Towards E-compliance

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E-governance initiatives are increasingly seen as a vehicle to tackle corruption across the globe. E-governance initiatives offer an unprecedented amount and visibility of data and information which can be aggregated, disaggregated and analyzed to identify patterns and help improve policies, procedures, and processes. But the information systems alone would be insufficient to actually reduce corruption. Otherwise, we would have seen corresponding decreases in corruption along with the increasing number and scale of e-governance initiatives worldwide. Furthermore, despite the fact that similar e-governance functions and initiatives have been implemented across the world, the evidenced outcomes seem to vary markedly from country to country.

In this exploratory inductive research, compliance is identified as a conduit and part of mechanism to explain the phenomena of e-governance implementation which aims to control corruption. When government employee users comply with the e-governance system requirements, it is expected that the system will achieve the objectives the system is designed for and contribute to overall control of corruption in the government. In this background, this present research aims to answer the following questions:

**How does compliance manifest in e-governance implementation?**

**What are the determinants of compliance among government employee users in e-governance implementation?**

To answer the research questions, this exploratory research used qualitative inductive methods, based on constructivist/interpretivist approach. A comparative case study helped provide a detailed description of each case and theme within a case and across cases (cross-case analysis) for interpretation.

Data collection methods included document analysis, observations and semi-structured interviews. The fieldwork was conducted from September 2019 to January 2020 and conducted semi-structured interviews of 32 government officials and experts in Bhutan. The data collected from the case study initiatives and triangulated across different data sources produced rich descriptions which enabled in-depth interpretation of compliance drivers in each case study initiative. Using two rounds of coding and partial pattern matching, similar and dissimilar compliance drivers were identified in cross-case synthesis. In analyzing data, actor analysis and process tracing methods were applied to establish more nuanced perspectives of
various actors and understand the institutional dynamics. The analysed data helped understand the phenomena under review and explain the how and why of compliance levels attained in each initiative.

The case study county was selected based on a set of pre-determined criteria of e-government maturity and level of control of corruption. Out of the 13 possible case study countries, Bhutan was selected, based on the UNDESA E-Government Survey 2016, Transparency International Perception Survey 2018 (25th out of 180 countries in 2019) and language requirement.

One distinctive aspect of the case study country is the fact that Bhutan is one of the least developed countries and at the same time landlocked developing country, with the approximate population size of 800,000. Thus, the available human and financial resources are limited to advance anti-corruption and implement the latest technologies across the government. Out of the 30 e-government initiatives listed in the Bhutan E-government Master Plan, the Asset Declaration System of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and the electronic Public Expenditure Management System (e-PEMS) of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) were selected as case study initiatives based on pre-set criteria.

Across the two case study initiatives examined in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, similar and dissimilar compliance drivers emerged. Some drivers were identical and interchangeable between the case study initiatives, despite the different organizational contexts and case configurations. They include the role of His Majesty the King, leadership, peer support, technology-enabled ease of use, such as automation, naming and shaming, the role of media and social media and fear for punishment. The others were similar but not identical or interchangeable, including credibility and trust in organization, organizational setup, personal commitment, transparency, visibility and traceability as well as responsive technical support. Some drivers appeared both in positive and negative examples, but nonetheless, pointing to the same effect as a compliance driver.

Some of the compliance drivers were technology-enabled and induced, and the others were institutional or social drivers. Some of them were dependent on other drivers and the others were independent and inter-dependent. Together, the identified compliance drivers and their dependence and inter-dependence have created a compliance mechanism and compliance space where the compliance drivers function optimally and compliance is high. If compliance is low, the functioning compliance mechanism might not be in place, with limited and ineffective compliance drivers, and the compliance space too narrow.
At the same time, it is expected that the compliance drivers evolve in response to a dynamically evolving context and background. New drivers may emerge, while other drivers may disappear when there are some incidents or changes in the context. If there are many inter-linked compliance drivers, a disappearance of a compliance driver or the diminished importance might not affect the overall compliance level much. However, if there is only one compliance driver in the country, such as leadership, and it disappears, it can safely be assumed that compliance will be reduced accordingly.

In this context, not only the compliance mechanism, which consists of inter-linked and mutually supportive compliance drivers, but also the compliance space, which consists of the number of compliance driver, would help explain the phenomena of compliance in the e-governance implementation.

Chapter 7 examined the identified compliance drivers against the existing literature detailed in Chapter 2. The technological compliance drivers played an important role in ensuring compliance in the two case study initiatives, yet the existing literature did not adequately explain the technological compliance drivers or compliance in the context of e-governance implementation.

Building on the identified gaps between the case study initiatives and literature and in recognition of the lack of appropriate compliance models, this present research proposed a new conceptual framework of e-compliance which integrates technology with other compliance drivers in e-governance implementation.

This present research elaborated how sociomateriality provides the theoretical foundation to explain e-compliance, as constitutive entanglement of the social and the material. E-compliance provides empirical data and operationalization of how the constitutive entanglement takes place.