices to learn from them.
- It uses a lot of data and social media to see what works and what doesn't.
- When it comes to compliance, this model helps identify best practices and use them as standards. It shows what's effective and what's not, so people can follow the right way to comply with rules.

### 3. Model of Critical Flow:

- This model focuses on sharing important information that is not meant for everyone.
- It could be shared with the media, researchers, or the public.
- In terms of compliance, this model ensures that the right people get the right information at the right time, helping in enforcing compliance effectively.

### 4. Model of E-Advocacy:

- This model builds online communities with similar interests and values.
- These communities work together for common goals in the real world.
- For compliance, it means that groups with shared compliance goals can come together online, making it easier for them to follow and advocate for specific compliance standards.

### 5. Model of Service Delivery:

- This model lets people interact directly with government services online.
- It covers various aspects, including elections, decision-making, and personalized services.
- When it comes to compliance, this model streamlines how individuals access and use government services. It ensures that compliance processes are standardized and easily accessible to all.

These models of digital governance are like different tools in a toolbox. They help make government services and

rules more accessible and understandable for everyone. For compliance, they provide a framework for setting standards, sharing information, and ensuring that people can follow the rules effectively. In a world where rules and regulations can be complex and diverse, these models play a crucial role in standardizing how we interact with the government and follow the law.

## PREVENTING CORRUPTION WITH THE SYNERGY OF E-GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDIZATION

The fight against corruption and bribery is an ongoing challenge for governments worldwide. One significant avenue through which corruption can flourish is when the law remains silent on a particular issue, thereby leaving room for interpretation. This ambiguity can lead to officers exploiting these gaps for personal gain, often by imposing unreasonable fees or levying penalties in the guise of unclear mandates. It is within this context that standardization of compliance plays a pivotal role in curbing corruption. Nevertheless, the true game-changer in this battle is the integration of digital governance, which not only streamlines processes but also introduces an additional layer of transparency in all interactions between government representatives and the governed.

### • Clarity and Prevention of Corruption

The absence of clear legal directives can open doors to corruption. Officers, in the absence of specific guidelines, might manipulate or misinterpret the law to their advantage, causing undue hardship to the public. However, when compliance standards are standardized and made explicit, it leaves little room for misinterpretation. A well-defined framework ensures that all stakeholders understand their roles, responsibilities, and limitations. This clarity acts as a significant deterrent against corruption, as it leaves little room for exploiting ambiguities in the law.

### • A Transparency Catalyst

The digitization of government processes and communication not only makes them more efficient but also inherently transparent. The benefits of this transparency cannot be overstated.

Here's how digital governance augments the prevention of corruption:

- **Accessibility:** Digital platforms make government services and information readily accessible to the public. Citizens can access relevant information, rules, and regulations with ease, reducing the scope for misinformation and corrupt practices.
- **Accountability:** Digital records and transactions leave a digital trail that is difficult to tamper with. This accountability ensures that officials are held responsible for their actions, reducing the likelihood of corrupt behaviour.
- **Reduced Discretion:** Digital systems can be designed to minimize discretionary powers. This reduces opportunities for corruption as officials have less latitude to manipulate outcomes for personal gain.



- **Real-time Monitoring:** With digital governance, it becomes possible to monitor government activities in real-time. This prevents corrupt practices from going unnoticed and unaddressed.

## CONCLUSION

The battle against corruption is a shared responsibility for governments across the globe. Standardizing compliance and embracing digital governance stand out as indispensable strategies in this noble endeavour. Together, they form a formidable partnership that not only acts as a barrier against corruption but also nurtures the vital trust between those who govern and the governed. By establishing a transparent, standardized, and technology-driven system, we are collectively forging a path towards a governance landscape that is both more accountable and less susceptible to corruption, thereby benefiting society as a whole.

In the dynamic and often complex realm of regulations, where legal standards can vary significantly, digital governance shines as a potent instrument for implementing compliance standards. This approach not only addresses the imperative of standardization but also ensures that compliance is pursued willingly, openly, and with the agility to adapt to evolving circumstances. Digital governance provides individuals and organizations with the tools and confidence they need to navigate the intricacies of compliance, ultimately reducing the risk of inadvertent non-compliance and the associated liabilities. It's a testament to our commitment to a fair and ethical governance, one that paves the way to a more just and accountable society for all.

## REFERENCES:

- Addo, A., & Senyo, P. K. (2021). Advancing E-Governance for development: Digital identification and its link to socioeconomic inclusion. Government Information Quarterly, 38(2), 101568. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2021.101568>*
- Algazo, F. A., Ibrahim, S., & Yusoff, W. S. (2021). Digital Governance emergence and importance. Journal of Information System and Technology Management, 6(24), 18–26. <https://doi.org/10.35631/jistm.624003>*
- Milakovich, M. E. (2021). Digital governance: Applying advanced technologies to improve public service (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Routledge.*
- Naim Keruwala (2013, 4<sup>th</sup> December) History of e-Governance in India and Maharashtra.*