



“THE INFORMATION HAS MOVED AWAY FROM HOME”

CONCEPTIONS ABOUT HOW AN OUTSOURCING POLICY AFFECTS PUBLIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Traditionally, public records have been handled and preserved by each creating or receiving agency separately. The existing legal framework in Sweden is still based on this principle. However, recent developments – digital technologies paired with new ways of working – create a more dispersed and complex body of archives. What this means for the practical records management can be discussed. This paper explores the potential consequences of implementing an outsourcing policy at a public agency, by focusing on issues actualized and seen as important by employees. The aim is to understand how the creation of public archives may be affected. The chosen research approach, phenomenography, aims to capture variation in perceptions and describe the range of possible interpretations on a particular topic. Semi structured interviews were conducted with 15 representatives from the agency. The result identified seven matters of particular importance, including effects on information governance, knowledge transfer, and the role of a public agency.

Keywords: archives creation, business information systems, information governance, organizational boundaries, outsourcing, public agencies, records management

1. Introduction

Both private and public organizations increasingly rely on *outsourcing*¹ to fulfil their mission. There are different reasons to outsource, for example to improve production efficiency, service quality, and enhance process responsiveness (McCarthy, Silvestre, & Kietzmann, 2013). *Public sector outsourcing*² has been described as one of the major policies associated with New Public Management (Alonso, Clifton, & Díaz-Fuentes, 2015), a mechanism for government service provision, which “(...) enables the

¹ The buying in of components, sub-assemblies, finished products, and services from outside suppliers rather than by supplying them internally (Doyle, 2016)

² The transfer of service provision from the public to an external organization (which is typically in the private sector but may also be an in-house team) (Jensen & Stonecash, 2005)

government to retain control over the specification of the service, the management of the contract and the evaluation of the service provider's performance" (Jensen & Stonecash, 2005, p. 769). Outsourcing in the public sector can have consequences for the creation of public archives. In the case presented here, the construction and maintenance of national infrastructure is being outsourced, which means that records about the infrastructure, that would have formerly been created by the agency, is now created by contractors. The records should still be managed and preserved with consideration to business needs, democratic transparency, and the needs of future researchers, which makes it relevant to ask what considerations the policy actualizes. Initiatives similar to this particular implementation of an outsourcing policy at a public agency in Sweden, can be found in many other countries, why the result can be of relevance in other contexts as well.

The paper is part of a research project funded by the Swedish Transport Administration. Their responsibility is to "(...) create and decide on policy, manage the transportation systems, and order and procure new infrastructure" (Swedish Transport Administration inquiry, 2009, p. 12). The research focus and research questions are informed by the needs and priorities of the agency, in cooperation with the researchers involved in the project.

The concept of *record*, is here defined as "recorded information in any media or format, providing reliable evidence of human activity" (Crockett, 2016, p. 1). Records can have *evidential* as well as *informational* value (Shepherd, 2003). *Records management* is "the field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records" (Swedish Standards Institute, 2001). A large part of the records created in the business of state agencies are *public records*, a concept which in the context of the present study is defined according to the Swedish freedom of information legislation as "any written or pictorial matter or recording which may be read, listened to, or otherwise comprehended only using technical aids" (SFS, 1949:105)³. These records should be preserved, kept in order and handled in ways that ensure the right of free access to public records; the information requirements of the public jurisdiction and administrations; and research requirements (SFS, 1990:782). Making a distinction between different types of records (e.g. public, private, and corporate) is not unique to Sweden: specific rules for public records exist in most countries around the globe. Which records are considered public depends on the cultural and legal framework. Some records become public after a certain time period, prior to which they are to be kept confidential.

2. Scope and objective

This paper discusses the potential consequences that an outsourcing policy can have for records management. It does so by interviewing employees that are involved in making decisions and recommendations in this area. The paper builds on the assumption that the first step in striking a balance between legal requirements, intended outcomes, and public response to a policy, is to determine which issues need to be discussed and

³ This is a broad definition and it is important to note that though the general rule is that any citizen has the right to access these records from the time of creation or receipt, there are also rules regarding official secrecy. Restrictions on access can be made for reasons related to personal integrity, national security, crime prevention, and more (SFS, 2009:400).

decided on. However, this had not been done prior to implementing the outsourcing policy. The aim of the paper is to highlight what issues the policy actualizes.

The research approach, phenomenography, allows for a special focus on variation and the range of possible interpretations. The Swedish Transport Administration is used as a case to capture a snapshot image of how a group of employees perceive the existing and future handling of records in relation to the outsourcing policy: which issues do they see arising and what are their thoughts on how these issues could be addressed?

2.1. Information and records

Data and *information* are usually defined as two terms directly building on each other, followed by knowledge and wisdom. In this sense, data means “simple sequences of signs and symbols that have no further meaning besides their simple presence”, and information “data that has been given meaning which allows answers to questions like “who”, “what”, “where” and “when” (Nurnberger, Seising, & Wenzel, 2009). The concept of *record* can be seen as one step further toward knowledge, due to their evidential value that allows them to function as “authoritative sources of information” (McKemmish, 2005, p. 14). However, a recent study concluded that though conceptually referring to records, the term information was used more frequently, indicating an overlap between two discourses: open data and modern archival management: “(...) the two discourses have the concept *record* in common, although they do not use that word in their communication“ (Borglund & Engvall, 2014, p. 175).

This “fuzziness” regarding core concepts is both a theoretical and a practical challenge. In the present study, the term information was used in the interviews as an umbrella term, comprising both data and records. The initial questions to all interviewees was: “What issues do you perceive that the policy to become a pure outsourcing organization will generate in relation to the handling of information at the Swedish Transport Administration?” This formulation could be seen as problematic given that the focus of the paper is records. However, the term information is currently increasingly being used, also by the National Archives, when referring to records. The term public record is strongly associated with existing archival practices, and the aim of the study was to explore the ongoing development of principles and practices for current records management.

In the Swedish context, records are formally considered ‘archival’, and part of the cultural heritage, at the point of creation or receipt, yet they are handled in different ways depending on stages in a ‘life cycle’. The Transport Administration has illustrated this process in three steps in an internal policy: 1) create and mark up, 2) use and store, 3) preserve or destroy, as shown in Figure 1.

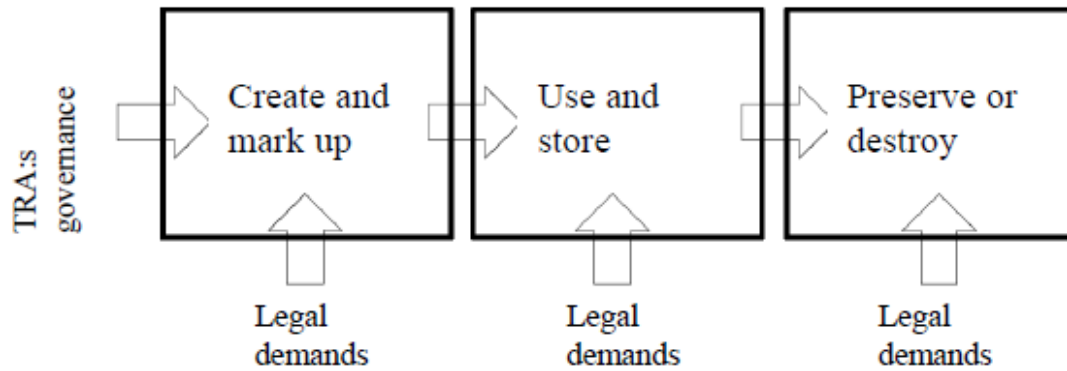


Figure 1. Illustration from the policy *Handling of business information*, (Swedish Transport Administration, 2015a).

In all stages there are legal rules that should be followed, and the overall information governance of the agency should take the legal requirements into account. Swedish public agencies can only waive the responsibility for their public records after transfer to an archival authority. This applies even if the records, in practice, are managed by another agency or a private company. Though this rule is specific to Sweden, agencies managing records in public information systems in any country need to consider responsibility issues.

The illustration in Figure 1, of how business information should be handled, seems pretty straightforward and linear, and shows similarities with the practices established for creating public archives in the paper-based administration: active cases are kept in the office of the administrating officer, inactive cases are moved to a ‘near archive’: a separate room close by, permitting easy access. When the need for regular access declines, the records are moved to a ‘central archive’. It is commonly at this stage that the records are prepared for long term preservation. Eventually, an archival authority will assume ownership and responsibility of the records.

But despite formally including all official records, the concept of the archive is often perceived only to include records in the later stages of the archiving process. Practices for the archiving process in the digital environment are currently developing and though some public agencies have implemented an ‘e-archive’ or a ‘middle archive’ (Klareld, 2015b), an established ‘route’ from records creation at the public agency to long term preservation at the archival authority is not yet in place. The result of this study indicates that the uncertainty regarding preferred practices can become problematic when implementing an outsourcing policy.

2.2. Records and public information systems

Public information systems are information systems available for public use. This can include systems used in public management, as well as systems used in the private sector. Any information system comprises people and information, and may also include artefacts, for example computers and computer-supported data processing systems (Sundgren, 2005). A *diarium* is one example of a public information system, designed to manage public records. Traditionally, it is a registry where incoming and outgoing correspondence is organized by manually applying metadata such as date, case identification, and sequence number. Currently, the diarium is often an IT-system where

public records are managed electronically, sometimes using automatic registration when a system is connected to an e-service.

Citizens have until recently been able to access public records only through a mediator (typically a registrar or archivist employed by the agency), but there is an increasing demand to develop the ability for direct searches. This corresponds to one of the core goals of e-government: to promote the use of public records. With the words of the former Swedish IT and Energy minister, the aim is to: “(...) make democracy accessible, even from one’s own kitchen table” (Sweden. Näringsdepartementet [Ministry of Industry], 2011, p. 5, my translation). Citizens, businesses, and government agencies have been defined as three different actors that interact in public information systems (Sundgren, 2005).

Implementation of digital work processes can affect a range of things, from the way citizens communicate with public agencies, to how knowledge is shared within an organization, to the way businesses are organized, and more. Existing practices for how to manage records have been perfected for decades – even centuries – to fit a traditional, paper based administration but are now questioned as per their current relevance and efficiency. Paired with other change processes, such as an increased use of outsourcing, the shortcomings of these practices can appear in a new light.

3. Background

Since 2010 the Swedish Transport Administration, an agency under the Ministry of Industry, is responsible for the long-term infrastructure planning for road, rail, sea and air operations and the construction and operation of state roads and railways (SFS, 2010:185). The agency procures and orders products, services and constructions with an annual value of approximately 40 billion Swedish crowns (Swedish Transport Administration, 2015b), and is currently striving to increase their outsourcing and become a ‘pure outsourcing organization’, which means that the outsourcing will increase to the broadest extent possible. The goal is: “to get more value for money through increased productivity, innovation and competitiveness in the construction industry” (Swedish Transport Administration, 2011, p. 1, author's translation). The new organization assumes that the state no longer produces its infrastructure, but acts as policymaker, system administrator, and client (Ek Österberg, 2016).

The implementation of the policy has actualized discussions concerning existing routines and practices. Planning, building, and operating the national infrastructure require access to reliable records. Furthermore, most of the records that are under the responsibility of the Transport Administration are public, which means that not only business needs, but also the needs of citizens and future researchers should be taken into account when making decisions that affect records management. At the time of the study, each of seven central functions and five business areas within the agency had been asked to describe what the change process toward a ‘pure outsourcing organization’ meant to them and what issues they could see arise, including reflections on core principles that needed to be maintained. The Department of Communications had identified issues related to the division of labor and the allocation of mandates and responsibilities, stating that as a core principle that the Transport Administration is accountable for all communication, always remaining the formal sender even if the practical tasks are outsourced. The person responsible for compiling a corresponding overview of records management-related issues, here called ‘A’, said it had been difficult, foremost due to the absence of designated contact persons to turn to for input or discussion. From his point of view, three main issues needed to be addressed in

relation to records management: 1) the allocation of responsibilities; 2) information governance; and 3) information ownership. However, he sensed that different departments may have differing outlooks.

In a recent government report, the Transport Administration were criticized for shortcomings in the ability to fulfill their task, as a consequence of lack of knowledge about the infrastructure. Records management was highlighted as an important issue to address, since construction and maintenance are dependent on reliable documentation to be efficient. The report recommended implementing a clearly distinguishable division of mandates and responsibilities related to records management including system support, methods, work practices (Alexandersson, 2015). That both internal and external observations have pointed out records management as problematic, motivated research about the relationship between records management and an extended use of outsourcing.

4. Theory

Traditionally, research in archival science is pursued from the perspective of the archive as an institution and focused on best practice, management and enabling technologies. In the last 25 years the research front has expanded and become “(...) responsive to the complexity and changing boundaries and ideas of the world in which archival and recordkeeping activities are situated” (McKemmish & Gilliland, 2013, p. 84). A major challenge that researchers have addressed since the 1990s is the preservation of digital records (Dollar, 1992). Organizational change and its effect on archives and records is also an important topic. Cook has argued that when the way of producing records changes, the organizations creating and using the records evolve from having been hierarchical, structurally fixed and stable over time towards being increasingly complex and constantly changing. This affects administration, legislation and information governance (Cook, 2007, p. 404). However, despite extensive research and investments in technology and legal frameworks, the management and preservation of records remains an obstacle yet to be overcome in many agencies. As Sundqvist and Svärd put it: “A lot of knowledge has been produced within the records management community that should by now, with all the technical advancements present, mitigate these problems, but attaining good information and records management is still a challenge in most organizations. Apparently, there must be other, less tangible, factors that impact on information and records management” (Sundqvist & Svärd, 2016, p. 9). These ‘less tangible factors’ include needs and expectations among employees and managers. Previous research has indicated that plans and suggestions connected to digital archives vary greatly, possibly as an effect of different (partially conflicting, partially co-existing) discourses (Klareld, 2015a).

Outsourcing has been a research theme during the past two decades, with particular attention paid to labor market and productivity effects (Kitcher, McCarthy, Turner, & Ridgway, 2013). Two important challenges facing organizations that outsource are information asymmetry and capability fit. McCarthy, Silvestre and Kietzmann have proposed the concept of ‘outsourcing context’ to describe how variations in these two factors combine to affect outsourcing, and identified as an opportunity for future research “(...) how cognitive abilities and decision-making approaches of managers” impact outsourcing (McCarthy et al., 2013, p. 281). The present paper aims to contribute to the field by focusing on a specific condition relevant for managers to consider in the context of public sector outsourcing, namely the management of public records.

5. Method

Since the object of study here is qualitative variation in conceptions of records management, *phenomenography* was chosen as an appropriate approach. It is a research specialization focused on "(...) the variation in how a phenomenon is experienced by a group of individuals" (Collier-Reed, Ingerman, & Berglund, 2009, p. 340). The aim of phenomenography is "(...) the finding and systematizing of forms of thought in terms of which people interpret significant aspects of reality" (Marton, 1981, p. 177). The object of inquiry is conceptions and ways of understanding and experiencing the physical and social world (Mathison, 2005), or in other words, reality as it appear to people: "(...) ways of experiencing represent a relationship between the experiencer and the phenomenon being experienced" (Åkerlind, 2012, p. 116). Svensson has described the most significant characteristics of phenomenography as being the "(...) categories of description, the open explorative form of data collection and the interpretative character of the analysis of data" (Svensson, 1997, p. 162). The present study explores issues related to records management from the point of view of employees at a public agency.

Phenomenography was developed within pedagogy in the 1970s, and has subsequently been used in research related to business administration, information literacy and information behavior (Limberg, 2008). It is based on the assumption that people perceive phenomena in the surrounding world in different ways, and that there are a limited number of ways in which these phenomena can be perceived (Dahlgren & Johansson, 2015). The knowledge interest is describing different conceptions of a phenomenon within a group of individuals in a particular context (C. Bruce, 1997). According to Svensson, conceptions "(...) may be expressed in different forms of action but they are most accessible through language" (Svensson, 1997, p. 166). Open-ended interviewing is the most common research method used, trying to understand: "When the informants talk about this phenomenon: what do they talk about and how do they talk about it?" (Larsson & Holmström, 2007, p. 57). The approach focuses on groups of people, rather than individuals.

The categorizations obtained through analysis are called 'the outcome space' and represent the researcher's interpretation or abstraction of different ways of experiencing meaning. "Ideally the outcomes represent the full range of possible ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question, at this particular point in time, for the population represented by the sample group collectively" (Åkerlind, 2012, p. 116).

6. Research design and material

The study is based on interviews with 15 employees. All were, at the time of the interviews, in managerial, coordinating, or consultative positions. Due to a lack of formally responsible persons and functions, the method chosen to find interviewees was 'snowballing', starting with five persons suggested by the first interviewee, 'A', who had good insight into the organization and had previously made investigations concerning archiving and records management. Each interviewee was asked to suggest others that would be appropriate to talk to, these in turn gave new names, and so on. The persons were contacted in chronological order as they were suggested. Due to time constraints, all persons suggested were not interviewed. Two persons declined to

participate. The number of interviewees was limited to 15, which is normally seen as sufficient in phenomenographic studies (Limberg, 2008). The decision to let the sample be shaped by the interviewees is part of the research design, chosen to fit the circumstances of an explorative study in an organization previously unknown by the researcher. A benefit of the approach is that it embraces the internal perspective on the phenomenon studied: the interviewees are selected on the grounds of their colleagues believing they have something to say about the matter in question and that their conceptions are worth listening to. The interviewees are identified with the letters 'B' to 'P'.

The interviews were semi-structured (Gillham, 2008) beginning with the question "What issues do you perceive that the policy to become a pure outsourcing organization will generate in relation to the handling of information at the Swedish Transport Administration?". This open-ended introduction provided the basis for the conversation, and then follow-up questions⁴ were asked based on what the interviewees raised as crucial aspects. The dialogue thus developed depending on the answers given. (In some cases, other issues than the one in focus here were raised. However, this paper focuses solely on issues regarding implications for records management as a consequence of the policy to become a pure outsourcing organization.) The interviews were conducted during October 2015 – January 2016. Each interview, ranging from 30 to 45 minutes in length, was recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then sent to the informant so they could comment if any corrections or clarifications were needed. Selected quotes are translated from Swedish and reproduced in the paper as examples. The data was analyzed using a seven-step approach: 1. Getting to know the material; 2. Condensation; 3. Comparison; 4. Grouping; 5. Articulating the categories; 6. Naming the categories; 7. Contrastive phase (Dahlgren & Johansson, 2015).

1. *Getting to know the material.* First, the transcribed interviews were read through several times, the researcher made notes and markings in the text and gained an initial image of which topics were highlighted;
2. *Condensation.* Second, the text was printed on paper, and statements that seemed related to the same conception were cut out and put in 'piles';
3. *Comparison.* Third, similarities and differences were compared between the piles and the topics were further refined;
4. *Grouping.* Fourth, the researcher looked through the categories once more to find the essential similarities and differences that were articulated in the material;
5. *Articulating the categories.* Fifth, the categories were looked over to ensure that all were mutually exclusive;
6. *Naming the categories.* Sixth, all quotes were examined again, and each category was given a name;
7. *Contrastive phase.* The final categorization, in which the findings can be compared, became: Information governance, Knowledge transfer, The role as a public agency, Organizational boundaries, Responsibility and ownership, Requirements, and Tools / business systems.

7. Result and analysis

The outcome space which is the result of this study, covers seven categories. They are briefly presented in Table 1 and further described in the following sections using

⁴ Such as: How do you mean?; Can you develop the answer?; Can you give me an example?

selected quotes as examples. Each category represents the researcher's interpretation of issues found to be of importance among the group of employees interviewed. In other words, the categories illustrate *experienced meaning*: "the relation between people and their world", which can also be called conception, experience, awareness, ways of seeing and ways of thinking (C. S. Bruce, 1999, p. 10).

A general view was that records are an asset that the agency could be better at managing. According to the agency's IT-strategy: "(...) information is an asset which should be handled in the same way as other assets, i.e. acquired, valued, protected, used, changed, developed, terminated" (Swedish Transport Administration, 2013, my translation). How to do this was however perceived as difficult or unclear within the group of interviewees, and various persons had differing ideas regarding what needed to be done. Significant questions perceived as important include: what requirements for records management are needed in relations with contractors; who owns and is responsible for records created in a project; and which principles apply for determining when records become public? A main concern was how records management should be organized so the agency would fulfill their legal responsibilities. Complexity was seen as increasing. 'D' said : (...) we have enormous amounts of information (...) the question is how to coordinate all of it so that you have some kind of overall view of it."

It is important to note here that the policy as a 'pure outsourcing organization' had yet to be realized to its full potential, and that what a 'pure' outsourcing organization means can be discussed. The definition of the concept, and the aims related to it, were said to vary within the organization, which added to an overall ambiguity on the matter. The role as a pure outsourcing organization was on the one hand seen as creating completely new issues related to information management. The change was even described as a paradigm shift. 'J' said: "I think that the more you put over to a third party who has no history, who doesn't know what the routines look like, the greater is the risk that you will lose these documents, that they will remain with the entrepreneur, or, well, I don't know where they will end up" ('J' 2015-11-20). On the other hand, the current issues related to records management were seen as only partly being the consequence of the new approach to outsourcing. Thus, it can be discussed to what extent the policy as pure outsourcing organization affects records management. The important thing here is that such discussion had not taken place prior to deciding to increase the use of outsourcing. It was considered that some of the current problems might then have been foreseen and handled in a better way. Table 1 summarizes seven issues conceived to be of relevance when thinking about outsourcing in relation to records management.

Table 1. Outcome space

| Category | Summary |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. Information governance | How to control and coordinate the management of records created and used by contractors |
| 2. Knowledge transfer | How to disseminate knowledge about records management, externally and internally |
| 3. The role of a public agency | How to comply with the legal demands on records management that apply to public agencies |
| 4. Organizational boundaries | How to define what is internally, respectively externally, created when records cross organizational boundaries |

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 5. Ownership and responsibility | How to assign responsibility and establish ownership of the records created by contractors |
| 6. Requirements | How to include requirements on records management and delivery in agreements with contractors |
| 7. Tools /business systems | What business systems should be used to manage records – those belonging to the outsourcing agency or to the contractor |

7.1. Information governance: controlling and coordinating records created and used by contractors

The first category in the outcome space represents issues that have to do with steering. Strategies for how to govern and manage records were perceived as having been overlooked in relation to the outsourcing policy: “We have a reality that we have not really thought through, with consultants who sit on these contracts and manages records that might be, or that are the Swedish Transport Administration’s (...) And as I understand the situation, we have poor control of this. Poor track of, you can say that the information has moved away from home but we have not done it in an orderly fashion really” (‘I’, 2015-11-19). Among the issues raised in relation to information governance were that the agency needed to give clear directions regarding: the responsibilities contractors have related to records management; what records should be created; and how records should be delivered to the agency. Control and structure were seen as needing to be improved when records would originate from several different sources. Coordination, both externally in relation to contractors, and internally among different departments and technical systems, was seen as increasingly important. ‘C’ saw it as a problem that some projects had created records management solutions on their own initiative, which did not facilitate long term preservation. In his opinion this was due to a lack of steering from the central management, since the head office had not provided the projects with proper tools or structures (‘C’ 2015-10-07).

7.2. Knowledge transfer: disseminating knowledge about records management

The second category highlighted in the interviews has to do with the dissemination of knowledge, both to contractors and internally. A lack of consensus was expressed regarding core concepts such as ‘records’, ‘archives’, and ‘digital archive’; distinguishing between business information, public records, and so-called potential public records⁵ was described as difficult; the concept of the archive was unanimously perceived as including public records, but not necessarily comprising ‘business information’. According to ‘F’, business systems used during a project were often thought of as ‘archives’, although not developed to enable long term preservation (‘F’ 2015-10-30).

Education was said to be needed: obligatory learning modules on records management were requested since all personnel managing records did not have the same understanding of existing routines and requirements. Knowledge about the reasons for preservation (such as future maintenance and cultural heritage), were experienced as low. Internal knowledge deficit was perceived to hamper the ability to get clear requirements across to contractors. ‘M’ said “It is very important to define

⁵ Compilations of information that can be created using routine means

what we want before we procure an entrepreneur” (‘M’ 2015-11-26), arguing that it would be valuable to have expertise on records management designated to help out with this.

7.3. The role of a public agency: adhering to the legal demands that apply to public agencies

The third category relates to the specific position that public agencies have in society. Legal requirements for records management differ between public agencies and private organizations. The primary differences highlighted were requirements on transparency and long term preservation. According to ‘C’, many standard agreements used included a requirement to preserve selected records for 10 years, “(...) but this is insufficient in the domain of public agencies” (‘C’ 2015-10-07).

Outsourcing was described as a more business-like approach compared with traditional ways of working. Certain records management principles, common in the domain of public agencies, were described as harder to uphold when contractors were responsible. Many public agencies in Sweden have registrars with a designated responsibility for registering records. This practice was highlighted as something very different compared with how records are managed in private organizations, and which tended to be seen as an ‘administrative burden’, although existing because of the legal demands: “(...) when we receive a request for disclosure [of a record] then there is a demand on us to produce it directly. We have to drop everything and focus on that. And an external party must also be able to live up to such requirements” (‘J’ 2015-11-20).

Records management was perceived by some as having to do with the need to live up to the freedom of information legislation, and was not obviously related to the business as such. The interviews showed that it could be questioned whether the registration practices in their current form were promoting efficiency: According to ‘E’ “Searchability in the diarium is not adapted to the needs of the business. The diarium hasn’t been seen as a tool for the business but is developed for the Archive center [a department within the agency responsible for preservation and retrieval] and those working with disclosing public records” (‘E’ 2015-10-29).

7.4. Organizational boundaries: defining the difference between internally and externally created records

The fourth category symbolizes the experience that an outsourcing policy could put into question whether records created by contractors should be regarded as incoming or outgoing. Organizational boundaries were therefore seen as an important matter to address, and was described as increasingly complex when one of the organizations was a public agency: “(...) when is the consultant so closely related to and dependent on the Swedish Transport Administration, and the agency’s instructions, that the established material can be considered as created internally?” (‘D’ 2015-10-28)

Formally, the administrative officer assigned to a case has to be employed by the Transport Administration, even if it is in practice handled by an external party. Consequently, some records were not distributed directly to contractors, but via a contact person at the agency. According to ‘J’ the reason is to maintain control of the records: “(...) we must have a contact person because it is an external party that sits on an external address that does not know our rules and routines (...) when we do not have that control, we do not even know which cases are missing, or which records are missing” (‘J’ 2015-11-20). Others said this rule had the opposite effect – that a person

could be formally assigned to many cases or projects without actually knowing much about them. It was also indicated that in practice, this principle was undergoing changes: “(...) some of the consultants, those that have access to the intranet, also can be administrators” (‘G’ 2015-11-04).

Records crossing organizational boundaries was seen as a challenge for information security, however ‘E’ said the connection needed to be investigated further: “(...) now people talk as if it is dangerous to disclose information to an entrepreneur (...) but is the risk really greater now? It can be questioned. Perhaps it has become an issue due to the introduction of new technology” (‘E’ 2015-10-29). The boundaries of the internal organization was described as problematic since all departments were perceived to manage records differently, why the agency did not act uniformly in relation to external actors: “(...) when we did everything in-house 20 years ago, if we talk about the Railway administration where I worked, then the part of the organization that handled the projects also kept the records” (‘N’ 2015-12-01) Today’s agency is instead divided in special areas of expertise and records are transferred between these.

7.5. Ownership and responsibility: assigning responsibility and establishing ownership of records created by contractors

The fifth category has to do with the concept of *information owner*: “the function responsible for the activities whose information is to be handled” (Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap [Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency], 2013, p. 26). In the traditional, paper-based administration, information ownership is comparatively easy to understand: the organization that creates records usually own them and preserve them at their premises. In a digital administration the issue is more complex. Responsibilities may be divided between system owner, process owner, and administrator. Outsourcing adds to the complexity since records can be created using e-services that the creating organization hires to be used by contractors. One perception within the group was that the transfer of responsibility implied a ‘physical’ transfer of records between business systems.: “(...) we cannot send over everything! It is huge amounts of files” (‘M’ 2015-11-26). Ownership and responsibility could be seen as connected to the ‘information flow’: “The information is born in Planning. Then the plan is submitted to Investment where it is refined. Then, the information goes to Maintenance and Traffic control to the extent necessary (...) the information is to follow the same principles” (‘E’ 2015-10-29). However, in the legal sense public agencies cannot waive the responsibility for their records, except after transfer to the archival authority, and they remain responsible even if the archive is, in practice, managed by another agency or a private company.

7.6. Requirements: including requirements for records management and delivery in agreements with contractors

The sixth category concerns requirements. This issue in relation to records management was new to some of the interviewees, for example when I asked a follow up question (“Is this something that will be included in the agreements?”) in a discussion about what demands that the agency have on contractors, the reply became: “Yes, it struck me now that you said it out loud like that, it ought to be included somewhere (...) but I wonder if it is” (‘H’ 2015-11-05). To formulate requirements regarding records management, delivery, and formats was seen as a problem due to a lack of competence, and also because it was seen as unclear whom to contact for support

when ‘putting the demands into print’. The content of the agreements discussed during the interviews included issues about formats to facilitate long term preservation; clear statements regarding which records that should be delivered, when, and how. Clarity was seen as paramount since the contractors are governed by the agreements: “(...) consultants should work independently. And then they have to have very clear conditions and understand these (...)” (‘M’ 2015-11-26). ‘J’ said it was important to formulate the requirements in a way that would motivate their relevance: “(...) so you understand the dignity of it. So that it doesn’t become just another administrative imposition, but a relay race” (‘J’ 2015-11-20).

7.7. Tools/business systems: deciding what business systems should be used to manage records

The seventh and final category concerns the issue of business systems. The main question the interviewees highlighted as important to discuss was whether the agency should provide business systems that the contractors would be required to use or if the contractors should instead be required to use business systems of their own. Some preferred the first alternative: “(...) if they [the contractors] had worked in the same tools as us, then this would have been much easier” (‘C’ 2015-10-07), others were in favor of the second alternative, saying that the requirements were currently formulated with respect to the products used, but that “(...) as a pure outsourcing organization perhaps we should try to erase these boundaries, so that the requirements are not formulated as being tools-based” (‘O’ 2015-12-07).

‘I’ perceived that before the policy to outsource was implemented more contractors were closely tied to the agency via the business systems: “(...) they were logged in to us and worked in our [digital] environment. And then it was something else, when we had more control over the information. We don’t have that today” (‘I’ 2015-11-19). ‘K’ had the opposite view: “That is my idea of pure outsourcing that then we should not provide a lot of tools that I then become responsible for. In most cases, I think it is the suppliers who should cover those parts” (‘K’ 2015-11-24).

8. Discussion

The categories in the ‘outcome space’ represents records management-issues that the interviewed employees perceive as important to discuss in relation to the outsourcing policy, but that the agency currently did not have a clear standpoint to. Each category represent an aspect of the implications outsourcing might have for records management, i.e. things that the group of interviewees perceived as relevant to discuss. The ‘outcome space’ covers issues conceived as being important and also shows there to be varying perspectives on each issue. Some interviews had the effect that the person I spoke to made new connections between concepts and work processes. This became apparent by comments like “I haven’t thought about this before”, or “well, now that you mention it...”. The knowledge obtained is thus created by interviewee and researcher together in a way made possible through the specific setting/situation of the interview, something that Limberg has described as a distinctive characteristic of phenomenography: “(...) the various experiences sought in the study are being shaped through the interview (...)” (Limberg, 2008). Bruce has argued that phenomenography “(...) provides outcomes which are readily applicable to professional practice (C. S. Bruce, 1999, p. 3).

The connection between records management and outsourcing was put into question during the interviews, and other issues such as the implementation of digital work processes, and the large amount of information it resulted in, were highlighted as affecting records management more. But it was also experienced that the role as a pure outsourcing organization did have a clear connection to and effect on records management issues. Regardless of the reason, clear requirements for how to manage records were perceived as becoming increasingly important. The need to revise and either reinforce or change existing records management practices was unanimously seen as crucial, but was perceived as not having been discussed to the extent needed, or at all.

Further, formally responsible persons were perceived to be missing, and though neither the issue of records management nor the issue of outsourcing were new to the interviewees, these concepts had not necessarily been put together before the interview situation. There had been requests from contractors to improve availability and reliability of existing records on current and planned procurements. This was however described in the supplier marketing plan as a communications-related issue (Swedish Transport Administration, 2014).

Transactions registered with the help of e-services have been described as records created in a 'grey zone' since it is unclear who is responsible for archiving these records. A proactive approach and regulation of responsibilities by clear agreements before an e-service is designed have been recommended (Asproth, Borglund, Samuelsson, & Öberg, 2010). The variation in conceptions regarding how records should be handled indicates that an outsourcing policy also pose a risk of different persons or groups interpreting the implications for records management differently, thereby acting in ways which may complicate capture and preservation. As Figure 1 illustrates, records can be viewed as managed in 'stages' from creation or receipt, on to use and storage, and further to archiving or destruction. Public agencies are responsible throughout this 'flow', even if different departments are responsible for the practical management.

The outsourcing policy seemed to have brought forward considerations on how to obtain control of records. Each person had their own personal conception about "how things should be" and in the absence of a clear central standpoint this could lead to contradictory practices – for example if one person or department thinks records management should be done in public information systems that the agency owns, while others argue contractors should use public information systems of their own. This can affect the reliability and access to public records negatively, both currently and in the long term. Future policymaking could benefit from an early discussion on how to ensure that public records are relevant and trustworthy, that their provenance is documented and the relationships between records are clear, even if the records are handled in and across different IT-systems and by different actors.

Records have until now primarily been managed by each organization separately. Sometimes different sections in the same agency may have created their own practices for storing records in public information systems. The introduction of a new policy can bring issues to light precisely because requirements now needed to be formulated to meet new strategies, structures and situations generated by the policy. As discussed at the beginning of the paper, there are theoretical differences between the concepts of records and information. Records are a specific form of information that should be preserved as evidence and for future use, both within the business and as part of cultural heritage. This distinction was only made by a minority of the employees. This is yet another argument highlighting why the issues need to be discussed and

clarified. Increasing knowledge about the variation in how professionals understand a phenomenon can open up possibilities for new ways of working (Sandberg, 2000).

9. Conclusion

This paper has explored and discussed the potential consequences that an outsourcing policy can have for records management. Though further research is needed to establish transferability of the results by comparing experiences in other organizations that have also outsourced key business activities, the result gives an indication of issues related to records management that needs to be discussed. The result shows that several potentially important issues were perceived by employees as not having been discussed prior to the implementation of the policy. These issues include: information governance and ownership; roles and responsibilities in records management and the business systems in which records are created and managed; the legal requirements of public agencies; knowledge transfer about records management requirements; defining organizational boundaries. An experienced lack of a clear stance or direction from the organization in its entirety reinforced the uncertainty about how to address these issues when dealing with contractors. In sum, outsourcing and other policies can actualize issues concerning demands on access and preservation of public records, which is why existing practices may need to be clarified, or revised, to meet business needs, citizens' expectations and uphold legal requirements.

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