

# Emotional Bureaucrats: The Paradox of Weberian Bureaucracy and Emotions in the Indian Railways

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## **Abstract**

Weber's ideal-type bureaucrat executes the business of the state rationally and dispassionately. Yet, in practice, the professional lives of bureaucrats are often deeply imbued with emotions. Drawing on fieldwork conducted over two years in India, this article examines the relationship between emotions and organizational structure in the Indian Railways. From fear and helplessness to jealousy and pride, I argue that the varied and powerful emotional experiences of Indian Railway officers stem partly from structural factors within the bureaucracy itself, particularly its organizational structure. Feelings of powerless and a sense that "bureaucrats are beggars" can be traced to the fragmented organizational structure of the Indian Railways, which sharply constrains the authority of individual officers. A pervasive "fear of being questioned" is fueled by the frequent "weaponization" of anti-corruption tools and intricate rules to carry out personal vendettas. Ultimately, this article shows how efforts to produce a more Weberian, rationally organized bureaucracy can backfire, contributing to the very emotions they aimed to limit.

## **Keywords**

Emotions, bureaucracy, organizations, Weber, Indian Railways

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## Introduction

The absence of emotion is central to Weber's conception of the modern bureaucratic ideal-type: "Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly, the more it is 'dehumanized,' the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation" (Weber, 1978: 978). Weber viewed emotions as not merely superfluous but in fact fundamentally antithetical to the rational functioning of bureaucratic machinery, which must operate "according to calculable rules and 'without regard for persons'" (1978: 975).

Yet, in practice, the professional lives of bureaucrats are suffused with emotion. Inspired by Arlie Hochschild's (1979, 1983) seminal work on emotional labor, a large body of scholarship has shown that "emotions are an integral and inseparable part of everyday organizational life" (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995: 98). Indeed, some scholars have questioned the antagonistic relationship between emotion and rationality in organizations. For example, Putnam and Mumby (1993:41) argue that "[b]ureaucracy perpetuates the belief that rationality and the control of emotions are not inseparable but also necessary for effective organizational life."

I argue that emotions are not only an integral part of modern bureaucracies but that, paradoxically, core features of Weber's rational-bureaucratic ideal-type can produce the very emotions they seek to eliminate. The depersonalization of the individual bureaucrat, the strict enforcement of bureaucratic rules, and the fostering of a bureaucratic ethos based on clearly delineated hierarchies and protocols are examples of Weberian bureaucratic features that can, in practice, generate emotions such as fear, helplessness, jealousy, and pride. These emotions produced by the structural features of Weberian bureaucracy can, in turn, undermine the effective functioning of the organization itself, contradicting Weber's original theory of bureaucracy.

This article examines the contemporary empirical case of the Indian Railways (IR), one of the largest state bureaucracies in the world with over 1.2 million regular employees (Indian Railways, 2022), to investigate the relationship between emotions and Weberian bureaucracy. Drawing on fieldwork conducted over two years in India, including in-depth interviews with 33 current and former IR officials and the analysis of internal organizational records, I show how the day-to-day work of IR officers is deeply imbued with emotions that stem in part from structural features of the bureaucracy itself. IR's comprehensive set of formal rules and procedures is designed to minimize the role of personal discretion, in line with Weber's original theory. Yet, the highly detailed nature of these rules and their strict enforcement, combined with the organization's fragmented structure, severely limit the ability of IR officers to act or coordinate action with other parts of the organization, leading to feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. IR's anti-corruption tools, originally designed to ensure a separation between official work and private interests, are frequently used as a "weapon" for bureaucratic infighting, generating a pervasive culture of fear and a conservative attitude toward risk-taking.

I then show how the emotional consequences of Weberian structural features in the Indian Railways diminishes, rather than strengthens, the organization's effectiveness. Whereas Weber argued that depersonalization and rationalization serve to improve organizational capacity, in the case of IR such efforts frequently backfire by contributing to emotions that reduce individual motivation and constrain the ability of the organization to achieve its goals, such as the safe operation of train services and the construction of new railway lines. The paradoxical relationship between emotions and bureaucratic rationality has implications beyond the context of the Indian Railways wherever large bureaucracies have sought to adopt similar Weberian structural features. This article challenges existing sociological theories of Weberian bureaucracy (Evans and Rauch,

1999) and answers Turner and Stet's (2006: 48) call to integrate micro- and meso-level structural analysis while contributing to emerging scholarship on how bureaucracies work in practice in the Global South (Aiyar and Bhattacharya, 2016; Author XXXX; Mangla, 2022; McDonnell, 2020; Pritchett and Woolcock, 2004; Rodrik, 2008).

### *Emotions and Bureaucracy*

Weber famously argued that the role of emotions would diminish in large organizations with the rise of modern rational bureaucracies characterized by “the dominance of a spirit of formalistic impersonality: ‘Sine ira et studio,’ without hatred or passion, and hence without affection or enthusiasm” (1978: 225). Specifically, Weber (1978: 223) contended that the rational-bureaucratic form operating through formal rules and procedures “makes possible a particularly high degree of calculability,” rendering it “superior both in intensive efficiency and in the scope of its operations.” As a result, Weber believed the emotionless rational-bureaucratic form would ultimately come to dominate because it was “superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability” (223).

In contrast, a wave of research on the sociology of emotions in the latter half of the twentieth century drawing on Emile Durkheim and Erving Goffman (Turner and Stets, 2006) reframed emotions not as obstacles to rationalistic organizational efficiency but rather as “an integral and inseparable part of everyday organizational life” (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995: 98). Arlie Hochschild's (1979, 1983) notion of “emotional labor” emphasized the instrumentality of emotional performance in social interactions. Theodore Kemper's (1978) power-status theory and Randall Collin's (Collins, 2004) concept of “interaction ritual chains” showed how self-reinforcing feedback loops can emerge between emotions and other social processes. Thomas Scheff's (1990)

and Jonathan Turner's (1999) work sought to understand the role of emotions in motivating social action. However, despite "advances in the development of broad meta-theoretical perspectives," Eduardo Bericat (2016: 505) has argued that the sociology of emotions as a subfield needs to make greater progress in "contributing substantive theories on concrete phenomena and social emotional processes."

One substantive area that has been the focus of recent scholarship is the role of emotions in interactions between public servants and other social actors, such as citizens and politicians. Mark Graham's (2002) seminal study of the interaction between the Swedish welfare system and a new wave of refugee immigration revealed a complex set of emotional dynamics, including guilt, envy, and differing expectations of "emotional dues." In Camilla Bank Friis's (2023) study of bus ticket inspectors in Denmark, public employees use displays of emotion strategically in interactions with passengers to manage the risks of cooperation versus conflict. Deepak Nair's (2020) study of bureaucrats working in the Secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) shows how civil servants can leverage emotional displays of subordination to political leaders to help create a space for more hidden networks of communication. Other work on interactions between citizens and bureaucratic actors has emphasized the emotional consequences of these encounters, such as frustration and anger in response to "bureaucratic red tape" (Hattke et al., 2020).

While progress has been made on understanding emotions and bureaucracies in terms of interactions between bureaucrats and external actors, much less is known about the emotional lives of public servants *within* bureaucracies. What types of emotional dynamics exist among bureaucrats in interactions with one another? How do these compare with the more well-known emotional responses to citizens or politicians in encounters with bureaucrats? To some extent,

findings from scholarship on emotions in private-sector organizations, such as corporations, may apply to public-sector bureaucratic organizations, such as the role of leaders in shaping a broader organizational climate (Ashkanasy and Dorris, 2017). Yet, the emotional dynamics within state bureaucracies may be distinctive due to their public service goal orientation and differing organizational structure.

## Methods

To understand the role of emotions within contemporary state bureaucracies, particularly in the Global South, this article examines the empirical case of the Indian Railways (IR), drawing on fieldwork in India conducted over two years from 2017 to 2019. During fieldwork, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 33 current and former IR officers across the organization, including engineers, project managers, accountants, financial analysts, planning officials, and operations staff. Nearly all interviews were conducted in person at India's Ministry of Railways in Delhi or at IR regional offices in Delhi and Hyderabad. I often conducted multiple interviews with each officer, and interviews typically lasted for one to several hours each. I also conducted supplementary interviews with researchers at Indian institutions and industry experts, including railway specialists at international development agencies. In addition to interviews, I examined a wide range of primary source materials, including internal organizational records, handbooks and procedural manuals, Indian Parliamentary budgets, Indian Railways Year Books, and historical archival records from the Ministry of Railways library. These were supplemented with additional materials, including domestic and international news coverage as well as publicly commissioned investigative reports on IR.

While IR officers frequently spoke with me with a surprising degree of candor—indeed some seemed eager to share their perspectives to an interested outside observer—I took several measures to ensure rigor and objectivity in my analysis of their statements. By speaking with a wide range of current and former IR officers as well as railway experts outside the organization, I was able to cross-validate information I received across multiple sources. For example, when several engineers blamed an accountant for frequently rejecting their budget requests, I spoke with that accountant to hear his explanation (he blamed the engineers for submitting incomplete budget requests). I also used independent news reports to corroborate claims I heard during interviews, such as disputes between different engineering divisions, and cite these sources in this article accordingly. It is a testament to the openness and intellectual curiosity of many IR officers that they were willing to share their personal experiences with me. Towards the end of my fieldwork, I had the privilege of being invited to present my findings at the Ministry of Railways itself and received valuable feedback from senior IR officers.

## Empirical Case Study: Indian Railways

### *Weberian Features*

The Indian Railways exemplifies many key features of Weber's rational-bureaucratic ideal-type and would score highly on many dimensions of Evans and Rauch's (1999) "Weberianness scale." IR employs a meritocratic system of recruitment and promotion for its officers, including a highly competitive set of nationwide recruitment exams and a formal work performance evaluation system. IR officers possess specialized technical knowledge through their education and training, often entering the organization with engineering degrees. IR officers tend to remain within the organization for the duration of their careers and are motivated by an overall commitment to the

organization as well as their own professional advancement. As a bureaucratic organization, IR operates according to formal rules and procedures codified in handbooks numbering in the hundreds of pages, which are widely known and enforced by specialized bureaucrats, such as financial officers. In true Weberian fashion, IR officers are widely regarded (and self-regarded) as a special class within Indian society with “distinctly elevated social esteem vis-a-vis the governed” (Weber, 1978: 959). Yet, these distinctly Weberian organizational features of the Indian Railways do not eliminate or diminish the role of emotions in bureaucratic life but rather produce and amplify them.

### *Fear of “Being Questioned” and Risk-Taking*

The most powerful and frequently cited emotion, raised unprompted in nearly every discussion I had with IR officers, was fear. I was told by multiple IR officers that they were perpetually “afraid of being questioned” for making decisions that might be construed as corrupt or otherwise in violation of formal rules and procedures. Two major central government oversight agencies were frequently cited. The first agency was “Vigilance,” which consists of a set of anti-corruption institutions covering all Indian central government agencies and headed by an independent Central Vigilance Commission (CVC). Empowered through the Prevention of Corruption Act of 1988 among other pieces of legislation, India’s anti-corruption institutions were designed to combat public-sector corruption through embedded anti-corruption teams and Chief Vigilance Officers within major central government agencies, including IR. The second agency was the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), a central government agency similar to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States with the power to investigate national-level crimes, including corruption cases.



While these anti-corruption institutions were originally designed as a check against corruption, they have been turned into powerful bureaucratic weapons frequently used by IR officers to carry out personal vendettas and exert power over others, contributing to an atmosphere of fear. The personal consequences for individual officers under investigation are severe. As several former IR officers explained to me, the work of any officer under investigation grinds to a halt as all other officers are afraid of working with him or her and becoming “tainted” by association. Investigations often require a year or more to complete, during which time an officer becomes a “passenger” in his or her own position, unable to carry out any work and unable to progress up the ranks of the organization. Even IR officers in retirement or at the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy, such as members of the Railway Board, can become the target of an anti-corruption investigation.

What may be harmful for individual officers can be even more destructive for the work of the organization as a whole, a problem highlighted in multiple high-level government reports (Debroy et al., 2015; Mohan, 2001; Tandon, 1994). The pervasive, organization-wide “fear psychosis,” as one former IR officer referred to it, that emerges as a result hampers the work of the bureaucracy because officers are afraid to take risks that might speed up work yet leave them individually vulnerable to “being questioned.” One senior officer working on the high-profile Dedicated Freight Corridor project described the fear of a potential CBI investigation as having a “chilling effect” as the organization. This same officer said this resulted in a culture where IR officers “do the right thing rather than the correct thing,” by which he meant following the rules to the letter rather than doing what was best for the project. As a result, IR officers “stick strictly to the rules even though this causes delays.” Another former IR officer confirmed to me: “If you make a decision that is a loss to the Railways, even if it actually helps, it may be seen as corruption.”

A high-level advisor to the Prime Minister noted that this problem is not unique to IR but applies across all Indian government agencies after the Prevention of Corruption Act of 1998. This advisor said the fear of an investigation made everyone “risk-averse” because government officials do not want to be accused of “something bad,” yet “many actions have unforeseen consequences that might only appear twenty years down the road.” Rather than taking such risks, officers opt to tread lightly in all professional interactions, careful to avoid antagonizing a co-worker lest they initiate a corruption inquiry.

IR officers provided two concrete ways in which this fear hampered the effectiveness of the organization. One is the dilution of the career evaluation and promotion system. Officers receive periodic performance reviews from their superiors called “Annual Performance Appraisal Reviews” (APARs), which form a key component of their professional records and are used to determine promotions. However, these reviews are not confidential and can be viewed by subordinates who, if dissatisfied, can launch a complaint to a supervisory body such as the anti-corruption team. Because superior officers fear becoming the target of a complaint, they write conservative performance evaluations and nearly always award the maximum performance score—a five out of five—rendering the entire evaluation process useless, according to a deputy chief engineer I interviewed at a regional railway bureau. A former senior officer in the Ministry of Railways confirmed that everyone received an “outstanding” on their performance reviews, which resulted in a tenure-based rather than merit-based system of promotion. Another former senior officer explained to me that as a result, all the officers at the top of the hierarchy were “yes-men” who played it safe throughout their careers while all the risk-taking officers had been targeted by corruption investigations.

The second way in which this culture of fear hampers the work of IR is in land acquisition. Land acquisition is a frequent cause of delays for railway projects as well as other infrastructure projects, particularly when disputes over compensation and land rights turn into lengthy court cases (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2014; Singh, 2010, 2012; Wahi et al., 2017). A senior IR officer working on the Dedicated Freight Corridor project explained to me that pricing formulas for assessing land values are often far below market values, which leaves landowners facing compulsory land requisition deeply dissatisfied. Yet IR officers are loathe to raise compensation values for fear that “people will question your actions” and ask “why you favored one place over another.” Another former IR officer confirmed to me that because IR officers are “scared of being accused of corruption,” they are quick to defer to the court system for any land compensation disputes, which is significantly more time-intensive but removes individual responsibility from the officers.

### *“Bureaucrats are Beggars” and Feelings of Powerlessness*

The other side to this pervasive climate of fear is an abiding sense of powerlessness vis-à-vis other members of the bureaucracy. I was surprised to discover the extent to which the experience of bureaucrats themselves mirrored the experiences of average citizens dealing with state bureaucrats. The bluntness and indifference, the Simmelian “*blasé* outlook,” that we are so familiar with as “end-users” of public services struggling to obtain a document or certificate from a government bureaucrat also characterizes the experience of bureaucrats themselves within IR in their interactions with one another.

The most striking example of this is the relationship between civil engineers who work on construction and the frequently maligned “finance guy” in the accounting department of the same

organization, who is tasked with ensuring projects remain within budget. There exists an inherent tension between the mandates of these two parts of the bureaucracy: the civil engineers in the construction department are individually assessed based on progress towards project completion whereas the accounting staff are assessed based on cost savings and budgetary discipline. The challenge of balancing across multiple competing goals and interests is not unique to IR as an organization but rather common to many public-sector organizations (Dixit, 2002, 2012).

However, rather than coordinate with one another in pursuit of common organizational goals, each part of the IR bureaucracy treats the other as if they were emissaries from different countries. Budgetary requests are submitted by civil engineers to their respective finance departments for approval. These requests are then frequently denied due to minor issues such as missing sections and are sent back for another round of revisions and reviews. According to an IR finance officer I spoke with, the fault lay with the civil engineers who *knowingly* submit incomplete paperwork in their haste to move projects along quickly. There is a double irony in that, in both cases, the lack of cooperation is self-defeating. For the finance department, their chronic rejection of budget requests causes project delays, which results in escalating costs. For the construction department, their attempts to speed through paperwork triggers more budget rejections and thus more project delays. In the end, each part of the bureaucracy treats the other at arm's length rather than sitting down together to work through common issues.

Another example is the arm's length relationship between the construction department and the traffic department, which manages the day-to-day operations of trains on existing lines. The construction department occasionally requires the assistance of the traffic department, which has the authority to create "blocks" of time during which train traffic is halted or diverted and maintenance work can be carried out on operating lines. The traffic department occasionally

requires the assistance of the construction department to conduct repairs of existing track or build a second track. Yet both departments treat each other as if they worked in separate organizations, even though they are both part of the same regional railway bureau. As one traffic officer explained to me, maintenance requests by the traffic department are not made directly to the construction department but rather escalated to the highest levels of the IR bureaucracy, such as the Railway Board, or even the highest levels of the Indian central government, such as the Planning Commission in Delhi, before being transmitted back down to the construction department of the same regional railway bureau. This lack of coordination, or in some cases outright conflict, between the construction and traffic departments can have deadly consequences. For example, a major train accident on the Utkal Express in 2017 that caused 22 deaths was found to be the result of a dispute between the IR construction department and the traffic department, which led to maintenance work being performed on an active rail line (The Indian Express, 2017).

Because coordination across different parts of the IR bureaucracy is so difficult and because formal rules within the organization are so detailed and intricate, IR officers frequently expressed a sense of powerlessness within the organization. As one civil engineer characterized it to me, “bureaucrats are beggars,” frequently pleading with their fellow officers in other parts of the organization to provide the authorization or final piece of paperwork they need to carry out their own work. Many IR officers complained to me that they had originally joined the organization as engineers to do engineering work but instead found themselves becoming full-time experts in filling out paperwork. They bemoaned the countless intricate rules they had to follow and the ways in which other members of the organization, such as the “finance guy,” could hold up an important project seemingly on a whim by citing a lack of adherence to a specific rule. Weber’s hopes that a structure of impartial rules could reduce the frivolity of personal discretion runs up against a

contrasting reality: rules actually increase the power of the personal. As a result, bureaucrats are reduced to begging each other for approvals—or at least for someone not to block their work. One civil engineer stressed the importance of maintaining good relationships with other IR officers to minimize the risks to a project—and to oneself—of opposition within another part of the organization. This problem of relationship management extends at least several decades back in the organization. An IR report on the construction of the Koraput-Rayagada railway line completed in 1998 also complained that the “relationship between executive and finance came under strain” and that project delays worsened as “matters got bogged down in correspondence” (South Eastern Railway, 2002).

The source of this powerlessness lies in the very organizational structure of the Indian Railways. Within each regional railway bureau, there exists a finance department that is headed by a Financial Advisor and Chief Accounting Officer (FA&CAO) who is in charge of budget discipline and rule enforcement. This finance head does not report directly to his or her regional bureau chief but instead answers to an independent Financial Commissioner, who sits on the Railway Board in Delhi. This separate chain of command was a deliberate creation of the British during colonial rule as a means of checking railway spending. But the result today is the bifurcation of the organization into two mutually antagonistic components, a construction side geared towards building and a finance side geared towards budget discipline, without any balancing or coordination mechanisms between them. When I asked several civil engineers why they did not simply report the perceived obstructionism of the finance department to their superiors, they explained that this would only damage a crucial relationship where they were used to pleading for approvals from finance officers.

### *Jealousy, Rivalry, and “Nuisance Value”*

The Indian Railways as an organization is divided into multiple groups and loci of power that often compete by blocking each other’s work out of jealousy, territoriality, or in retaliation for a perceived personal slight. One well-known set of divisions among IR officers is the cadre service system, which produces frequent bureaucratic conflict and has been noted in multiple government reports (Debroy et al., 2015; Mohan, 2001; Tandon, 1994). IR officers join the organization as part of a service cadre based on technical expertise such as the Indian Railway Service of Electrical Engineers (IRSEE), the Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers (IRSME), and the Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS). Originally created by the British to ensure specialized technical proficiency, these service groups have solidified over time into interest groups with their own “empires.” To this day, a balance of power within IR, especially at the level of the Railway Board members including the Chairman, is maintained through delicate negotiations across the various service groups who are sometimes portrayed as encroaching on each other’s turf (Arora, 2018).

These various bureaucratic jealousies and rivalries have manifested themselves through deliberate obstructionist actions that delay critical railway work. One recent example was IR’s effort to convert existing diesel-powered train lines to an all-electric system. Naturally, this project was given to IR’s electrical engineering division (IRSEE). However, this created jealousy and resentment among the Mechanical Engineers (IRSME) who opposed the project until they were later given the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail project as a form of compensation, according to a former member of the Railway Board (Chan, 2023).

Another more historical example is the construction of the Koraput-Rayagada rail line in the 1990s. A special-purpose organization was formed, separate from the existing IR bureaucratic structure, to speed up construction work. But this new organizational unit was viewed as an

“intruder” and treated with “hostility” by the regional railway bureau, South Eastern Railway, that would normally have had jurisdiction over this project (South Eastern Railway, 2002). Even after this new organizational unit was found to be more productive, it was ultimately shut down out of fear by other parts of the IR bureaucracy that it might “gradually grow into a separate power-centre,” and the bureaucratic infighting over the status of this new organization resulted in a project delay of two years (South Eastern Railway, 2002).

In addition to the divisions among service cadres, there also exists a political-bureaucratic division within the organizational leadership of the Indian Railways between the railway minister, a political appointee, and the Railway Board, a committee of top-level bureaucrats who oversee most of the regular work of the organization. Personal conflicts between IR’s political and bureaucratic leaders also cause delays to railway projects and often need to be resolved at the highest levels of the Indian federal government. For example, a 2018 clash between then Railway Minister Piyush Goyal, who supported the rollout of a new European-standards train control system, and the Finance Department of IR as well as members of the Railway Board who opposed it ultimately had to be settled by the prime minister himself (Dastidar, 2018; Jha, 2018). In the construction of the Konkan Railway in the 1990s, a dispute between the railway minister and the Railway Board over the use of optical fiber cables resulted in the suspension of the project in the middle of implementation and was nearly escalated to the President of India (Konkan Railway Corporation Limited, 1999).

At a more granular level, the ways in which these rivalries and vendettas are meted out are referred to as “nuisance value” within IR. Nuisance value, as explained to me by one officer and corroborated by others, is the power to cause problems and delay the work of others. Because “time is the most important resource” in the work of the organization, the power to delay translates



into a form of leverage over other officers. As another officer explained to me, one must be careful not to personally upset other officers in the course of one's work. Otherwise, this could trigger a cycle of "action-reaction" where one's actions might provoke potentially devastating bureaucratic retaliation by another officer, such as an anti-corruption complaint. Another former IR officer explained to me that an excessive amount of time and energy is spent on these kinds of "bureaucratic games" rather than on the actual work of the organization. Indeed, these distortionary power "games" were cited not only within the bureaucracy but widely across the political-bureaucratic nexus where Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assemblies also deliberately stall ongoing railway projects, such as the high-profile Dedicated Freight Corridor.

While these emotional flare-ups and acts of internal sabotage may appear to be contingent on the specific personalities and relationships at play, this damaging pattern of jealousy and rivalry can be traced back to structural factors within the organizational structure of IR itself. The cadre divisions discussed earlier, which fragment the identities and allegiances of IR officers, are reified by a segmented leadership and promotion structure that prioritizes within-cadre rank over individual performance. The chronic tensions between the railway minister and the Railway Board stem in part from an ambiguous division of responsibility between IR's political and bureaucratic leadership. Ultimately, the ease with which personal enmities can translate into consequential bureaucratic violence stems from the disproportionate veto powers embedded within the labyrinth of rules and procedures of IR that essentially arms every bureaucrat with a nuclear button.

### *Prestige and Hierarchy*

Despite their complaints about the many structural disfunctions that plague the organization, my interviewees frequently cited the personal pride and esteem they held in their work and in their

positions as elite civil servants. One IR officer who worked for thirteen years in the country's northeast region where transportation connectivity is limited recounted to me the tremendous pride he felt upon completing a new railway line to a previously underserved village. "It changed people's lives," he explained to me, because "suddenly you could sell to a much bigger market." Another IR officer who had worked in Mumbai breathlessly recounted a story of how he managed to save a major project there from being terminated due to environmental issues. When he had heard that the environmental clearance for a major project might suddenly be revoked by a Supreme Court justice, this officer recalled feeling "completely crestfallen." But when he managed to negotiate an agreement with that Supreme Court justice that preserved the project's environmental permit in exchange for the creation of a special wildlife protection fund, he felt an overwhelming sense of relief and pride that he had managed to rescue a project he had felt so personally committed to.

The officers of the Indian Railways are acutely aware of their prestigious social status as elite members of their nation's civil service. IR officers share many markers of prestige with other elite "Group A" civil service groups in the Indian central government, such as the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), including recruitment through a highly selective exam and interview process, special state-provided perquisites such as housing and medical services, and secondments or appointments to other high-level positions within the Indian government, in international organizations such as the World Bank, and in the private sector such as seats on corporate boards. Many IR officers are members of exclusive members' clubs such as the Civil Services Officers' Institute (CSOI) and the Delhi Gymkhana. As one former IR officer explained to me, there are three members' clubs for Railways officers, but the more prestigious CSOI and Gymkhana can take years or even decades to join. Some applicants are granted membership after they have already

passed away. The active presence of IR officers within these rarified circles is both a testament to, and a reinforcing factor behind, their broader social prestige.

Within IR, personal respect for hierarchy and seniority are powerful cultural norms. Promotion through the organization primarily depends on tenure within the bureaucracy. Indeed, the combination of minimum tenure requirements and a mandatory retirement age of 60 produces a frantic race to the top of the hierarchy and short tenures at senior positions, such as membership on the Railway Board. As a result of the narrow career window produced by these tenure and age requirements, Railway Board members and General Managers who head regional railway bureaus frequently serve in their positions for a year or two before retiring, leading to high turnover and a lack of long-term investment.

Moreover, an informal system of seniority based on each officer's year of joining the organization (known as one's recruitment "batch") trumps formal reporting hierarchies, often undermining the authority of senior leadership. One former IR officer explained to me that the Principal Heads of Departments (PHODs) are subordinate to General Managers (GMs) according to formal organizational charts. Yet in practice they may be more senior than GMs according to tenure and recruitment year. For example, a GM may be from the 1980 batch, but his head of electrical engineering may be from the more senior 1978 batch. As a result, the GM has little ability to compel an officer who is theoretically his subordinate to follow his orders and must instead resort to cajoling and persuasion. The power of seniority was strikingly evident to me in my observations of interactions between officers of different ranks. An interviewee might wave off a subordinate with barely a glance during my interview but then interrupt our discussion to answer a call from a senior officer, which often consisted of a one-sided monologue from the more senior officer punctuated by the repeated "hain ji sir" of acknowledgement from the junior officer.

## Conclusions

It was nearly a century ago when Weber, inspired by European and especially Prussian bureaucracies, proclaimed the impending dominance of emotionless, impersonal bureaucrats as part of the “iron cage” of rationality. Yet, today we find evidence of the opposite sociological phenomenon in the Global South (and perhaps in the Global North as well *contra* Weber), where the proliferation of bureaucratic forms renders the public agents tasked with carrying out the work of the state into something very different from emotionless components of a bureaucratic machine. Instead, as the case of the Indian Railways demonstrates, an increase in the “Weberianness” (Evans and Rauch, 1999) of the state—from the hardening of rules and procedures to the establishment of monitoring and auditing apparatuses designed to root out private interference in public matters—can engender a dizzying array of emotions that deeply affect the work of the organization and its cultural milieu. The fear, jealousy, rivalry, mistrust, and pride that suffuses the professional lives of Indian Railways officers is not merely an additional layer of bureaucratic operation but rather endemic to nearly every aspect of their daily work.

Several questions follow with implications for the sociology of emotions in organizations and the role of organizational structure in the state. Why have efforts to “bureaucratize” the state and attenuate the personal and emotional element in the work of public officials backfired so dramatically in cases such as the Indian Railways? How might the emotional energies of ambitious, career-driven personalities be re-channeled toward more productive and cooperative activities that support the overall aims of the organization? This paper has focused on tracing how organizational structure affects emotions and organizational culture. But how might a shift in culture lead to a change in organizational structure? Ultimately, more detailed empirical studies of contemporary

bureaucracies across the Global South are needed to better understand the relationship between emotions of public servants and the organizational worlds they inhabit.

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