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Grievance Management: Retelling The Epic With A New Paradigm

28th Sep,2020

Back in 2011, a banyan tree in Tamil Nadu's Elamangalam village struck the onlooker's eye for a quaint reason. One of the branches had a multi-coloured 'Problem Tree' attached to it- a poster flaunting the titles, addresses and phone numbers of all responsible officials to resolve grievances. It was a unique innovation in a World Bank funded project on poverty reduction and empowerment.



Global in spirit and local in implementation, the concept of grievance management has taken the 'digital stride' while being mindful of the 'digital divide'. Today, grievance redressal is not a module in isolation but a key component in the lifecycle of any project in its transition from 'drawing board' to the ground. And, complaint resolution is the key to improving project outcomes at lower costs, identifying systemic implementation issues and promoting accountability.

Breaking Barriers, Building Trust…

Grievance management forms the cornerstone of citizen centric administration. This is clearly spelt out in sub goal 16.6 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16. Grievances on projects are resolved more easily, cheaply and efficiently when they are dealt with early and locally. In India, the 2nd Administrative Commission recognizes speedy and effective delivery of services with the use of ICT as one of the four pillars on which ‘good governance’ rests.

Also, the Government of India has the ‘Centralized Public Grievances Redress and Monitoring System, a web enabled application for receiving and redressing grievances from the public. States, too, have developed their own systems- notably, the public grievance cells of the Chief Ministers as well as government departments, public run enterprises, civic bodies and urban development authorities.

People’s Grievances- Tackling them early in the system

For any project, structuring grievance management systems helps all stakeholders to manage potential problems during implementation. Having a grievance redressal system from the project design stage helps to resolve issues early on. Else, the affected people and stakeholders have to suffer delays. Even for governments, delay in resolving grievances leads to cost and time overruns

When dissected, you realize the line between a grievance and a complaint is thinning. Having said that dealing with grievances is a ‘problem of plenty’ as they can pour in from myriad sources. Just ponder over what the authorities have to tackle every day- each hour- every passing minute. The stream of complaints on roads, water, sanitation, electricity, health- the list is too exhaustive to be telescoped in this piece. Hence, addressing it needs the comingling of the right intention and solution.

GovTech as a Bridge Between Technology and Tradition

If you imagine the scope and spread of grievances, vanilla online solutions aren’t enough. GovTech solutions need reengineering to align with the changing dynamics. Today, states are increasingly realizing the leverage that social media has with the people. Haryana has a social media based grievance redressal system. The Telangana government is creating a common ICT platform for consolidating grievances received in all modes.

Take for instance Sociomatic. This social listening tool is capable of disrupting the way we deal with complaints. This system is strengthened by subfields of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

such as Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Optical Character Recognition (OCR). The power of AI and Machine Learning (ML) can be tapped to analyze complaints posted on the social media, grasp the essence and extract insights to enable better resolution. Since grievances emanate from a highly granular demographic, AI tools can be the right substitution to cumbersome human intervention.

The cumbersome efforts needed to process grievances of all stripes also backs the case for Robotic Process Automation (RPA). Bots can be programmed to read and process emails and posts, extract data, distinguish grievances from suggestions and filter out frivolous messages from the system. But with 'digital inclusion' yet to take deeper roots, such intelligent automation technologies need to be integrated with IVRS enabled toll free lines. With the balance of technology and tradition, an integrated GovTech solution can set a new paradigm in citizen-administration interface.

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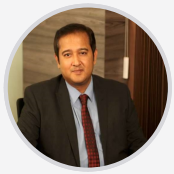

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