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Grievance Resolve(d). Adding the ‘d’ with Gen AI

Here's how a governance area can be re-imagined and transformed from 'painfully and helplessly slow' to 'staggeringly fast and delightful' by rewiring it with a new mindset- and some AI.

By Pratima H



Take a moment. Reflect on the irony of living in 2024. You can order a cab, a burger, even a Biryani, and a masseuse within minutes. But if you file a grievance for a pot-hole or an electricity pole, just logging in and following up on it can take ages. We have all been through it. No one likes it. Especially people like Abhishek Sharma, District Development Commissioner, Samba, J&K who wants to delete all the Red Tape that frustrates both sides of any citizen service process – the person who suffers from an issue as well as the official who wants to fix it soon. This gap matters a lot. Especially in an age where everything is happening with instant results on new-age apps. If we can send Good Morning smileys, share jokes, pass on family updates, curate documents and exchange pictures on WhatsApp – why not file grievances too?

Sharma got his answer with the arrival of Gen AI. Discussing this area one day with Ankush Sabharwal from BharatGPT led to this epiphany – let's try and

use Gen AI with WhatsApp for the entire grievance process. Let's see what happens.

And so began eSevak, an AI-based WhatsApp chatbot in collaboration with CoRover.ai

CHANGING THE BLUE TAPE

"The government has a basic question to address in administration- no matter where we are and who we are serving. It's called 'Grievance'. Most platforms leave the issue hopping from one place to the next – like from one department to nodal officer to the next person and so on. A lot of time is spent in this endless movement of a grievance that keeps traveling from one desk to another for long. And- The citizen does not know the status of the action." Plus, a lot of intermediaries come into the picture – like Community Service Centre, E-Sahayata Kendra or Jana Sahayata Kendra. The citizen making the complaint gets lost in this maze - full of many dependencies. Sharma also highlights the adjacent issue of fake grievances and complaints that

are made just to harass some officers. "Also, people with limited literacy or people who are senior citizens may find the online process hard." True- Online is a great leap from paper-monsters but it does not serve its purpose if it's clunky and friction-laden. He hit the pain nerve very well.

"That's why when we started discovering about GenAI with Bharat GPT, we decided to explore its speed and intelligence for upending these problems. If AI can help us filter fake complaints from genuine ones, direct them to the right department/official and allow the citizen (filing a grievance) to get real-time updates- what else do we need?" Sharma explains as he sketches the first mark of how this pilot started.

His words remind us how, for long, public had no access to real governance machinery – like a police blue tape marking the outer cordon – keeping general public from entering an area. But governance, instead, could be, and should be, 'the blue tape walkthrough' used in construction. The mark of a new project coming to life.

That's exactly what ensued.

NO ROOM FOR BEIGE TAPE THOUGH

The aim was really simple- any citizen wishing to bring a real issue to government attention should be able to do so easily, without online layers as speed-bumps, and without being in the dark about governance-response. The beauty, as always, lied in the execution.

Sharma spells out how the idea for using WhatsApp came in here. "It's a prevalent mode of communication today. It does not take time, or paperwork or patience. And so many Indians are using it without any formal training. So we went ahead with the Gen AI pilot with WhatsApp as the front-end. We set up a system where the grievance can be put through a simple WhatsApp number. It is immediately routed to multiple people and is categorized as per relevance. The concerned department springs into action in a much more accelerated way because everything is on a chat-app."

Every next move- whether the grievance is being forwarded to someone or being responded to or any comments are being made by any official- is converted to an instant alert for the citizen concerned. The process lands right on the spot of a field-level officer instead of wasting the bandwidth of higher government authorities. Easy dashboards, analytics and simple visualization- add to the elegance of this solution.

But the real beauty lies in the results. Just two months old, and the pilot is already proving how fast a complaint can be addressed when it reaches the

grass-root level person – and without getting caught in bureaucracy and other delays. "You can yourself check how quickly a response pops if you want to try to file any complaint." Sharma quips. The team is also gathering feedback and sharpening any rough edge it spots – across all areas like filing grievances to alerts and final action-update.

Great! But what about ethical and practical challenges?

YES, THE YELLOW TAPE?

Ask Sharma about issues like fake complaints, data privacy and data localisation and he does not dismiss them with the typical nonchalance of a bureaucrat. In a refreshing candor, he avers that privacy and safety are paramount priorities for this project.

"Interestingly, one day during the pilot, I was surprised to see a citizen's message that had a video attachment showing the pothole he had complained about. It occurred to us that yes- Bots can use location data, voice notes, pictures and videos to add authenticity and specificity to a grievance. So that fixes the fake grievance issue." Sharma reflects.

As to data security aspects, he asserts how that has been a concern but since WhatsApp messages need not have PII data, it is not that big an issue -presently. Also, grievances etc. often form public information and are in the ambit of administrative data. "Once this solution gathers scale and popularity, we will definitely adapt to any issue and to new questions that will emerge." He assures.

Sharma has planned a two-year horizon for this with one year devoted for development and fine-tuning work. He is ambitious about the uniqueness and scalability of this idea – specially in the realm of governance.

There might be scope for bringing in Voice capabilities next. "As of now, we are in the Pilot stage and fine-tuning algorithms etc. If successful, this model can be replicated across India. It's a unique process and showcases how AI can be used to move grievances to the right place and the right person with good transparency and speed for citizens."

Right now, the project is in the Orange Tape mode. The cables for new communication and lines for 'fresh and better ways to complain' are being set up. It's just the beginning. But it's the breaking of Red Tape in a complete way- and the beginning of a new kind of tape. The Duct Tape. Strong. Robust. Gets things done. 

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