Document Tracking Mechanism

A Concept Note

# 1. The Need

Flipkart and Amazon are in the business of package delivery. Imagine if their management itself isn’t able to track where their shipment packages are! What will happen to the timely and accurate package delivery and efficiency? What will happen to their customer satisfaction and profits? Total mess, won’t it be?

Government is in the business of delivering services. Our shipment packages are papers - daks and files. And we, sadly, don’t have any easy mechanism to track any paper once we have marked them. And what we cannot track and follow-up, will get delayed. Of course, there are ominous amounts of prescribed registers and equally voluminous rules about how to maintain them. But the reality of most field level government offices is – they are understaffed, one clerk holds multiple charges and the officer is overworked, she is supposed to have 10 clones. So none of the routine office management happens and most of the time they are indulged in firefighting mode.

Things which are supposed to happen in routine happen only when a nudge comes in form of a call from superior office or politician or a notice from a court or commission or the person himself comes 3-4 times. And even when that happens, we have no ready mechanism to track what happened to the grievance which this old man had given 2 months back or the inquiry report our superior office had asked for 4 months back. We have to ask our clerk who tells us either from his memory only or hurriedly searches for in his papers and files. Inevitably, many times the paper is either missing or lying unattended on some table. Then the fire-fighting begins and by the time this fire is doused some another begins.

So what is needed is a mechanism to constantly follow-up things. It is an established management fact and also an observed one that what is followed up is what gets done. Instead of following up only when we receive that phone call or notice, if we follow up in routine, then things will get done in routine. And that is when maximum number of common people will get relief. The only thing which is needed is to make the follow-up mechanism easy and quick. Hence this proposed solution.

# 2. The Guiding Principles

To be successful, the solution has to follow certain guiding principles apart from the usual requirements of security and so on.

* As mentioned above, there are already detailed rules and registers prescribed for following up but due to shortage of staff, overburdening of officer and complexity, they are not followed. So any solution we design has to make life easier for the staff and the officer in charge (OIC). It should replace those registers rather than be an addition to them.
* Also, one of the reasons why those registers are not maintained is that at every stage, the concerned clerk has to enter all the metadata of the dak again. This is clearly undesirable and the guiding principle should be that all the metadata should be entered only once at the initial stage. At every subsequent stage, only the necessary information should be added.
* Presently, the state government has a very good solution vis Sampark (and soon CM Helpline) for following up on people’s grievances but while it is very good for the state government to track, it stops at the head of office level. What we need is a follow-up mechanism which can track the dak movement both within the office and other offices. Another limitation for Sampark is that it is meant essentially for G2C (Government to Citizen) transactions i.e. citizen grievances whereas what we need is for G2G (Government to Government) transactions i.e. inter and intra office communications as well.
* Another practical reality at the ground level is poor computer literacy and weak internet. We have e-office application designed by NIC which completely makes the file movement paperless. However, even in Government of India we can see that the departments are reluctant to adopt it because:

1. People including senior officers have become so comfortable with paper files over the decades that it becomes really difficult for them to do away with it. The ease of working with paper files is just way too better than ease of working with electronic files. Inertia of any system must be respected otherwise even the greatest of ideas may fail even before taking off. So our solution must not do away with papers while at the same time give us all the advantages we need in following up and tracking.
2. Not all people are comfortable with typing on a computer or even staring at it for long intervals. So the solution must keep this to a bare minimum and disturb the users in the minimum possible way in terms of the way they have been doing things over the years.
3. It is expensive. Very expensive. Not just the hardware requirements but even the licenses. This prevents offices from adopting it. The solution has to be cheap – both licenses and in terms of hardware requirements.
4. It is heavy to load, slow, cumbersome to look at and work with and requires good internet connection. The solution has to avoid all this.

* Just like the standard ERP solutions in the logistics companies, this solution also has to be an end to end solution in terms of tracking.

1. As in logistics companies where each shipment has a unique tracking id, each of our shipment i.e. dak / file should have a unique id (like Aadhar) as well. This unique id will be present in every entry regarding the dak / file and will help us in tracking it.
2. The solution must track the dak at every change of hand right from inward till its final filing. At every stage necessary information must be recorded which can tell what happened to it.
3. The solution must be robust enough to enable us to locate any paper even decades in future in case of any RTI application or other need. In routine cases, for example where say a person comes and says he belongs to such village and gave us a BPL application 2 months back, we should be able to, within seconds, track the status of his application – whether it is stuck in our office with X person or whether it is gone for inquiry or if the inquiry has been done then this is unique id of the inquiry report which came in and then whether the final order has been generated and if so the unique id of the order and its dispatch date to the relevant office.

* The solution will improve efficiency only when it is able to generate actionable MIS reports. Like any good MIS solution, it must have the following features:

1. The officer must be able to track that so many papers are pending in this section.
2. She must be able to see how many days daks are kept pending with the inward/outward section on an average.
3. The reports must be clickable and drillable till individual dak level in case the officer wants to see what happened to such and such particular dak.
4. She must also be able to search pending daks section wise. For example, a SDO must be able to see how many and which daks are pending with his revenue section and for how long so that she can follow it up in regular meetings.
5. She must also be able to search pending daks office wise. For example, the collector must be able to see how many and which daks are pending with electricity department or a particular SDO so that she can follow it up in regular meetings.

* It is critical that the efficiency of the solution must not be dependent upon its adoption in other offices. In government every office has its own circumstances and priorities. So for successful functioning, an office must be able to realize the full potential of the solution on a standalone basis only.
* Finally, it must be a mobile friendly, web based solution with android app extensions for various purposes.

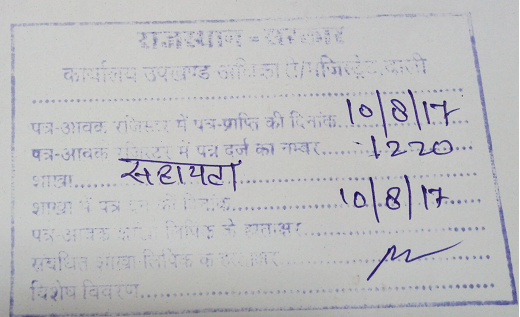
# 3. The Detailed Workflow

## 3.1 Workflow in the Inward Section

* As of now, when any grievance or a dak or an email is received in the office i.e. as soon as a paper becomes an official document, it is sent to the inward section. This must remain the same.
* After receiving, the inward section enters all the metadata in the inward register. Now, instead of entering the metadata in the inward register, inward section will enter the metadata in the solution.
* The solution will generate an inward id which will become the unique id of the dak. This id will be subsequently used to track it. The inward id will be a combination of number/year. So for instance, the 512th paper coming in the office in year 2017 will get an id of 512/2017. This will be auto-generated by the solution. A template of the entry module of the inward section is given below.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Inward Id (Unique Id)** | **Receive Date** | **Received From** | **Letter Date (of sender office)** | **Letter Id (of sender office)** | **Subject Matter** | **Section** |
| To be filled by Inward Section | | | | | | |
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* After making the entry in the inward register, the inward section puts up an office seal on the paper. The seal contains the details like inward id, inward date, dealing section, date on which the dak was forwarded to dealing section and signatures of both clerks. Recording of the dates on which the dak was received by the inward section and when it was forwarded to the dealing section is necessary to bring accountability and faster processing. Otherwise in cases of delay, both sections simply blame each other and there is no way to verify which one caused it. A sample seal can look like the following:



## 3.2 Workflow in the Dealing Section

* Once the dak moves in the dealing section, the section is supposed to maintain a dairy where a summary of action taken on the dak will be mentioned. As again, due to the cumbersome entry requirements, this diary is not maintained.
* The solution must provide for an easy entry system by the section. A template of the entry module in the dealing section is given below:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Unique Id** | **If Dispatched** | | | **If Filed** | **Section Comments** | **Pending With** |
| **Dispatch Id** | **Dispatch Date** | **Destination** | **File Id(s)** |
| To be filled by Concerned Section | | | | | | |
|

* If the dak requires to be filed only, then the section, after obtaining the signature of the OIC, will file it and make the entry of the file id field.
* If, at the same time, certain communications need to be sent to other offices, then dispatch entries will be made. It is possible that one dak may require multiple dispatches.
* In many cases, the incoming dak may be linked to certain other dak which had come in some time ago. For instance, in case of a BPL appeal, SDO may have sent it to the BDO for inquiry. One month later, a dak may be received from BDO office containing the inquiry report of 50 BPL appeals. In that case, it would be prudent to link this dak with the original appeals. The original appeals would have been linked to 50 file ids (even though physically there may be just one big file of BPL appeals). Once this inquiry report comes, it should be possible for the section to quickly search on the basis of metadata and be able to pull up the relevant file ids and link this to those.
* Until a matter is disposed, it must show as pending. And the solution must be able to tell us who it is pending with. So in case of a BPL appeal, until the matter has been sent to the BDO for inquiry, it must show as pending with the BPL section, once it is sent it must show pending with BDO, once the inquiry report is back, it must show pending with the section until the final order has been issued. The concerned section must be authorized to mark whether the issue has been disposed off or pending and if pending then with whom. The OIC must be authorized to override it.
* The section must also be able to mark the priority level of a matter. The OIC must be authorized to override it.
* The section must be able to specify the number of days within which the matter has to be resolved by other offices. The solution must be able to generate alerts based on this on the specified day so that the section can remind the concerned office. The solution must provide the facility of setting a fresh deadline for the disposal of the matter (or a bunch of matters in a batch). The OIC must be authorized to override it.

## 3.3 Workflow at Officer level

* The OIC must be able to see all the pendency reports of his section(s) and override the section’s entries.
* OIC must hold regular meetings with his section(s) and regularly monitor the pendency. Daks which are pending for a long time should be auto-escalated to the next higher officer.
* The OIC / Head of Office should hold regular meetings with other offices where pendency at their level can be tracked or can follow it up in whatever way she desires.

# 4. Conclusion

This solution can give us an effective mechanism to track and monitor our office processes and can help greatly in improving efficiency in the government offices. It is no magical tool, but given in the hands of a willing head of office, can really turn around the office and help countless number of people.