The Effect of Organizational Factors on the Transparency Behavior of Street-Level Bureaucrats: The Bangladesh Perspective

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Abstract: *Organizational transparency in the public sector is a major concern in the public administration discourse. Conventional wisdom says that absence of transparency stimulates corruption. Therefore, transparency is argued as a remedy to the corruption problem of public sector organizations. This paper is based on a qualitative study, which was aimed at exploring how organizational factors—culture, structure, and endowment—affected the transparency behavior of the street-level bureaucrats in Bangladesh. Employing in-depth interviews and observation methods, the study found that power distance, uncertainty avoidance tendency, discretion, and insufficient resource allocation affected the transparency activities of the street-level bureaucrats negatively while participation and team orientation mentality contributed positively.*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Public sector organizations are plagued by the problem of corruption. This problem exists in all societies irrespective of their economic and social development. Big corruption takes place at the macro level of organizations while petty corruption happens at the grassroots level where organizations deliver public services to the citizens. The media, sometimes through investigative journalism, discloses public sector corruption. However, petty corruption goes mostly unnoticed. Only service seekers at the grassroots organizations know about these irregularities. The media, along with rapid expansion of information and communication technologies (ICT), on the other hand, are playing a role in awakening people to raise their voice against corrupt practices of government organizations. Therefore, more and more voice is being raised by citizens to bring transparency in organizational activities. Traditionally, government applies the auditing approach as a means of transparency whereby organizational activities are audited by other agencies in order to check and prevent corrupt practices. But what to do if the auditing agency itself becomes involved in corrupt practices? Citizens' trust in the traditional approach to transparency through auditing and third party certification has become weak. This approach is considered less reliable because of its monologic nature. New forms of transparency are demanded where citizens as stakeholders can play an auditing role (Birchall, 2014; Press and Arnould, 2014). The objective of citizens' auditing is to make organizational activities transparent whereby anyone can see what is happening inside. However, what is meant by transparency is not clear. There is no universally accepted definition of the concept. Commonly, it refers to the access to information. Conventional wisdom says that if citizens can access information held by organizations, doing corruption becomes difficult. Rawlins (2009) defined transparency as "the deliberate attempt to make available all legally releasable information—whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal, for the purpose of enhancing the reasoning ability of publics and holding organizations accountable for their actions, policies, and practices (p.75)." Information should be timely available, accurate, and easily understandable to the readers. The purpose of making information available is to make citizens able to know about an organization's activities so that they can question its authority about these activities.

However, defining transparency as making information available to citizens is criticized because it can be less beneficial (O'Neill, 2009). Organizations may make information available to citizens in order to serve their own purpose. While disclosing information, they may hide important elements containing corrupt practices. Or they may present information in a way that is not understandable to the citizens. Critical information may be buried, intentionally, under bulk of unnecessary, irrelevant information. Transparency's purpose then remains unattained. Moreover, there is doubt about citizen's ability to process the information provided by organizations and to act upon it (Etzioni, 2010). It has almost become a myth and a value-laden concept, which is more preached than practiced (Christensen and Cornelissen, 2015). The myth makes it taken for granted that when an organization is audited (by agencies or by citizens), it becomes transparent. Disclosure of information available is one thing and having an insight of it is a different one. Making them synonymous

becomes problematic. The debate on the definition of transparency lies at the highest level of the transparency discourse. At grassroots level of organizations where services are directly delivered to citizens, transparency concerns whether public service providers violate provisions in order to get illegal benefits by concealing information. This article does not enter into the debate on transparency's definition. It takes transparency in its general meaning; i.e. the disclosure of information relating to the activities of an organization so that citizens can act upon it. At the grassroots level of organizations, citizens are more concerned about what they are entitled to, following what procedures; how organizational benefits have been distributed; and who have received those benefits. This study, therefore, explores the behavior of street-level bureaucrats regarding disclosure of information about organizational activities. It especially focuses on how organizational factors impact on this behavior.

How organizational factors affect the transparency behavior of street-level bureaucrats has remained unexplored so far. Some authors have studied several aspects of transparency such as transparency and legitimacy (De Fine Litch, 2014), transparency and trust (Grimmelikhuijsen, et al., 2013; Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer, 2014), proactive transparency and government communicators (Ruijer, 2013), transparency and participation (Welch, 2012). Pandey et al. (2007) conducted a study following mixed methods in an India state to see the effect of informing resource poor citizens about their service entitlement. Hazell and Glover (2012) studied the impact of the transparency law on the U.K. Parliament. John (2011), following an ethnographic design, looked for the meaning of transparency in the context of the transparency law of Scotland. Moreover, there are recent thought and review papers on transparency such as Christensen and Cheney (2015), Christensen and Cornelissen (2015), Fenster (2015), Flyverbom (2015), and de Vries and Sobis (2016) among others. This study looks into the transparency behavior of the bureaucrats of grassroots level public sector organizations and determinants of such behavior. It appears to be the first empirical study trying to know the causal mechanism of the transparency behavior of street-level bureaucrats.

Organizational Factors and Transparency

Several organizational factors such as culture, structure, and endowment may affect the transparency behavior of street-level bureaucrats. Organizations are influenced by their culture. O'Reilly et al. (1991) argued that when new members join an organization, they are socialized and assimilated into the organization by orienting them to the culture of the organization. Organizational culture is understood as a collective orientation towards a particular set of beliefs, behaviors, and actions. Hofstede et al. (2010: 6) defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others." Cultural researchers suggest the existence of different dimensions of organizational culture. For example, Hofstede et al. (1990) had identified six practice dimensions and three value dimensions of organizational culture. Ghosh and Srivastava (2014) had proposed seven dimensions. Therefore, there is no fixed number of dimensions of culture practiced by every organization in every society. Hofstede et al. (1990) argued that dimensions of culture are not universal. They are context-based. Moreover, Jamil (2002) argued that dimensions of culture differ in private and public sector organizations.

A review of the dimensionality of organizational culture and the possible effect of such dimensions on transparency activities of an organization, it appears that four dimensions of organizational culture may affect organizational transparency activities: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, participation, and team orientation. Power distance refers to the benign acceptance of inequality across hierarchical relations in a society. In an organizational context, power distance lies in the dominating role of those who are in the higher ranks over those who are in the lower ranks of the organization. The lower rank staff benignly accepts what the higher rank staff says. Power distance in organizational context comes from the overall societal distribution of power. Making information available to citizens for auditing actually empowers them. Therefore, transparency may redistribute power in a society (Flinders, 2000). In that case the societal power distance will affect the organizational power distance because organizational structure is a reflection of the social structure (Rong and Hongwei, 2012). Therefore, it can be argued that existence of high power distance in organizations may negatively affect the organizational transparency behavior.

Public officials, like people in general, will naturally want to be in their comfort zones. They avoid activities that may create uncertain future. Therefore, any organizational activities, which trespass on the comfort zones of the staff of an organization, are not welcomed. Studying the civil service in Bangladesh, Zafarullah (2013: 936) noted that it "has shown an extraordinary predilection to hang on to the established rather than readily accepting change in its status, structure, functions, and norms of engagement with extra-bureaucratic instruments. It has been more at ease operating in a familiar environment employing conventional practices than embracing anything new or different." This description of bureaucratic desire may represent the overall bureaucratic behavior in other contexts with similar socio-economic development. Thus, bureaucrats may consider transparency laws, which compel them to make information available to citizens, an instrument for bringing uncertainty to them. Brobbey et al. (2012: 3) argued that bureaucrats are not willing to disclose

information or grant access to information that "may be embarrassing" or "may reveal unreasonable decision-making, maladministration or corruption." Therefore, it can be argued that uncertainty (risk) avoidance tendency in bureaucrats may influence their transparency activities negatively.

Dedicated and patriotic bureaucrats may believe in people's empowerment. In a democratic society where everybody is aware of his rights, bureaucrats will not be an exception. These bureaucrats will develop citizen-oriented culture in their organizations. They will love to receive feedback from citizens to improve their services. Welch (2012) in a study found that participation positively affects transparency. By participation he referred to the organizational practice of taking stakeholders' opinions in order to make organizational decisions. Meijer (2015) argued that in the first phase of transparency history, it was transparency in a representative democracy. In the second phase, it is in a participatory democracy. In this second phase, citizens engage not only with their representatives but also with bureaucrats on the basis of rights of participation. Citizens' right to information allows them to participate in decision making through raising their voice (Meijer et al., 2012). Therefore, it could be assumed that citizen-oriented bureaucrats that allow participation in the decision-making process will have greater transparency activities.

Some people like to work in teams, in collaboration with others while some other people like to work in isolation. Individual attitude towards working in a team or working in isolation is a personality trait. In organizations, it is a work culture. Good understanding and relations among the members of an organization can enhance performance than without such understanding and relations. Lovell (1992: 403) argued for changing the hierarchically controlled managerial culture in bureaucracy into "a coaching environment with greater appreciation of interpersonal needs and the benefits of intuition and creativity." Only team works can address the interpersonal needs and harness the benefits of intuition and creativity. Transparency activities create extra workloads and team approach to work can lighten these extra workloads. So, it can be argued that team orientation of the members of the staff in an organization may impact on their transparency behavior positively.

There is an important characteristic that exists in grassroots level bureaucracy, which is recognized by the street-level bureaucracy researchers. This is discretion used by these bureaucrats. Discretion is categorized in this paper as organizational structure. Lipsky (2010) extensively studied street-level bureaucracy and argued that exercise of discretion by street-level bureaucrats is a common characteristic of them. Henderson and Pandey (2013) argued that street-level bureaucrats work in a relatively supervision-free world exercising discretionary abilities. This does not mean that the bureaucrats working in the frontline offices can do whatever they wish. Scott (1997) argued that discretion has two perspectives. At the macro level, discretion is the latitude of public agencies in implementing their policies. At the micro level, it is the range of choice of street-level bureaucrats within a set of parameters that circumscribe their behavior as the individual service provider. Higher degree of discretion can be assumed to impact transparency behavior negatively.

Resources can be considered as the fuels of an organization. Resources are categorized here as organizational endowment. They keep organizational activities running. Resources include sufficiency of fund, sufficiency of staff members, and skills of these staff members. Making information available to the citizens needs appropriate skills of the members of the staff of an organization. For example, uploading information on the web site of an office requires skills on preparing appropriate contents and how to put them on the web portal. Making information available also needs extra money. So, sufficiency in resource endowment may contribute to information disclosure activities positively.

The Context

This study was implemented in the street-level bureaucracy in Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh enacted a transparency law called right to information (RTI) act in 2009. The law states as its objective "to make provisions for ensuring transparency and accountability in all public, autonomous and statutory organizations and in other private institutions constituted or run by government or foreign financing" (BG, 2009: 7138). Under this law, the government in the same year had established an information commission to implement the provisions of the law. In the subsequent years, the information commission had promulgated several rules for implementation of the RTI act. These rules require the frontline offices of the government to publicly display citizen's charter, organizational chart listing the staff and their responsibilities, and activities of the office among other things (BG, 2010, 2011).

The research participants were Upazila (sub-district) level bureaucrats that head their respective offices. Each Upazila had representations of around 25 ministries or departments or agencies of the government. These offices distribute government benefits and sanctions to the people of their sub-district. Sixteen office heads were chosen for an interview. One of these offices is called the Upazila Nirbahi Officer's (sub-district executive officer) office or UNO office. This office is headed by a bureaucrat from the administrative service of the Bangladesh civil service (BCS) and coordinates administration and development activities of a sub-district.

The health complex[1] of the sub-district provides preventive and curative treatments to the citizens. Treatments are provided at outdoors and indoors. The family planning office provides antenatal and postnatal cares to pregnant mothers and vaccination to children. The land office and the sub-registrar office provide different services relating to land tax and buying and selling of land properties. The agriculture office, the livestock office, and the fisheries office provide different services to the farmers relating to agriculture, livestock, and fisheries respectively.

The other offices which were included in the study were primary education office, rural development office, youth development office, women affairs office, social service office, project implementation office, accounts office, and engineering office. All these offices directly provide different services to their clients.

II. METHODS

This study was aimed at exploring how organizational factors influence transparency behavior of the bureaucrats working at the Upazila level offices. Three categories of organizational factors were included. The first category consisted of several dimensions of organizational culture. The second category is termed as organizational structure; it consisted of the use of discretion by the research participants. The third category is termed as organizational endowment; it included staff, fund, and skills of the staff of the street-level offices.

Organizational culture included four dimensions—power distance, uncertainty avoidance, participation, and team orientation. Power distance was used to mean the degree of ease in boss-subordinate hierarchical relations in the organizational context. It was indicated in terms of expression of opinions in the process of making organizational decisions. Uncertainty avoidance was used to mean the attitudes of the respondents toward taking risk in organizational activities in order to get desired results in favor of citizens. Participation was understood as the tendency of the officials to take feedback from citizens in order to develop services for their satisfaction. Team orientation was referred to the attitudes of the street-level officials toward working in a team in carrying out organizational activities.

Transparency behavior in this study was defined as the activities of the street-level bureaucrats pertaining to proactive disclosure of information about their organizational activities. The proactive disclosure activities included display of the citizen's charter and job responsibilities of the staff in front of their offices and on the web portal, and publication of official decisions on notice boards and on the web portal. Under the transparency laws of the country mentioned earlier, these disclosure activities are compulsory for all of the offices mentioned in the previous section.

The findings of this paper are the results of data collected, through qualitative interviews and observation, during November and December of 2015. Heads of the sixteen offices that were covered by this study were interviewed. The interviewees were selected from five sub-districts of four districts. An interview schedule was prepared for each participant through telephone contact; the researcher himself went to the interviewee's office or place of choice to conduct the interview according to the agreed schedule. All of the interviews were unstructured. They just happened in the form of discussions. The researcher followed only a checklist so that no important issue remained unattended.

The interviews were recorded electronically and later transcribed into texts. Observation data about display of citizen's charters and information displayed on notice boards were recorded in note books. Data analysis followed a basic thematic framework. Thorough reading of the interview transcriptions helped identification of categories. The categories were coded and integrated under the relevant themes. Interpretation followed the reflexive approach. Reflexivity allows the researcher to look "inwards" and "outwards" and to explore the relationships between existing knowledge, experience of the researcher, research role, and the world around him (King and Horrocks, 2010: 125). Findings are presented in three subsections: organizational culture, organizational structure, and organizational endowment. Each of these subsections discusses how the organizational factors impact on the proactive transparency behavior.

III. FINDINGS

Organizational Culture

Interview data revealed that power distance existed across the ranks especially between the street-level bureaucrats and their higher authorities. The interview respondents did mention having power distance with their higher authorities but they did not mention having power distance with their subordinates. This researcher tried to understand power distance of the street-level bureaucrats with their higher authorities in terms of how the respondents place arguments with the higher authorities and how they disagree with them (higher

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[1] The Upazila health complex is situated at the hub-district headquarters. Like many other offices, it has extended services at the lower units of the local government system. Every Upazila consists of several unions. A union is a local government unit. The Upazila health complex maintains a subunit at this level. Even it maintains community clinics at the village level.

authorities) when needed. It is revealed that the street-level bureaucrats can hardly disagree with their higher authorities. Rather, they place arguments in submission. This behavior of the subordinates reflects also their uncertainty avoidance tendency because they don't want to be on bad terms with the higher authorities. Rather, the street-level bureaucrats want to be certain that the higher authority is happy with them. The formal hierarchical relations between authorities in an organization are influenced by social culture. The boss-subordinate formal relations are not separated from the overall social cultures where juniors respect seniors. The following excerpt taken from an interview echoes the voices of most of the respondents:

"It happens (placement of arguments). Informally opinions are exchanged. We express our opinions where laws are not followed. We do not have the culture of placing arguments openly. There are ranks in jobs. If the ranks are not so distant, strong arguments can be placed. These are considered. But usually boss-subordinate is an asymmetric relationship. The boss is above me. So, I will keep him in good humor. This is natural. If I disagree on a point, I will tell it politely. (...) Beyond that there are also cultural contexts. In our society, we do not disobey seniors. We do not argue with them publicly. The same patriarchal social phenomenon impacts our professional services. That is why we do not go for a fierce argument with a boss" (Interview 3).

Equating social cultural norms of respecting seniors with benignly accepting whatever the seniors tell to do in an organizational context can be problematic. This may accommodate corruption through acceptance of unlawful directions. Sometimes, the frontline bureaucrats get results of discussions in their favor by placing logical arguments with the higher authorities. But most of the time the higher authorities take the results in their favor. The previous excerpt tells about this. Another respondent told:

(…) *"Sometimes, the matters come to our favor, and sometimes, not. Then we don't have anything to do. In maximum cases, this happens. I don't have any scope to work going beyond the wish of the higher authority. I have to satisfy him"* (Interview 2).

Whether power distance has an impact on transparency behavior can be subjected to debates. It seems that power distance does not directly influence this behavior but it can have indirect influence. Support for high power distance is an indication of support for inequality irrespective of knowledge, expertise, or power. A subordinate can have more knowledge and expertise and can suggest better solutions to problems. If bureaucratic culture does not inculcate this belief, then this will affect citizens' empowerment through transparency laws. The principal agent (PA) theory argues that the citizens are the principals and the bureaucrats are their agents. The transparency laws are designed to support the PA theory arguments through removing the information asymmetry between the principal and the agents. But the culture is not changed yet. One bureaucrat acknowledged that the citizens still behave with them *"as they would do during the British rule, and do 'sir, sir'"* (Interview 4). Disclosure of information breaks this power distance. Thus, power distance and secrecy support each other.

Power distance is one source of uncertainty avoidance tendency. Other issues also lead the street-level bureaucrats to avoid uncertainty. The street-level bureaucrats work for fulfilling targets set by their higher authorities. If the targets are not fulfilled, then tension grips them because they have to face questions about targets at the district meetings which all officials from all the sub-districts attend. Beyond the fear of facing questions from the higher authority, they also feel the prestige issue if performance deficits occur. Each sub-district officer competes with other sub-district officers at the district. One street-level bureaucrat responsible for primary education in a sub-district described the situation in the following way:

"For primary completion exam we get a target of cent percent pass. Now we give targets (to schools) of A+ (results). If there are few A+, then it becomes a prestige issue when I come to know about good results in my neighboring Upazila. I compete with other colleagues in the district. The issues of admission and dropout create tension. We have to share information about these issues in the district meetings. These things create pressure" (Interview 9).

Uncertainty may also come from citizens and media. Disclosure of information can make the street-level bureaucrats accountable to these stakeholders. These bureaucrats will be interested in hiding information. This is a natural argument. But there are also arguments that information is kept secret for good reasons. Some street-level bureaucrats expressed fear that opportunists might create problems for them if information is disclosed through the notice boards or the web portals (Interview 3, Interview 8). They acknowledged that some authorities don't publish information because they do corruptions but for their cases nondisclosure is for good reasons. One bureaucrat told that he did not disclose some information to prevent corruption. Here is what he told:

"The Union Parishads[2] (Union Councils) are supposed to display information about its projects but it is not done. They don't do it because they do corruption. Disclosure of information will fetch public wrath for them. So, they don't do it. I will also not share publicly many things (like), for example, how much money I have

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[2] A Union Parishad (Union Council) is a local government unit under a sub-district. A sub-district (Upazila) is made up of several unions.

transferred from revenue to development fund. If I do it, then different (political) leaders will come and demand many things. They will take different projects to misuse funds. Even they will come with projects approved by a minister which I cannot ignore. So, I will not disclose this information" (Interview 3).

Another bureaucrat is confused about publishing information on notice boards. He showed an ambivalent attitude towards transparency activities. He thinks that there is no problem in publishing information on notice boards. At the same time, he also considers that, sometimes, publishing information may create problems and bring uncertain future. It can be inferred from his arguments that he actually wants to avoid uncertainty because sometimes decisions are imposed on him and disclosure of such decisions can put him in problems:

"Meeting resolutions are not disclosed but copies are sent to members. If they are published, I don't think there are any problems. (...) However, there are some issues to consider. Different members of a meeting say different things. One member may suggest something while another member may oppose it. We need to write in the resolution what the members say. There are some opportunist beneficiaries. (...) They create problems based on opinions of a specific participant of the meeting. It creates an uncertainty for the future. (Moreover), sometimes, decisions are imposed" (Interview 8).

The other two dimensions of organizational culture were citizen orientation and team orientation attitudes of the street-level bureaucrats. Citizen orientation is a tendency to take feedback from citizens. Interviewees told that they receive feedback from citizens through their field staff (Interview 3, Interview 4, Interview 7, Interview 9, Interview 11). On the other hand, team orientation can be argued as opposite of power distance. While power distance maintains hierarchy in social relations, team work breaks this distance and induces staff to collaborate with each other and help each other irrespective of hierarchies. The interviewees told that without team work they cannot sustain. As is discussed below, vacant posts in most offices compel them to work in teams and share workloads. Both these dimensions are logically supportive of transparency activities but from the interviews it was not clear because the street-level bureaucrats have a shortfall in information disclosure activities.

Organizational Structure

The street-level bureaucrats enjoy discretionary power to some extent. This power is applied within the legal framework but sometimes, by bending the laws. Discretion is understood here as the activities of the street-level bureaucrats that depend on his will by following or not following rules. A street-level bureaucrat, responsible for building infrastructures, and maintenance of roads within his jurisdiction, described his discretion in the following sentences:

"It (discretion) depends on the level of the decisions. For example, when I send maintenance estimate, my Upazila roads are more important. They will get priority. Then I will prefer Union (lower administrative unit) roads. However, in some cases, like one or two, we select (roads) out of these categories. If a new establishment is made on a rural road, then it (the rural road) gets priority. So in that sense I have discretion" (Interview 12).

Another street-level bureaucracy works for rural development through forming cooperatives among rural people, giving them training, and providing them with soft loans. These loans are given to the groups (cooperatives) repayable in certain number of installments. After complete repayment of the loans by all members of a cooperative, it can become eligible for new loans. However, sometimes, one or two members from a group become defaulters. Because of these defaulters, the entire group cannot borrow new money as per the laws. However, new loans are sanctioned in spite of having one or two defaulters using the discretion of the bureaucrats. The following excerpt of an interview tells about this discretion:

"Unofficially, we can do it. Sometimes, when one member becomes a defaulter, his unpaid money is kept secret by the inspector and new loans are issued. From these new loans the old unpaid money is then deducted. It happens at the inspector level. At my level I don't go beyond the rules and regulations of the government. We know about the unofficial deals and allow it. Otherwise things will not work. In that sense we have discretion" (Interview 4).

Discretion affects transparency activities negatively. Most street-level bureaucrats know about the legal provisions for disclosure of information through the citizen's charter, notice board, and the web portal. But they don't do these activities properly by exercising discretion. This type of discretion they enjoy because of lack of monitoring. They think that the higher authorities are not rigid in implementing the transparency activities. *"It is not implemented because the authority is not rigid about it. It has not monitoring"* (Interview 2). Another bureaucrat confessed, *"we don't feel the urge, the pressure from above, to display. In last two years, I did not get any pressure"* (Interview 9). A frontline bureaucrat told that he did not display the list of those who received soft loans but he displayed the list of the defaulters (Interview 16). Therefore, the discretion factor contributes the most to their transparency activities.

Organizational Endowment

Resources of the street-level bureaucrats vary across offices. The first component of the resources of an office is considered to be the manpower. Almost all offices whose heads had been interviewed had shortage of manpower compared to the sanctioned posts. If all the sanctioned posts of an office are fulfilled, they can work smoothly. For example, a street-level bureaucracy responsible for providing training and loans to the youth community had 7 positions in its organogram. At the time of the interview there were 5 persons posted in that office. Therefore, the 5 persons had to share the workload of the 2 vacant posts. Another frontline bureaucrat providing accounts related services gave the similar account about manpower of his office:

"There are 7 sanctioned posts in this office but we are working only 4 persons. Every day we work beyond the office hour. If all the members of the staff are posted and if we could work even 7 hours a day, then the total amount of work would stand at 49 hours a day. This amount of work would have been sufficient to offload the huge workload. Now we 4 persons have to work the total amount of works of 7 persons" (Interview 14).

Another component of the resources of a bureaucracy is the skills of the members of its staff. This study focused on skills that are needed to make information available to citizens. Therefore, the respondents were asked about IT related training. From the interviews, it is understood that generally they lack skills to do internet related activities for their office. Each Upazila has a web portal where every office has its presence. This portal describes the activities of an office, the current staff, and their contact phone numbers among other things. From the interviews it was revealed that a few bureaucrats didn't know about this web portal even. This researcher collected contact phone numbers of the interviewees from the Upazila web portal for an appointment. In some cases, when this researcher contacted the mobile phone number, the receiver of the call informed that he was transferred from the station long back from where the phone number was collected. This means that after transfer of the officer the web portal was not updated. About web portal related activities, one interviewee told the following:

"We are given a tab but line (internet) is not available. We are given a SIM card. It does not work. It is not a network problem but availability of balance. (…)I use internet in my tab with my personal money. It is not included in the office budget. It is not given to us from the Upazila budget" (Interview 1).

However, money is not a big barrier to transparency activities for all offices. Money is manageable from within the office budget. The most necessary thing is the will. Replying to a question over manageability of fund to prepare and display a citizen's charter one street-level bureaucrat told:

"The charter has value. The reality is that there is an instruction from the government that there should be a citizen's charter. But along with the instruction, the government will never be able to show that 'I have given you this budget' (to materialize the instruction). But I also consider that the government gives me contingency in different ways" (Interview 11).

Making information available is considered as a burden. It requires extra activities. With shortage of manpower and skills, information disclosure activities not only seem to be a burden but also appear as a complex job. A street-level bureaucrat providing services related to women affairs expressed her feeling about the job of information disclosure in the following way:

"Yes, citizens can be benefited (from information disclosure) but, actually, it needs time and manpower[3]. Doing it every month puts extra burden on us. Our manpower is very few. (…) We don't upload information on the web portal. Many of us don't know the usage of this thing (web portal). Moreover, internet is very weak here. (…) It is very slow and we cannot afford much time to spend on it" (Interview 13).

Lack of training on internet activities is a reason for not uploading information on the web portal for many grassroots offices. Moreover, the web portal is managed centrally. At the time of data collection, the web portal for all the offices of an Upazila was managed by a technician in the UNO office. Therefore, it requires every other office to prepare information and go to the UNO office for uploading them. This requires them extra time. As the education officer told:

"We have limitation of time. We do so much work. We don't have required manpower. I don't have skills to upload information on the web portal. I have awareness but don't have the skills. We should be given the administration password of our part of the portal" (Interview 9).

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Bangladesh's public administration still carries the legacy of the British colonial tradition. Its bureaucracy was guided by the colonial administration's secrecy law until the RTI act was enacted in 2009. The RTI law has suddenly confronted the culture of secrecy with the opposite culture of openness. This has created a clash of opposite values. With regard to transparency activities, the public administration in the country is going through a period of transition. This research has found an ambivalent attitude of the street-level bureaucrats

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[3] The office had 3 staff including the officer against 4 sanctioned posts.

towards transparency behavior. This is not unnatural because of the transition from a culture of secrecy to a culture of openness. The cultural change will take some more time to become stabilized in openness.

Organizational factors, included in the study like culture, structure, and endowment, were found less supportive of transparency activities. Power distance appears to be high. There is also high tendency in the street-level bureaucrats to avoid uncertainty. Although they appear to be citizen oriented through taking feedback from the citizens to improve their services, the other two culture dimensions work as barriers to taking transparency activities. These bureaucrats have developed team oriented mentality perhaps because of the huge workload they face due to shortage of manpower. Team orientation mentality was not found to have significant impact on their transparency behavior.

The street-level bureaucrats under the study had moderate to high degree of discretion. This discretion is a result of lack of monitoring their activities. Their immediate higher authorities are stationed in the district headquarters. Because of the distance between the district headquarters and the sub-districts under each district, the street-level bureaucrats live in a supervision-free environment. The existence of this supervision-free environment contributes to their high degree of discretion particularly with regard to implementation of the provisions laid out in the transparency laws. The deficits that the street-level bureaucrats have in their transparency behavior are to a large extent a result of the organizational structure i.e., their discretion with regard to the disclosure of information.

Resources were found to vary across the street-level bureaucracies under the study. Manpower and their skills affect transparency activities of these bureaucracies more than the shortage of fund they face. Internet-based transparency activities appear to them as burdens because of lack of their skills in web related activities. This research contributes to the understanding of transparency behavior of the street-level bureaucracies. It finds that culture dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance tendency affects transparency behavior negatively while citizen orientation and team works can have positive impact. Existence of wide discretion can put the street-level bureaucrats' transparency behavior at their will. For facilitation of better transparency activities, the street-level bureaucrats should be endowed with requisite manpower and appropriate skills.

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