

Chapter 17

E-Government Implementation for Internal Efficiency: Perceptions and Experiences of Control at City of Cape Town, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes worker experiences of control in the context of e-government implementation in the City of Cape Town, South Africa. E-government is part of the governmental modernization project to enhance service delivery channels while promoting internal organizational efficiency. Based on the literature on control and surveillance in the workplace, this chapter looks at how workers perceive the e-government and how it affects their labor process. The participants in the study seem to be unclear of the direction and impact of e-government in the City of Cape Town's service provision. The research suggests that e-government has opened new possibilities and challenges for control at the City as enhanced service delivery for citizens is pursued.

INTRODUCTION

E-government is increasingly applied as a public reform measure in Africa. Governments across the world increasingly make use of the related technologies to deliver services. The term e-government broadly describes the use of internet and the World Wide Web for service delivery. With this, has been a growing need for research

that looks into the impact of the implementation of this complex phenomenon. E-government is not a neutral issue (Simões, 2012) because technology is not neutral (Whelchel, 1986). Technology has long played a critical role in the transformation of the workplace (Wood, 1992). It has long been used to maximize management control to enhance surplus value (Braverman, 1974; Littler, 1990). Management maximizes profit by controlling the

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6296-4.ch017

labor process through the power it exercises (Dufty & Fells, 1989). Control is contested between the workers and employer (Edwards, 1979) and e-government technologies provide management with managerial control systems that reinforce labor's subordination to managerial control (Willmott, 1995), but, does not completely eliminate labor's resistance. These technologies may reduce skill levels, limit training and career development, restrict information and consultation, exclude workers from decision making and set standards of output and quality (Beynon, 1974; Nichols & Beynon, 1977; Watanabe, 1990; Knights & Sturdy, 1987). However, workers may creatively resist management control during technical change. While resistance to control may become labelled as "counterproductive behavior" (Dishaw, 2002) and management may prioritize correcting it in order to maintain the organization, worker resistance is still possible.

This chapter discusses worker experiences of the control systems presented by e-government implemented by the City of Cape Town, South Africa. Using the experiences gathered through semi-structured interviews during 2013, the chapter seeks to contribute to a limited understanding on the subjective experiences of extensions of control through e-government. All interview respondents have been given pseudonyms.

BACKGROUND

In explaining the degradation of work and changes in occupations in the 21st century, Braverman (1974) saw scientific management and technology at the center of the labor process, increasing managerial control through the separation of conception and execution. The monopolization of information by the management on the shop-floor formed the source of control, while workers continued to lose skill and salaries. Through the separation of conception and execution, the rationale for

the existence of management and the means for subordinating labor to managerial control could be reinforced (Braverman, 1974). Management control strategies and use of technology would be used to maximize control over workers thereby maximizing the capitalist's interest to reduce costs and maximize profit (Braverman, 1974). While Braverman (1974) explained control based on the objective work condition, Edwards (1979) looked at the subjective sources of control beyond the objective capitalist conditions. He noted that through direct or simple control individual owners could be present on the shop floor, rewarding and punishing behavior (Edwards, 1979). With technologies that maximized the transformation of labor power into labor, technical control could maximize efficiency, enhance control over workers but create the potential for worker resistance through their shared experiences of work (Edwards, 1979). Bureaucratic control would create rules to govern the workplace thereby removing the unrestricted supervision and rewards and punishment based on established rules and procedures set out (Edwards, 1979).

In present popular and academic discussions, efficient management, labor, administration or public service is the order of the day. It is assumed that there is no need to define the concept of efficiency as it is deemed to be common-sense with people or organizations dubbed inefficient or efficient when comparing input to output in terms of resources or money (Wallis, 1989). It is also associated with productivity whether it is that of the organization or labor (Baldamus, 1961). Maximizing efficiency is the chief purpose of rational bureaucracy. Generally speaking, bureaucracy comprises a negative connotation, associated, for instance, with slow-moving organization (Greener, 2009). This is a particularly applicable concern when dealing with public sector administration. The latter is said to be serving people with deliberate obstruction and incompetence and thus is inefficient (Wallis, 1989, p. 3).

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