DEMATERIALIZING ACADEMIC RECORDS IN DIGITAL INDIA: AN E-GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE OF CDSL

INTRODUCTION

Mr. PS Reddy, Managing Director and CEO, CDSL said,

"Creating and maintaining a digital depository for academic certificates is a huge task that comes with a lot of responsibility. We are sure that these initiatives will strengthen the structure of academics. [1]" On 5th March 2017, Joydeep Dutta, the Executive Director and Group Chief Technology Officer (CTO) of Central Depository Services India Limited (CDSL), walked into the meeting room at his Mumbai office, feeling confident about his views on the topics about to be discussed. He was going to brainstorm on right pricing strategy for availing services of the newly launched National Academic Depository (NAD) platform by CDSL Ventures Limited (CVL) with Mr. Yogesh Kundnani, Vice President (Business Development), Mr. Sunil Alvares, Chief Operating Officer (COO), and other members of Business Development (BD), and the Operations team. The NAD platform was to serve as a digital depository for academic awards issued by higher education institutions in India, and as such, was going to eliminate the intermediaries currently existing in manual processes of managing academic transcripts. The number of Indian higher education institutions, which had joined the NAD

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[1] Source: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolhapur/suk-to-disepense-academic-info-online/articleshow/56819432.cms, retrieved on May 30, 2017.

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initiative, already reached 105 in a short span of six months[2]. The NAD platform was also witnessing steady growth in student registrations, with over 7,000 students having already registered, and over 2.7 million certificates already uploaded on the platform, as on August 15, 2017. With this background, Mr. Dutta began the discussion,

"There are lots of inefficiencies in the processes related to physically verifying and issuing of academic transcripts. Since, so many other services are moving onto online platforms these days, we thought this is a very good opportunity and a great case for the digitization of academic records, and creation of a robust electronic ecosystem for delivering fast, efficient services to all stakeholders."

On 27th October 2016, the Union Cabinet of India under the Chairmanship of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi accorded its approval[3] for the establishment and operationalization of a pan-India NAD platform under the aegis of Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD)[4] that would serve as a pan-India digital depository for academic awards (including school leaving certificates, college degrees, and academic mark sheets issued by higher education institutions in the country). Similar to several other E-governance reforms being carried out under the broader Digital India[5] vision of the Government of India, the NAD initiative was targeted to eliminate the existing inefficiencies involved in manual issuing, storing, and maintaining of academic transcripts on the part of Indian educational institutions. The NAD was envisioned along the lines of two existing central securities depositories in the country, namely Central Depository Services Limited (CDSL) and National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL). Consequently, the operationalization of NAD initiative was rested upon two wholly owned subsidiaries of CDSL and NSDL, namely CDSL Ventures Limited (CVL) and NSDL Database Management Limited (NDML), respectively.

Mr. Dutta was closely involved with the NAD initiative since its inception, and he understood well the fact that such a large-scale initiative would need more than just a robust platform. While Mr. Dutta could foresee the technological hurdles related to ensuring data integrity and security, and

[2] National Academic Depository Platform, retrieved from: https://www.nad.co.in/NAD/home.action on March 25, 2017

[3] Press Information Bureau. (2016, October 27). Cabinet approves the establishment of National Academic Depository, retrieved from: https://www.nad.co.in/NAD/dispalyContent.action?pdfFileName=cabinet_nad.pdf on March 25, 2017

[4] MHRD is the ministry responsible for the development of human resources in India. The E-departments of school and higher education come under the ambit of MHRD. Retrieved from: http://mhrd.gov.in/ on April 8, 2017

[5] The Digital India program is an initiative of the Government of India aimed at transforming India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. Retrieved from: http://www.digitalindia.gov.in/ on April 08, 2017

achieving process standardization, he appeared less anxious, probably owing to his vast experience in leading several technology-intensive initiatives within CDSL and in his previous organizations. He realized that, without the presence of sufficient avenues for value generation and capture, the prime stakeholders (i.e., educational institutions) would remain apprehensive about joining the NAD platform notwithstanding the legal mandate from MHRD.

The key questions he was seeking answers to were related to identifying the entire value chain in NAD ecosystem, and defining the scope of NAD platform therefrom. What would be the implications of disintermediation effect on the legacy processes due to the introduction of NAD platform? Would the consequent process improvement have an impact on the education dimension of the Human Development Index (HDI) of India? Would there be a need for newer partnerships and innovative business models? What would be the key success factors for the NAD initiative to be sustainable? Mr. Dutta had planned to deliberate on some of these aspects and was looking forward to hearing new ideas and insights from his team members in the brainstorming session about to take place. There was a slight murmur of uncertainty in the room, as he entered and took his place. He opened his presentation while the room lights dimmed; the slide appeared on the screen behind him, and he began with his first point.