

Chapter 22

Designing and Implementing E–Government Projects in India: Actors, Behaviours, Influences, and Fields of Play

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ABSTRACT

The recent, rapid global proliferation of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has sparked an explosive increase in an already steadily-growing stream of scholarly and practitioner literature on the applicative potential of e-government initiatives for development. Attracted by the potential intrinsic to these innovative digital technologies, platforms, and applications, political actors across the world have adopted computer-based network-systems for strategic use in government; as a means of reforming inefficiencies in public administration, and in public service provision. This research chapter, through the delineation of an electronic property tax collection system, deployed in Bangalore, India, analyses and unravels the strategic actor interactions shaping similar e-government initiatives, globally; predominantly, through a detailed scholarly examination of prevailing actor behaviours, motivations, and interactions. The research presented herein considers, thus, not only the interplay of local contingencies and external influences acting upon the project, but also the disjunctions apparent within these relationships which inhibit the effective exploitation of ICTs in the given context.

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the last two decades, globalisation and information technology have been rapidly dismantling traditional barriers to trade, travel, and communication; fuelling great promise for progress towards greater global equity and prosperity. Attracted by the ‘hype and hope’ of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), development actors across the world have adopted computer-based systems for use in government as a means of reforming the inefficiencies in public service provision. Much has been written about e-governance within a growing stream of literature on ICT for develop-

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ment, generating countervailing perspectives where optimistic, technocratic approaches are countered by far more sceptical standpoints on technological innovation.

However, in trying to analyse both their potential and real value, there has been a tendency for scholars to see e-governance applications as isolated technical artefacts, analysed solely as a collection of hardware and software. Far less work is based on empirical field research, and models put forward by scholars and practitioners alike often neglect the actual attitudes, choices, and behaviour of the wide array of actors involved in the implementation and use of new technology in real organisations, as well as the way in which the application shapes and is shaped by existing social, organisational, and environmental contexts. This research chapter, through the delineation and in-depth analysis of an empirical case study concerned with the strategic deployment, implementation, and use of an electronic property tax collection system in Bangalore (India), developed between 1998 and 2008, critically examines both the role of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in governmental reform processes; and, notably, the contribution made by the scholarly enquiry into the innovation and the uptake of such technologies, thus proffered, towards the deeper, more nuanced understanding of the social dynamics and the strategic political manoeuvres that shape e-government projects, and, most especially, those initiatives adopted to reform public sector institutions within a developing country or nascent project-stage context.

The embedded case study, from which the conclusions arrived at within this book chapter are drawn, focused on a public-sector project that sought to advance the digitisation of property tax records, and to facilitate the strategic reengineering and the streamlining of extant administrative processes, within the Revenue Department of the *Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike* (BBMP or Greater Bangalore City Municipal Corporation). In recognising the need to turn the property tax into a viable revenue instrument that delivered high tax yields, without compromising on either citizen fiscal compliance or citizen acceptance of the new system, the Greater Bangalore City Municipal Corporation aspired to improve its property tax administration system; in particular, through

1. The introduction of a comprehensive computerised database, based upon data collected according to newly established data-collection procedures and protocols, and via
2. The development of system-compatible Geographic Information Systems (GIS)-led digital cartographic techniques, and their subsequent application to the effective jurisdictional tracking of tax compliance and to the speedy detection and curtailment of tax evasion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to augment theoretical discussions of administrative reform in a digitised world, this research uses a case study to explore its central research issues. Within the case study, a mixed-methods approach was selected in order to inform and strengthen the understanding of the relationships between the *participating actors, raw materials and inputs involved, and eventual project outputs* (Virkar, 2011b). Quantitative data used, both primary and secondary, consisted of statistics obtained from official sources which indicated changes in tax revenue between 1998 and 2008. Primary qualitative data included material gained from in-depth interviews and discussions and collected between 2005 and 2010, whilst secondary qualitative data was sourced from academic work, policy papers, and newspaper articles.

The use of mixed-methods case study research is becoming increasingly popular in the social sciences, recognised as a successful approach for investigating contemporary phenomena in a real-life context

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