Factoring Decentralization in E-Governance Policy Frameworks – A Study in Indian Context[1]

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FACTORING DECENTRALIZATION IN E-GOVERNANCE POLICY FRAMEWORKS – A STUDY IN INDIAN CONTEXT

With globalization, the governance paradigm from the global to the local is undergoing a systemic change. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are increasingly recognized as fundamental to the development and maintenance of the systems of governance (Horrocks & Bellamy 1997). A simple definition of e-governance would be the introduction of ICTs in the governance process along with a set of techno-managerial changes in the architecture of the governance system.

The idea of decentralized governance is a need in developing countries (Bardhan 2002). Policy attempts at the national and the international level aimed at decentralization are as much a part of the current governance framework as policy attempts at e-governance. In addition to this, there is evidence to prove that ICTs can help in decentralization of government systems (Kakabadse, Kakabadse and Kouzmin 2003a, Kakabadse, Kakabadse and Kouzmin 2003b, Prabhu 2004, Bhatnagar 2004, Gupta, Kumar & Bhattacharya 2004, Mishra & Gachhayat 2004, Grant & Chau 2005, Lenihan 2002,McChesney, Wood & Foster 2001, Chandrasekar 2006, Ward & Vedel 2006, Cleveland 2000,McCullagh 2003, Madon 1993, Deakins & Dillon 2002, Norris & Moon 2005).

Shirin Madon, in the context of telecentres says that we have to go beyond the "telecentre as good governance" rhetoric and consciously think of ways in which telecentres can address governance reform agenda (Madon 2005). Taking a cue from such pointers, it becomes pertinent to look at how not only telecentres but the entire gamut of ICT enabled e-governance can be used for addressing governance reform agendas, one of which is decentralization. So, understanding this issue becomes not only an intellectual imperative brought about by new technologies and political changes but also a much-needed policy imperative.

In India, there have been a variety of frameworks to assess the e-readiness of e-governance projects. The prominent amongst them have been INDIA: e-Readiness Assessment Report 2006 (MIT 2006), Skoch e-governance report card (Kochhar and Dhanjal 2005) and EAF framework (currently ver 2.0) (Rao et al. 2005) etc. But models/frameworks for the purpose of making the e-governance process more decentralized are still rare in India (Suri 2005) and we need such models.

It is pertinent over here to define certain terms used in the Indian governance context. A “State” is a province. A “District” is the next level of administration below the state. A “Taluk” is below the Sub-District level and a “Panchayat” is the lowest body of Local Self Government at the village level. This entire doctoral study is conducted in a particular state of India called Gujarat because of its advanced state of e-governance and the model proposed here is valid for this state only.

Accordingly, the research questions that has been sought to be addressed by this doctoral study are,

1. How the process of e-governance facilitates the decentralization of power in the governance process?
2. What is the quantitative extent of the decentralization facilitated by E-governance?

3. Can the current models of e-governance be changed so that decentralization concerns could be incorporated in them?

A model has been developed here based on a review of the existing literature in governance area and e-governance. It understands decentralization as a set of authority transfers. The authority transferor is always the government bureaucracy. The authority transferee can be the lower levels of the government itself in which case it is called "De-concentration" or extra-state agencies in which case it is called "Delegation" or Local Self Government units in which case it is called "Devolution". The different attributes of the kinds of decentralization are mandatory. The model is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: E-Governance-Decentralization model

Decentralization & E-Governance	**Kinds of Decentralization**	**Attributes of the kinds of Decentralization**
E-Governance facilitated De-centralization (GOI 2002, Prabhu 2004, Bhatnagar 2004, Gupta, Kumar & Bhattacharya 2004, Chandhoke 2003, Fang 2002, Kakabadse et al. 2003, Gupta et al. 2004)	De-concentration (Rondinelli 1983, Conyers 1984)	Govt. as authority transferee (from some particular hierarchical level) (Adamolekun 1991, Conyers 1984, Public Administration & Development 1990)
		Operational, Tactical, Strategic Authority transfer (Conyers 1984)
		Internal Accountability(normal accountability within the government) (Rondinelli 1983, Conyers 1984)
	Delegation (Rondinelli 1983)	Extra-State Actors (like NGO, Pvt, Co-operatives) as authority transferee (Rondinelli 1983)
		Operational, Tactical, Strategic authority transfer (Rondinelli 1983)
		Principal-Agent Accountability(to authority transferor) (Rondinelli 1983)
	Devolution (Rondinelli 1983, Conyers 1984)	Independent entities with corporate status, with character as that of Govt / Pvt / NGO / Co-operative) / Local Self Government(primarily Local Self Government) as authority transferee (Adamolekun 1991, Conyers 1984, Rondinelli 1983, John & Chathukulam 2003, Shin & Ha 1998)
		Operational, Tactical, Strategic authority transfer (Conyers 1984, Rondinelli 1983, Guess 2005)
		Citizen Accountability (Accountability to citizens at grassroots below the transferee level) (Conyers 1984, Rondinelli 1983, John & Chathukulam 2003)

The model is depicted in a different manner in Figure 1.

E-Governance-Decentralization Model

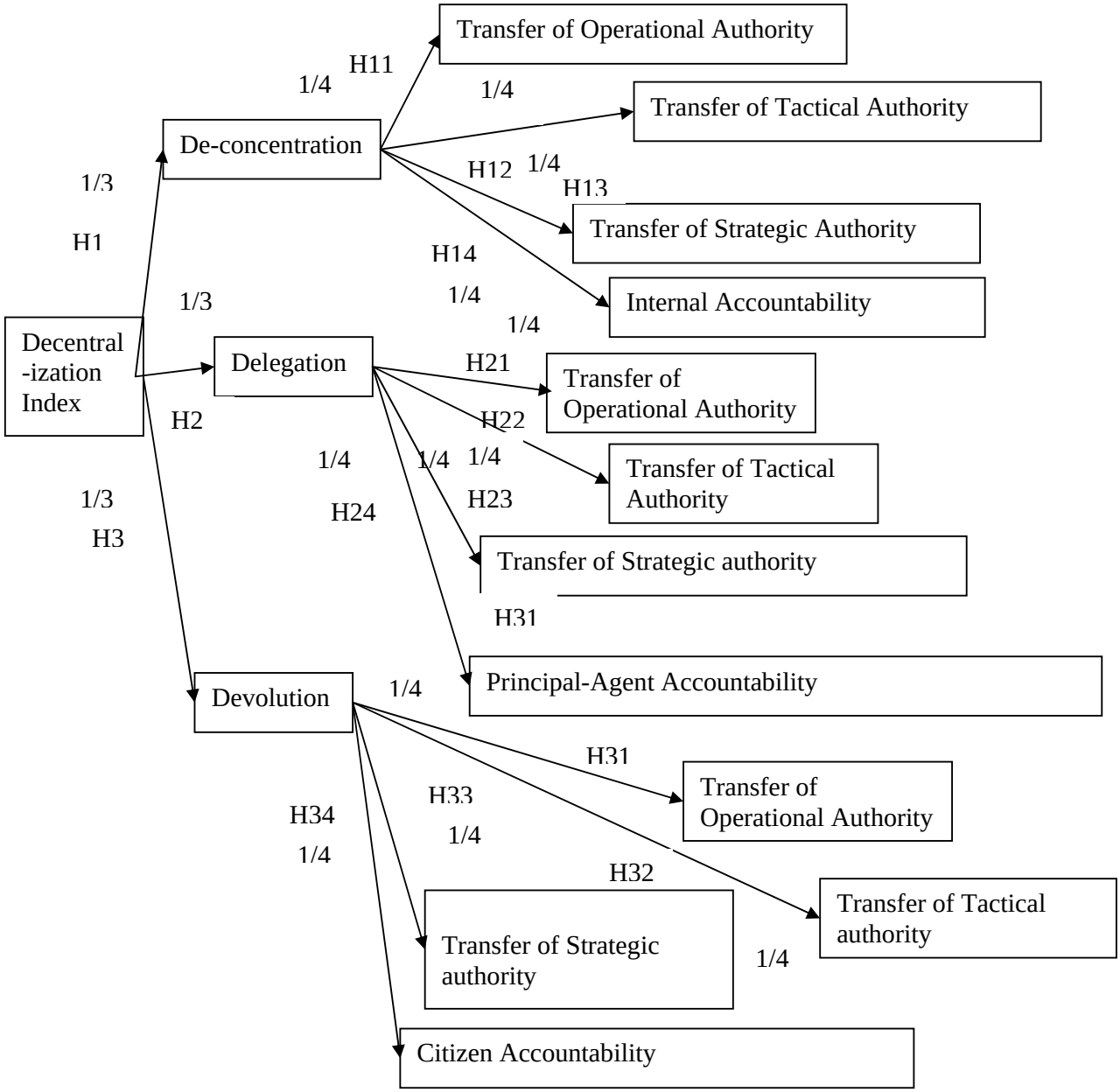

Fig. 1

As of now, equal weightages are given for the different components based on similar studies by academic institutes, consultancies and international agencies (GITR 2002-2007, MIT 2006, Kochhar and Dhanjal 2005, Rao et al. 2005). Based on results from the field, the weightages will be changed. A scoring system, based on related scoring done in other

relevant literature as well as intuition, has also been devised for capturing quantitatively, the hierarchical extent of decentralization for the authority transfers. This score might also be changed based on data from the field. The highest score is given for authority transfers from the state headquarter level to the village level and accordingly, the authority transfers between the different levels have been accorded different scores. The weightages and the scores will be applied onto the different constructs in the model.

Table 2: Scoring for hierarchical extent of decentralization (GITR 2002-2007, MIT 2006, Kochhar and Dhanjal 2005, Rao et al. 2005)

FROM	TO	Scores
State	State	1
	District	2
	Sub-District	3
	Taluka	4
	Gram Panchayat	5
District	District	1
	Sub-District	2
	Taluka	3
	Gram Panchayat	4
Sub-District	Sub-District	1
	Taluka	2
	Gram Panchayat	3
Taluka	Taluka	1
	Gram Panchayat	2
Gram Panchayat	Gram Panchayat	1

For testing our model, within Gujarat, all the e-governance projects have been taken up. Within the state of Gujarat, to test our model, we do a stratified random sampling wherein we divide the districts of Gujarat into three strata based on different parameters, viz, Social, Economic Demographic and the Technical parameters. And then we randomly select one district from each strata.

At the Gujarat state capital level, samples are taken from some of the important department officials as well as from the non-state actors involved in e-governance service delivery. At the District HQ level, samples are taken from the administrative headquarters of the district, semi-government offices like the District Rural Development Agency, the District Panchayat office (both elected representatives as well as officials), the non-state actors involved in service delivery. A similar set of samples are taken at the Sub-District, Taluk and the village level.

To each respondent, broadly, the questions that will be asked will be, after the e-governance projects as compared to the situation before,

1. Has there been increase/decrease in their authority?
2. Has there been increase/decrease in their accountability?
3. Qualitative inputs regarding the e-governance enabled service delivery
4. Qualitative inputs regarding e-governance enabled decentralization.

The quantitative responses will be captured through a Likert scale. The data is collected in such a manner that a set of questions will give the quantitative measure of the different constructs in our model. The result of the data collection can be analysed using some appropriate regression technique and the factor loadings in the model can be found out. The net increase/decrease of the authority at the different levels, between the different actors can be found out.

As to the question of how the findings link to the success of decentralisation, the first thing that will be an indicator of the success of decentralization will be the quantitative magnitude of the decentralization that may be happening. Apart from this the weightages of the different actors involved in the decentralization process and their accountability will indicate the nature of the decentralization that is happening. The qualitative outputs from the field give pointers for policy-making to make e-governance facilitate decentralization. The ultimate objective will be to suggest a model of e-governance that incorporates decentralization concerns. This is on the lines of a maturity model for e-government on the lines of Capability Maturity Model (CMM) of SEI(SEI CMM, 2008). Data collection is being done in the current phase of the doctoral work.