LocalCircles

"Improving File Processing In Government Offices"

Collective inputs from over 200,000 Citizens in circle

"Transform India with Modi"

(Current state, Issues, Root Causes and Proposed Solutions)

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File Processing in Government Offices

Executive Summary

All of us have been a victim of the 'files not moving' problem when dealing with a Government office. It is a problem which has been going on ever since India's independence and an effective and sustainable solution to make file processing efficient and transparent in Government Offices is yet to be implemented. The problem not only leads to poor functioning and delivery of the Government offices but it also creates immense dissatisfaction on the ground for the citizen and small businesses of India.

The subject of 'Improving File Processing in Government Offices' was covered in the 200,000 strong citizens' community for governance 'Transform India with Narendra Modi'. With a large number of citizens participating in the discussion, this whitepaper outlines key issues and root causes for the current state of file processing and solutions to implement effective file processing in Government offices.

The community expects that the leaders in Central Government and progressive State Governments will seriously consider the recommendations and implement them to make File Processing more efficient and transparent in Government offices.

Issues Identified:

1. A lot of paper work is put into files
2. Citizens or Businesses are called several times to complete paperwork
3. Most Government officers have a tendency to let files sit either because they want a bribe or they do not want to be accountable for taking a decision
4. There is no owner of a citizen/business file once it is submitted to a Government office and the citizen/business has to go chase it
5. File transfer takes a lot of time
6. Citizens/Businesses don't hear from the department about their files for months
7. It is very hard to find files and peons/clerks want money from citizens/businesses to find their file
8. Files are put in the file room which has thousands of files with no easy identification
9. Files getting lost is a usual sight
10. Many times, files are damaged by rodents
11. The Government Officers struggle to find files in their own chamber/office

12. In most cases, electronic tracking of a file submitted to Government office is not available.
13. File processing in state and district level offices is worse than Central Government.

Root Causes Identified:

1. There is NO identified owner of the file within the Government department in most cases
2. There is NO "complete by" or "action by" date on the file and hence no urgency
3. No triggers/alerts are served to officers once a file has arrived in their office
4. No triggers/alerts are served to them if they have been sitting on a file for weeks or months
5. Processes in most Government offices have not been automated yet
6. Employees working there are not comfortable in using computers
7. The e- office project has not been indicted in a time bound manner in most departments
8. Officers like to show off their importance and hence don't let the file move
9. Employees intentionally stop the file process so that they could ask for bribes
10. Employees don't want to take accountability of a case/file
11. There is no time bound decision making in Government offices
12. File rooms are more of dump yards where files get lost or damaged
13. Government employees oppose the computerization and its use as it will reduce the possibility of them getting bribes
14. There is an absence of a proper Performa
15. Key Responsibility Areas (KRAs) of the officers are not clearly defined and hence the file is pushed from one department to another.

Solutions Identified:

1. All paper submissions/pending files should be fed into the systems
2. Electronic files should be created for new cases/projects
3. As soon as a case is fed into a system, it should automatically assign to the related officer
4. Every file should have an owner who should be held responsible for timely processing
5. The system should show the number of pending cases/files against each officer's name, which should also be visible to their seniors and head of department like Secretary and Minister or District Magistrate (District) and Chief Minister (State)

6. Each application should have a 'maximum response time' failing which the office should be held accountable
7. Automatic escalation should happen if file is not cleared within the stipulated time
8. A week before a case file is to reach its 'maximum response time' limit, the system should start displaying an urgent message against it and send a SMS trigger
9. An automatic penalty rating system to be established
10. Once a file/application is submitted, it should be made the offices' responsibility to get back to the applicant
11. It should be made a rule that the files should be transferred to the second department on the same day as it is cleared from the first one
12. No file should move for more than 3 layers for decision
13. Timely file/case processing should be embedded into everyone's KRA from Secretary to Clerk with different weightage
14. Efficiency and results should be made the key to performance appraisals
15. Proper pest control measures should be taken for the file storage rooms
16. Electronic tracking of files/cases should be enabled and in cases where the customer is a citizen/business, they should have a tracking number
17. A clear set of instructions should be issued from the offices for the documents required for each set of work
18. CCTV cameras should be installed in Government offices to keep an eye on the proceedings
19. Officers/peons caught taking bribes should be immediately suspended
20. Employees should be periodically trained on using computers for their daily work
21. Paperwork in Government offices should be reduced by replacing it with electronic communication and approvals.

File Processing in Government Offices –A few Citizen quotes:

1. Bribery should lead to termination. In my opinion, suspension is almost an unpaid leave, that is too much of convenience to the person taking Bribe in spite of so much mess up in the "systems running India" – *Vinod Kasthuri*
2. Instead of feeding the paper forms into systems, an option should be provided in all offices to directly enter the details in the system. This will also save paper and mistakes in copying the data from paper to system. For IT aware people there should be kiosks in the offices where people can enter their data directly into the system and get a "reference number" that will then be used by the Government employee to process their request. Along with the reference number, a tentative completion date based on the amount of pending work should also be generated. Later this can

be expanded to place the request online without having to personally visit the office – ***Deboleena Shakalley***

3. File processing should have deliverable and accountability targets rather than 7 files to be done each day by an officer which is copied from British long ago. Sending files to higher officers residence to be stopped where the root of corruption starts and many files are missing conveniently – ***Mangalam Balasubramanian***

4. As per my experience the junior most officers who deals with the files do not follow the rules may be due to lack of knowledge or some other motive. In other sense he is considered to be the wisest &most knowledgeable person in the bureaucracy as every senior officer follows his line& tries to defend him. Most of the people not having time to pursue matter ignore and become victim of the system. Their method of responding to the grieved person is "The officer will say on the bases of the report of (dealing official) the case is closed and next officer will follow his junior officer and thus injustice done to the poor citizens without any fault of him. Of course courts are there but everybody cannot afford to go to courts due to various reasons, may be lack of time, jurisdiction and involvement of a small amount – ***Dharam Vir Sobti***

5. Many times it appears that the concerned staff may not be able to fully comprehend and interpret the rules properly resulting in the movement of files from one table to the other unnecessarily resulting in waste of time and efforts. There should be regular training programs for the administrative staff in the use of necessary computer software and to update their knowledge regarding changes happening in the administrative set up. Responsibility coupled with accountability and working within time limits is the only way out in improving the file processing in Government Offices – ***Latha Shenoy***

6. Work culture has to be improved by adopting objective approach for handling any and every issue. As on date any application narrates a request and then it get processed with questions and answers on long term basis. It is possible to get it converted into objective approach so that subjectivity in taking decisions gets eliminated. This would compel employees to look in to any case with objectivity – ***Mohan Lal Bhargava***

7. A time limit should be prescribed in all Government offices and public sector units to dispose of any representation from the public/customers. If it is not adhered by somebody in the organisation severe punishment should be imposed as quickly as possible so that other employees will realize their fault and will act quickly to dispose off the cases coming to him in a reasonable time. But in any of the Government organization there is no accountability on the part of the employees/officers. They never care for the public/customers. So every head of the office should review the pending cases and should pull up their sub-ordinates. Responsibility should be fixed on the individual employee for his slackness and inactiveness and severe punishment should be imposed on him within a reasonable time – ***K. Selvarajan***