

EMPATHY: A BUREAUCRATIC BEHAVIOUR?

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This study picks up the common phenomenon of the inconsistent behaviour of bureaucrats having implications on the state governance process. In general, behaviour of bureaucrats is notoriously tagged in two extremes, namely 'red tape' on one hand and 'subservience to politicians', on the other. The former is explained in literature as inflexible, rule bound behaviour (Jenkins and Gray 1983), and the latter as subservience to the political will (Mulgan 2007). Sinclair (1995), recognizes varying responses of bureaucrats between these two extremes. However, literature does not reveal contexts which give rise to such varying behaviour and resulting practices, which is the focus of this paper.

This study has the objective of understanding the social contexts that influence behaviour of bureaucrats to form different governance practices. Investigations were carried out on the basis of two research questions: (i) What are the current behaviours of bureaucrats? (ii) What influences the formations of such behaviours?

Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977) was used to understand how practices are constructed. Accordingly, human behavior is formed by the influence of three categories of social phenomena, namely, habitus, capital / symbolic capital and the field. To Bourdieu, the embodied interplay of habitus, with the capital / symbolic capital of the agent and the field, influences the construction of practice (Bourdieu 1990; Toril 2001).

This is an ethnographic case study undertaken at three Kachcheris. Data were gathered through observations and semi structured interviews conducted with the Government Agents and their teams. Before commencing the case study, a series of in depth interviews were carried out with 15 retired bureaucrats, who had served at very senior levels in the state service.

The empirical evidence proves the extreme behaviour discussed in literature. However, a behaviour not discussed in literature also emerged, *i.e.* behaviour based on empathy. From the theory of practice perspective such behaviour is influenced by a habitus formed through its embodiment with the structured spaces of the field such as opportunities available through positions of office, the capital accumulation through education, and the symbolic capital of the influence of visionary parents and religious upbringing. Rule boundness and subservience can also be similarly explained. The former as the embodiment of habitus with the positional power of the field, the capital accumulation through education, and the symbolic capital of social and political connections and wealth, and the latter as the embodiment of habitus with the pressure of the field, the capital accumulation through education, and the values cultivate during upbringing. Therefore the study reveals that empathy is also seen as a bureaucratic behaviour.