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Information Technology and Bureaucratic Reform: A Case from India

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ABSTRACT

Most governments see the use of information systems as part of a reform strategy to reconfigure relations both among various government departments as well as between governments and other stakeholders. However, there is little empirical evidence to support whether these systems achieve this intended outcome. Therefore, the overarching question that guides this study can be articulated as follows: given that the information systems used by governments are proposed to institute new relational patterns within governments and between governments and other stakeholders, has this happened, if so how and if not why not. I suggest that e-governance systems are designed and implemented with the context of existing institutionalized social structures, which constrain actors who come together to build and implement a new system. However, this does not mean that these actors are mere puppets. They are capable of strategic action and can choose whether to reinforce the existing institutionalized set up or to change it. In either case, these constrained actors build coalitions by using strategic and assumptive frames in their attempt to move from interpretive flexibility towards institutionalization. This study uses the extended case study approach with in-depth interviews and participant observation as the data elicitation techniques. My data analytic approach stems from the notion of a hermeneutic circle that sees the process of social construction and institutionalization as a series of constructed dialogues.