Digital government playbook

A guide to build digital public infrastructure and empower citizens at scale

/thoughtworks

Foreword

Technology can help address many of society's problems. Building and nurturing digital public infrastructure can create extraordinary impact on the world and amplify positive social change.

A more equitable future depends on the constant and critical assessment of tech-tools at society's disposal. Even with the best of intentions and resources, building digital public infrastructure is a complex effort. For instance, in the healthcare sector, tech-based solutions struggle to move beyond the pilot stage. However, our homegrown product Bahmni, an open source Electronic Medical Record and Digital Public Good (DPG), is successfully catering to low digital settings.

Today, the accelerated interest and investment in digital public infrastructure is driving unprecedented innovation in data, policy making, asset monetization, service delivery models, ecosystem thinking and is spawning several startups. There is a mindset-shift towards acceptance for DPGs among governments and citizens.

This playbook presents learnings from our experiences for public organizations to adopt in their digital transformation journey. We believe collaboration among governments, public officials and technologists can fundamentally transform the quality of life for citizens.

Sudhir Tiwari
Co-Managing Director for Thoughtworks in India

Leveraging digital to amplify citizen services

Digital technologies are redefining the world we live in. They enable governments with unique opportunities to connect with citizens and improve their lives. Digitalization is at the heart of innovation in public services – driving sustainable growth and addressing social and living challenges. Nowhere is this more true than in India.

According to a [2021 World Bank](#) study of 198 countries, a fifth of countries were ranked as 'leading' when it came to governments using advanced or innovative digital solutions.

30% significantly invested in digital

32% aimed to improve digital maturity

79% launched digital initiatives in the last decade

17% regarded digitization with minimal focus

In the study, India is the only (lower) middle income country from the South Asia region, besides Bhutan, to feature in the 'leading' group. The **Digital India** program aims to improve India's digital infrastructure, make online services accessible and enhance digital literacy. Other initiatives mentioned include **Aadhar**, **MyGov**, the Unified Mobile Application for New-Age Governance (**UMANG**) and a national strategy for **Artificial Intelligence**.

Notably, these nationwide initiatives are motivating digital innovation at the grassroots level. Be it employability in the **public education system** or a police duty management app or eGovernance projects in low digital resource districts – the new-age public services in India promote welfare of all using digital technologies.

Thoughtworks has spearheaded several digital transformation initiatives in the government and public goods sector. We share our experiences and perspectives in the form of **ten tenets**. We encourage stakeholders across government and public sector organizations to focus on these tenets when on their digital transformation journey.

The ten tenets for digital governments

Make every citizen matter
Serving every citizen no matter which segment of the population they belong to.

Digitize for the digitally challenged
Designing solutions first for the digitally challenged eases population-size scaling challenges.

Establish frameworks for data accountability
Effective utilization of data for governance is a good indicator of digital maturity.

Think ecosystems
Delivering exceptional citizen services entails nurturing partnerships with like-minded organizations.

Build for future generations
Leveraging open source to create digital public infrastructure ensures equity for all in the long run.

Measure for outcomes
Outcome based metrics for assessments trump protocol driven approaches.

Foster a culture of digital instinct
A connected, digital world embraces those mindsets that think and act digital.

Drive policy agility
Proactive policy making outpaces disruption to people's lives caused by technology advancements.

Leverage untapped assets
Innovative utilization of assets creates new business models for asset monetization.

Be intentional about brand building
Optimizing for trust yields better brand dividends for organizations engaged with serving citizens.

Tenet 1
Make every citizen matter

Our view: Citizen services design that follow the conventional approach of 'one size fits all' often fails to address the unique needs of diverse population segments. However, a 'one size fits one' approach is best positioned to manage population diversity. Offering personalized services across diverse population segments is a painstaking selection and arrangement effort unless optimized using technology.

What we mean

Citizen services designed for a diverse population often leave some segments of the population unserved. Therefore, it's imperative for public officers to adopt a mindset of 'one size fits one' - a design principle that ensures 'every citizen matters' and that their needs and aspirations are considered upfront and not as an afterthought.

The personalization of citizen services at scale is a complex effort. It involves multiple variables with varying levels of influence. For example, designing a public vaccination program involves variables not limited to age, gender, medical history, travel history, demography, side effect management, cost and procurement. Such levels of complexity make personalization a capital-intensive exercise.

Leveraging technology during the design process enables governments to scale personalization of citizen services no matter how complex the population diversity is. This is similar to how digital native organizations have achieved personalization to improve customer experience. The notable difference between the two is the scale and complexity at which governments operate.

Bahmni is an easy-to-use <u>open source</u> EMR and hospital information system (HIS) designed for low resource settings, making digital healthcare accessible to the most overlooked segment of the population.

Bahmni combines and enhances existing open source products into a single solution. It was first implemented in 2012 when **Jan Swasthya Sahyog (JSS) and Thoughtworks** joined hands to implement digital healthcare solutions for the underserved citizens in Bilaspur, Chattisgarh. From a humble beginning, Bahmni is now implemented in 500+ sites in 50+ countries and serves over 2 million patients.

The possibilities

Engage citizens during service design: consider involving citizens across the spectrum of profiles – age, affluence, education, gender and income to identify unique needs and aspirations. Assess current and future challenges that can be mitigated through inclusive design. Proactively reaching out to the traditionally unserved (and underserved) population can offer deeper insights and significantly transform the service offerings.

Leverage technology from the outset: employing technology from inception drives efficiencies across the value chain. The total cost of service offerings, over its lifetime, tends to be more when technology is introduced as an afterthought. As an example the total cost of digitizing a manual process is more than the cost of digitizing it from the start.

Experiment in low digital settings: early engagement with citizens creates opportunities for governments to experiment with technology solutions in low digital settings. This approach eases scaling challenges when technology solutions are extended to the larger population.

"Technology can effectively scale personalization levels to support population diversity. Having said that, solution design is critical and should hinge on the needs and aspirations of the last person in the queue."

Vinod Sankaranarayanan
Head of Digital Public Goods
for Thoughtworks in India

Tenet 2
Digitize for the digitally challenged

Our view: Digitalization, when implemented correctly, empowers the digitally challenged citizens. However, its impact is witnessed only when digitalization is adopted at scale amongst the digitally disadvantaged citizens and their communities. This results in technology becoming mainstream for the population that is 'technology averse.' Thereafter, scaling such technology solutions for the larger population becomes relatively easy.

What we mean

Technology has traditionally been an efficiency accelerator - getting things done faster or better. However, for the digitally challenged, technology acceptance comes first. Acceptance at scale drives efficiency. When technology minimizes its own entry barrier, it transforms how governments and citizens benefit from digitalization. Growing acceptance, in turn, empowers the digitally challenged population segments.

Digital solutions created and experimented at the bottom of the pyramid often involve deep tech. For example - authentication of citizens for the digitally challenged is often a deep-tech solution involving biometrics. On the other hand, for the digital natives, authentication can be done using OTP on a mobile phone - a predominant technology solution.

When the digitally challenged (and digital non-natives) adopt digital first, they normalize use of deep tech in routine transactions. No wonder, voice based transactions are gaining wide acceptance. Today, semi-literate non-digital natives can effortlessly voice chat which otherwise would not have been possible had text chat been the only option.

Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AePS) uses Aadhaar authentication such as biometrics to enable the digitally disadvantaged citizens to perform financial transactions using a point of sale (PoS) device.

AePS users can deposit and withdraw money besides conducting balance enquiry and payment transactions. AePS enables Central and State governments to perform direct benefit transfers associated with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), social security pension and handicapped old age pension using Aadhaar authentication.

The possibilities

Extend digital to interactions and communications: the future of 'government and citizens interactions' will heavily rely on channels that are powered by technology. For instance, **grievance redressal** appears best managed through voice or video interactions.

Experiment with service design: intuitive design will accelerate technology adoption among the digital non-natives. Access to real context and conditions during design sprints will lower the entry barrier for technology penetration in public services.

Mainstream deep tech: solutions that are scalable by design drive mass adoption before progressively becoming mainstream. Experimentation of deep tech such as AI/ML accelerates adoption by finetuning models at a limited scale before citizen-scale roll-out. Initial investments in deep tech when extrapolated to population scale make the solutions cost effective.

"'Digital leap' is replacing the 'digital divide' by guaranteeing services to citizens irrespective of their age, gender, income, educational background, language and location.

A coherent strategy with clarity of purpose and consistency in communication can help governments deliver services and build trust as an outcome."

Jagannath A L
Head of Marketing for Thoughtworks in India
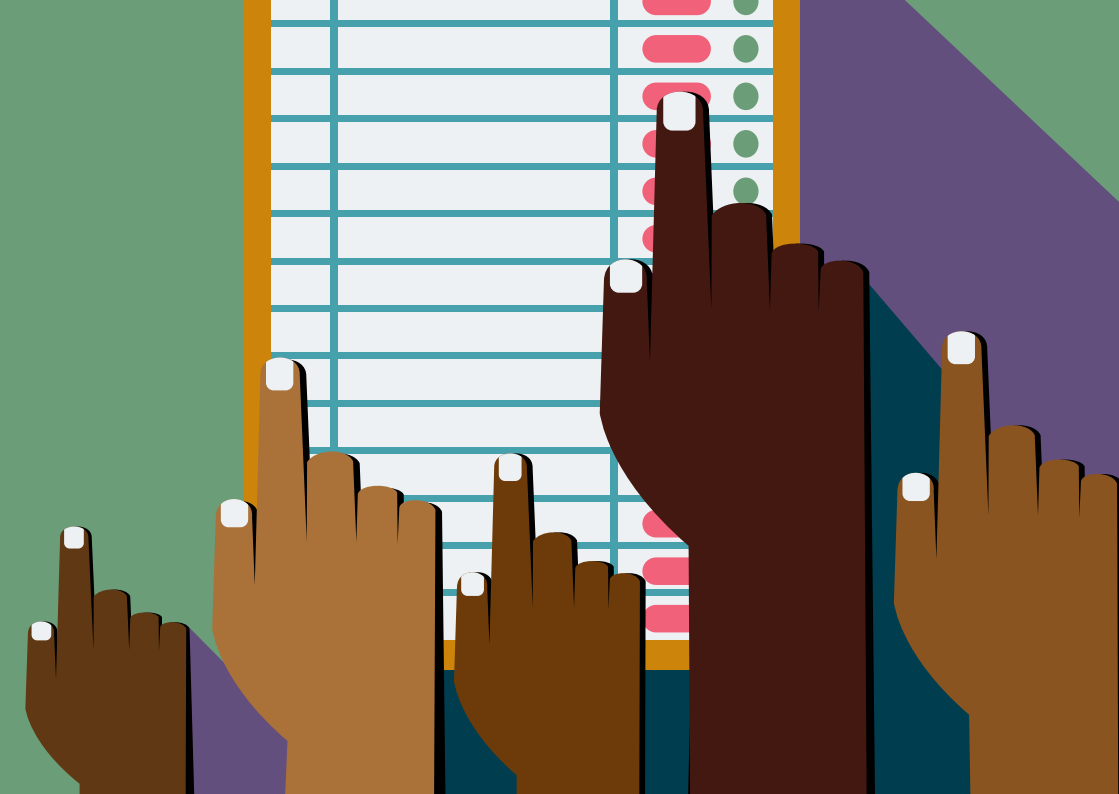
Tenet 3
Establish frameworks for data accountability

Our view: Digital ecosystems generate huge volumes of data. Given security and privacy issues, this data often becomes a liability rather than an asset. The unintended data discharge demands attention and subsequent intervention. Governments, in a transparent manner, should leverage the data to benefit citizens and build trust.
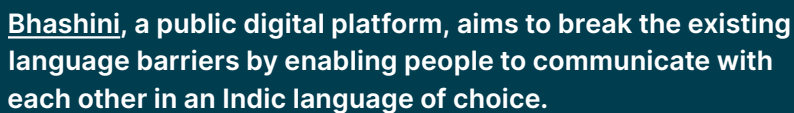
What we mean

Data is one of the foundational pillars for design and delivery of citizen services. In the past its availability was a challenge. However, thanks to massive digitization efforts, availability is no longer an issue. Data collected from intentional (surveys, outreach) and unintentional (digital transactions, interactions) sources can overwhelm governments. The collected data creates sensitive issues around data security – the extent of data manipulation and the custodian's response when a breach occurs.

The unintentional data collected is not something governments necessarily plan for. However, this information is critical in that it presents a huge opportunity for governments to generate actionable insights. This is very similar to how digital native companies such as Amazon and Netflix harness data. While private corporations leverage data for incremental revenue, governments can leverage data to improve citizen experience, influence policies, drive internal efficiencies and boost the private sector.

Data on citizens' experiences, interactions and expectations through digital channels can enable governments to offer services that citizens want and value. Governments in turn should ensure all data management activities are transparent and executed with consent. Prudent policies on citizens' informed consent for gathering and processing data (personal and non-personal), can effectively regulate information exchange without stifling its flow.

Bhashini, a public digital platform, aims to break the existing language barriers by enabling people to communicate with each other in an Indic language of choice.

Bhashini is a one of its kind platform in the world that processes speech to text, text to text, text to speech, and image optical character recognition (OCR).

A highly disruptive construct, it crowdsources data from the citizens to improve open source models. The universal language contribution API (UCLA) framework for Indic language datasets and models encourage public contribution to drive maturity at scale.

The possibilities

Improve operational efficiency in governments: data-based evidence can help governments identify improvement areas. Evolving data architecture approaches such as **Data Mesh** can converge intra-department data silos to identify operational improvement opportunities.

Strengthen data governance: the risk of data mismanagement is both loss of trust and embarrassment for governments. A citizen-centric data governance framework can mitigate such risks. It can help governments instill trust by seeking consent and keeping citizens informed of how their data is managed.

Boost business and in turn the economy: **Open datasets** for public good can unlock numerous possibilities for the private sector. In addition to providing citizen services such as healthcare, financial inclusion and environment, open datasets can help make the world a better place.

Enable data-informed policies: insights from high quality data gathered from citizen experiences over several years can positively impact policy decisions. The power of data and experience coupled with transparency boosts credibility.

"With big data comes big responsibility. Governments can play a critical fiduciary role in driving responsible application of data and AI."

Prasanna Pendse
Head of Data and AI Service Line
for Thoughtworks in India

Tenet 4
Think ecosystems

Our view: Fulfilling citizens' aspirations is a multi-dimensional and complex effort. Several moving parts make the government a single entity, inefficient and often ineffective. However, such complexity can be minimized by partnering with organizations that have similar goals and possess complementary skills. Governments can coexist with like-minded organizations, together, operating as an ecosystem for citizen welfare.

What we mean

Governments interact with several public and private stakeholders to deliver services to its citizens. The collaboration required to deliver such services is complex. It requires sourcing, planning, coordinating and orchestrating among multiple internal and external agencies, leading to inefficiencies. Instead, governments can assume the role of facilitators and leverage partners with specialized skills. Such an arrangement sows the first seeds of an ecosystem.

Overtime, the collaborative arrangement progressively transforms into one of interdependence where participants coexist by harnessing each other's knowledge and capabilities.

The **Unique Identification Authority of India** (UIDAI) and **National Payments Corporation of India** (NPCI) are examples of organizations that have significantly transformed citizen services by building digital identity and digital payments ecosystems respectively. These are examples of digital ecosystems that have organically scaled and revolutionized the lives of citizens and communities. The upcoming **Open Network for Digital Commerce** (ONDC) aims to make digital commerce mainstream for more than a billion people and a million businesses.

The Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) is bringing together patients, doctors, providers and insurers to create a digital ecosystem that intends to revolutionize healthcare in India.

The digital healthcare ecosystem pivots around the needs and aspirations of patients. Other participants in the ecosystem, equipped with specialized and complementary skills, thrive in a setup that promotes interdependence and is mutually beneficial for everyone. The digital healthcare ecosystem brings together multiple stakeholders that operate in unison with the sole purpose of serving patients.

The possibilities

Drive standardization: formulating standards, guidelines and protocols in place will encourage the private sector to participate voluntarily and not out of duress. Technology partners can use these standards to create innovative solutions that further accelerate delivery of public services.

Encourage industry participation: intentional creation of ecosystems paves the way for greater participation from the private sector. This sector's huge appetite for risk translates into significant investments that help foster innovation. The risk appetite is often handsomely rewarded as the ecosystem scales to support citizens.

"The complexity associated with citizen-scale is often underestimated. Governments are better equipped to solve such problems when they intentionally build and cultivate digital ecosystems consisting of like-minded players."

Umesh Mohanty
Product Principal, Digital Public Goods
for Thoughtworks in India

Tenet 5
Build for future generations

Our view: As nations grow, their digital public infrastructure must foster creation of innovative digital solutions on top of foundational ones. Achieving such extensibility is primarily a function of design and architecture balanced with tactical and strategic decisions. A future-proof approach involves intelligent unbundling of citizen needs and aspirations to offer matching digital services.

What we mean

Digital public infrastructure must align with the emerging needs of citizens. The rapid pace of technology change requires periodic maintenance and upgrades to keep the digital infrastructure fit. Digital infrastructure,when built leveraging the **building block** approach, becomes future-proof. The approach meticulously unbundles citizen services into relevant technology components, augmenting the infrastructure's ability to deliver citizen services effectively.

For example, the building block; **Consent Manager** secures prior consent from citizens before any of their non-public information is accessed. It controls what information is shared, for what purpose, until how long and whether the information can be shared further down the line.

Breaking down digital public infrastructure into smaller and manageable components allows governments to conduct multiple citizen focused experiments before accelerating digital transformation at scale. This inherently mitigates risks associated with large-scale, multi-year implementations.

The private sector can also leverage the reusable software components to build solutions that benefit the government. When multiple **building blocks** converge, they offer better capabilities than an individual block does. For example, the building blocks of identity, healthcare registry, payments and consent manager enable citizens access to healthcare services such as telemedicine.

Open source software powered by a group of passionate technologists can nurture digital public goods over generations. The values of community and collaboration ensure its sustenance.

Linux changed how the world perceived open source software. Over several years, open source software has not only gained acceptance in academia but also in building citizen-scale digital public infrastructure.

Open source software is inherently transparent and secure. It is vendor-neutral, which automatically makes it best suited for citizen-scale initiatives.

The possibilities

Promote open source software: the autonomy to modify and reuse open source software (OSS) makes it a preferred choice for digital public infrastructure. OSS fosters extensive collaboration and innovation at scale. When backed by dynamic communities, OSS creates innumerable opportunities for digital innovation, powering digital excellence.

Invest in a tech-savvy workforce: technology is best suited to solve citizen problems of the future. The government machinery, therefore, must be adept at leveraging technology for public good. Governments must design fulfilling and purposeful career paths that motivate citizens to join public services and strengthen the public workforce's capabilities.

Blueprint digital public assets: a connected digital world will gradually progress from localized interactions to cross-border interactions, leading to business transactions. Citizens from multiple countries operating a digital business registered in a tax friendly nation will become more common. And future-proofing digital public infrastructure can promote such collaboration among citizens of multiple nations.

"Digital public infrastructure should outlive us all and the technology choices we make should be independent of any company, entity, group or country."

Manish Kumar
Head of India Business for Thoughtworks in India

Tenet 6
Measure for outcomes

Our view: 'Metrics of massiveness' often dominate the measure of success for citizen-scale initiatives. The obsession with size overshadows underlying goals of many initiatives and results in gathering disconnected metrics. A structured gathering (and aggregation) of metrics links intended outcomes with stated goals. Such a framework augurs well for the functioning of governments, both internally and externally.

What we mean

The fixation with optics-driven metrics creates situations where multiple processes and activities are measured that lack cohesiveness with strategic goals. Metrics are often inward-looking and help uncover operational efficiencies. But operational efficiency seldom indicates whether stated goals are achieved or their resulting consequences.

Outcome based measurement overcomes this inadequacy by linking accountability with results. It confirms alignment of citizen needs with the government's stated goals. Measurement across different levels of the hierarchy ensures that metrics are rolled upwards, eliminating possibility of generating disconnected metrics. Outcome-based metrics measure success and effectiveness from a citizen's viewpoint and help governments justify their budgetary allocations for future initiatives. It helps redefine the measure of success by aligning every act of measurement with the goals.

DHIS2 is a global digital public good transforming health information management. It helps countries collect, manage, visualize and analyze health data – all in one place.

DHIS2 is context agnostic and has been deployed in education, logistics, agriculture, etc. It focuses on outcome driven metrics, enabling countries (and organizations) to meet their stated goals.

Outcome driven metrics optimize for impact and inclusion

🤲	Benefits received	*over*	Value of benefits
☀	Impact of relief	*over*	Funds approved for relief
💬	Digital engagement	*over*	App downloads
👥	Target segments	*over*	Size of the population

The possibilities

Integrate metrics visualization: the power of visualization, when reinforced with granular data collected at multiple levels, enables periodic monitoring of intended outcomes and helps course-correct in case they are off track. Making visualizations available on mobile devices not only supports government outreach programs but also improves the productivity and accountability of public officers.

Adopt actionable metrics: actionable metrics are outcome-linked and present an accurate view of progression. Subsequently, efficiency improvements take place in internal administration and the delivery of public services. Actionable metrics constantly validate the alignment of citizen needs and aspirations with the government's objectives.

"It's important to align everyone involved to outcomes and breakdown the outcomes into actionable metrics. Also, it is equally important for everyone in the team to know how their actions are contributing to the overall outcomes."

Saptorsi Hore
Chief Operating Officer for Thoughtworks in India

Tenet 7
Foster a culture of digital instinct

Our view: The future of governance will be shaped by how effectively governments and citizens interact digitally. However, the digital proficiency gap between the two is likely to impede engagement on digital channels. Citizens invariably have better digital skills, prompting governments to upskill themselves. Digital instinct as a skill enables two way communication and therefore must metamorphose into a culture within the government structure.

What we mean

Citizens and government interactions of the future will be predominantly digital, requiring governments to heavily invest in technology. Intentional and well scrutinized technology investments can accelerate digital maturity. Identifying how technology can positively impact citizen lives will become a critical skill that governments will need to build. Digital instinct is that skill. It enables governments to assess how convergence of multiple technologies can solve citizen-scale problems. Digital instinct, when repurposed as a filtering lens, can help prioritize public investments and shorten the technology evaluation cycles.

An improved level of digital instinct across the government hierarchy ensures technology investments generate better value for everyone. Sustaining such a high value skillset becomes tough unless its application is a part of the operating culture. A huge dependency on people makes it imperative for governments to be intentional about building a culture of digital instinct. Therefore, selection, development and motivation of officials is essential. Leaders will have to demonstrate a culture of digital instinct and train their staff accordingly. Rewarding successes and treating failures as a part of the learning process will only strengthen the much needed cultural values.

Estonia, a small country in northern Europe, achieved a rare distinction of being the first paperless government in the world. And when the pandemic struck, there was a country-wide effort in 2020 to drive awareness of Estonian's culture through digital channels - audiobooks, digital museum cards, virtual festivals and fair streaming platforms.

Countries that realized the value of digital adoption in public services early built home grown technology stacks. The foundational digital public infrastructure not only enabled governments to provide public services electronically but also promoted a culture of digital acceptance. No wonder, digital money or for that matter digital identity are no longer alien to the vast majority of the population. Over the years, the foundational digital infrastructure has matured substantially to effect long-lasting cultural and behavioral changes.

The possibilities

Strive for digital maturity: the absence of a standard definition for digital maturity allows governments to customize maturity models that best align with their aspirations. Aligning what levels of digital maturity to pursue ensures digitalization efforts are directed in the intended direction. A critical success factor in the journey of digital maturity is the culture of digital instinct.

Reimagine hiring and training: sustaining a culture over decades requires fitment of personal and organizational values. Current hiring processes are largely skills focussed. A reimagined hiring approach could optimize for fitment of both skills and culture. Identifying talent at the borderline of culture is as important as relevant training that promotes culture-alignment over time.

Fund advanced research in technology: governments benefit from an informed understanding of technology evolution and its implications on the population. Acquiring such in-depth knowledge requires proactively investing in technology research to ensure a first mover advantage. These investments enable the much needed fitment between citizen-scale problems (or opportunities) and emerging technologies.

"Culture change in a hierarchical institution starts at the top. The highest ranked public officers must demonstrate consistent and sustained behavioral changes for their staff to believe in the change and propagate it themselves."

Satish Viswanathan
Head of Social Impact for Thoughtworks in India

Tenet 8
Drive policy agility

Our view: A regulator's ability to formulate policies is often outpaced by the rate of technology evolution. A reactive approach to policy making not only deters citizens but also the ecosystem that supports government initiatives. Formulating citizen-centric policies involves leveraging a tech-enabled framework to anticipate futuristic trends and trigger accountability across the ecosystem.

What we mean

There are significant consequences to reactive policy making, given the flux in technology innovation. Retroactive policy making not only causes agony for the citizens but is also a financial burden on the exchequer. For example, in India, the proposed regulations on cryptocurrency lack clarity and continue to confuse investors. Agility in formulating policies can prompt a paradigm shift in how those policies are implemented – with a focus on results, responsiveness, citizen participation and self-organization over rules, routine, control and centralization, respectively.

Agility, by design, is inclusive as it encourages collaboration and interactions among the participants. Agility in policy making engages governments with stakeholders from the private sector, academia and non-profits towards collective outcomes. Private sector's expertise in technology and its applications allows for quick iterations to meet citizens' time-sensitive needs. The desired speed drives proactivity and time sensitivity to keep up with societal changes driven by emerging technologies.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is one the first public organizations to conduct open public consultations.

The public consultations on FinTech and its implications resulted in the creation of "regulatory sandboxes". A regulatory sandbox allows the regulator, the innovators, technology providers and the customers to conduct real tests and collect evidence on the benefits and risks of innovations, while carefully monitoring and containing their risks.

More recently, the **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission** (ABDM) sandbox is facilitating testing and certification of healthcare products to accelerate digital healthcare at citizen-scale.

Policies for technology help adoption of digital in governments whereas technology for policies streamline operations. Policies for technology and technology for policies, together, accelerate digital transformation journeys in governments.

The possibilities

Engage stakeholders in policy framing: proactively engaging stakeholders through consultative interactions creates a robust collaborative framework and encourages citizens' voluntary participation. The 'voice of citizens' when heard in a timely manner enhances camaraderie between governments and citizens.

Oversee technology trends that impact citizens: citizens' interactions with emerging technologies can extraordinarily impact their behaviors and conduct. A keen eye on this changing dimension can overcome agony associated with reactive policy formulation.

Simplify policy implementation: for an average citizen, discovering, comprehending and applying policies within context is a painful experience. Technology interventions such as machine-readable policies can improve citizen experience while also enabling digital ecosystems to decode policies and drive efficiencies.

"Regulations should be anticipatory rather than reactionary. An effective approach is creating a framework that affords public officers the freedom to operate within a broad set of guardrails."

Sameer Soman
Co-Managing Director for Thoughtworks in India

Tenet 9
Leverage untapped assets

Our view: Government-controlled assets, such as real estate, offer physical spaces whose reach can not be matched by private organizations. Innovative use of such networked assets can help governments serve unserved segments of the population. The approach will not only deliver low-touch digital services but also strengthen government-citizen relationships.

What we mean

Untapped assets in the government's control have the potential to power digital services and create new opportunities such as low-touch citizen services. Government-controlled real estate is backed by time-tested desk procedures and an experienced workforce that can repurpose the facilities to benefit citizens.

Such untapped assets offer abundant opportunities for monetization, creating new revenue streams. Assets that have turned into overheads because of changing consumer preferences can be repurposed for multiple use cases. For example, India Post's legendary reach and personnel can be leveraged to increase logistical coverage and support the growth of digital commerce in India. Similarly, the network of railways and nationalized banks can help deliver innovative low-touch citizen services.

India Post, an asset heavy organization, has reinvented itself to become a leading last mile financial services provider.

India Post has leveraged its huge network of post offices and delivery staff i.e. postmen to offer financial services to its customer in places where private corporations will not venture.

Instead of people going to the bank (or an ATM), banks come to the people. A Point of Sale (PoS) device enables banking transactions and drives financial inclusion in the most remote parts of the country.

The possibilities

Monetize assets: insight from citizens together with prudent policies accelerates the monetization of untapped assets. Innovative use of government-owned assets can lead to evolution of new business models. Public private partnership (PPP) is one such business model.

Back the startup ecosystem: governments with untapped assets can find partners in startups that require assets to scale. While real estate can be monetized through leases, reach has several innovative uses cases – for instance, public sector banks can drive retail investment in the equity market.

Upskill the workforce: new business models and revenue streams require deputing public officers to manage these engagements. Skills such as accounting, document processing, software administration etc. ensure in-house talent is well equipped to serve the government's aspirational goals.

"To serve and support people, countries require infrastructure – physical, social and more recently digital. Governments are already well positioned to provide physical infrastructure and foster social infrastructure. But digital infrastructure is different. Governments need to reimagine how their vast reserves of real estate, buildings and other networks can be used in the current digital backdrop."

Chad Wathington
Chief Strategy Officer for Thoughtworks

Tenet 10
Be intentional about brand building

Our view: Governments perceive branding to be a zero sum game because investments can rarely be attributed to positive brand perception. However, governments embarking on a digital journey must consider investing in digital brand building to maintain relevance in the physical world. A cohesive branding strategy that elicits purpose, manages perception and drives intentional promotion builds trust while creating empathy for the public organization.

What we mean

A government's brand identity is vulnerable to manipulation by the abundance of digital interactions (opinions, feedback) among citizens. Leaving the brand image to chance can have irreversible, long term repercussions. A continuous interplay between the services delivered and the corresponding citizen reaction lays the foundation of the brand. When governments communicate, citizens react through various channels, resulting in a vicious cycle of back and forth open interactions. Such digital interactions result in creating unintended brand perceptions.

Government and private sector's approach to branding is fundamentally different. While the private sector aspires for brand identity that aligns with the organization's values, governments have limited options but to optimize for trust. A government brand identity bereft of trust creates friction. When governments adopt cohesive and well-executed branding strategies, citizens find it easier to connect and identify with them. This advances the relationship and helps governments focus on delivering infrastructure for public good.

Digital India, a flagship program of the Government of India intends to transform the country into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy.

The Government of India realizes the importance of branding in its digital transformation journey. There is an intentional effort to drive engagement that promotes 'Digital India' as a brand.

Investments in branding is a long term game. Patience coupled with consistent messaging across channels (physical and digital) is critical to creating the intended brand image.

The possibilities

Build trust through transparency: citizens' trust in their government is directly proportional to the consistent and transparent delivery of promises. Governments aspiring for clear and transparent communications can adopt digital mediums/channels to engage with their citizens.

Share success stories: communicating success stories of good governance such as citizen delight, timely accomplishments and effective public services positively impacts the government's brand. Uniformity in messaging across channels and periodic reinforcement ensures much needed stickiness.

Demonstrate preference towards digital: digital (not digitized) information from verified government sources is inherently trusted. Governments that demonstrate the ability to think and act digitally gain trust – a necessary and minimum feature of a digital government. As a start, governments must digitally communicate how a decision for public good was made using a combination of facts (data) and opinions.

"A modern, international, progressive and inclusive government image can be easily built by amplifying the work done around Digital Public Goods (DPG) and infrastructure. Of course, it's important to continuously deliver on promises made."

Elise Zelechowski
Global Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Thoughtworks

Further reading

The following online resources offer more valuable perspectives on the field of digital public infrastructure and plenty of food for thought.

Click on the links to explore:

- **How to bring digital inclusion to the people who need it most** on Digital Inclusion

- **Digital public infrastructure can help solve global woes, Secretary-General tells ministerial event** on Digital Public Infrastructure for an Equitable Recovery

- Talks from Thoughtworks XConf 2021
    - **OpenNyAI: Open AI to help the Indian legal system**
    - **Lessons from eight years Bahmni EMR**

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This playbook would not have been possible without the work, wealth of knowledge, and expertise of many individuals, organizations and partners – thank you.

This is truly a collection of many people's experiences, thank you all!

Continue the conversation. Send us an email to suggest another approach that you think we should include here. If you need some help, or have questions, we would be happy to set up a workshop to help you in a more tailored way, our goal is to further support and catalyze successes in this field.

Contact us using this [form](#) or by email:
contact-in@thoughtworks.com

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