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THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES?
- ANALYSING THE SWEDISH ACTION PLAN FOR E-GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

This paper analyses the "National Action Plan for the Swedish eGovernment", launched in 2008, based on three dimensions generated from theory: (1) the relationship between information systems and organizational change, (2) process orientation and (3) coordination. The analysis presents a critical examination of the action plan. The analysis shows that the action plan contains an overall rational perspective on the relationship between information systems and organizational change; several rather specific impacts are forecasted using e.g. e-services in public administration. Rational choices when designing information systems for public administration are assumed to be made based on business needs, citizen needs and business processes. An almost unlimited choice over technological options and an explicit ambition to control the consequences are also outlined in the action plan. The process perspective is also very present in the action plan promoting a horizontal view of public administration and e-services as an antithesis to the vertical, rigid "silos" often reported in government organizations. The action plan is also found to have an innovative view of IT, but a more moderate and reformist view of internal government organizations. The plan as such represents an overall top-down approach to e-government, providing a framework within which to develop e-government. The customer/client needs are expressed explicitly in the action plan, in several contexts and combined with internal efficiency efforts in a balanced way. Several aspects of coordination are also identified in the analysis, for example regarding standardization.

Keywords: process orientation, e-government, action plan, public e-service, public sector, information systems, organizational change, coordination

1. Introduction

This paper analyses the "National Action Plan for the Swedish eGovernment" [2008] from three dimensions: (1) the relationship between information systems and organizational change, (2) process orientation and (3) coordination. The analysis presents a critical examination of the action plan.

The action plan for e-government was launched by the Swedish government in 2008 with several embedded values, concepts and issues related to the coordination of e-government development, processes and the use of information systems (e.g. e-services and e-administration) in order to serve citizens and to transform government agencies. The action plan is an important expression of a new direction for e-government development in Sweden and is therefore interesting to study as one example of the European (e.g. the i2010 eGovernment Action Plan for European

Union) and global e-government diffusion. One important aspect in the action plan for e-government is the issue of process orientation that will be analysed in this paper. A model consisting of prerequisites, processes and results is outlined in the action plan [2008, p. 5]. Another important aspect in the action plan concerns the changes implicated by the use of new, integrated, information technology (IT) (e.g. information systems and telecom systems). The relationship between information systems and organizational change will be focused upon and analysed in this paper. Finally the principles and patterns of how to coordinate the e-government development in Sweden, according to the action plan, will be focused upon and analysed in the paper.

The National Action Plan for the Swedish eGovernment [2008] was launched as "new grounds for IT-based business development in public administration". The action plan consists of four major themes: (a) rules for overall agency cooperation and information management, (b) technological prerequisites and standardization of IT, (c) common business support, knowledge support and coordinated evaluation, and (d) agency contacts with citizens and entrepreneurs. The action plan will be described in greater detail in section 4.

The three dimensions, introduced above, will serve as a point of departure for the analysis of the action plan and are briefly introduced here and further described in section 3. The three dimensions are chosen because they represent general issues and trends in research and practice. They are also present in the action plan. The choice is further elaborated in section 2.

The first dimension is *information systems and organizational change*. The relationship between information systems and organizational change is complex – the implications of information systems are full of nuances and full of contradictions [Keen, 1981]. This relationship is discussed by Markus and Robey [1988] who conclude that the effects of information systems are not deterministic. The "same" information system can result in different organizational effects dependent upon the interplay between the information system and human actors who use and legitimate the systems. A social meaning can be attributed to an information system. The public sector with its internal and external users of information systems is no exception to this case. However the user group is normally more complex in e-government settings; it is not users who buy goods or services online – it is "citizens with rights and obligations" [Contini and Lanzara, 2009]. Several challenges regarding e-government initiatives are reported in research (e.g. [Axelsson and Melin, 2008; Gil-García and Pardo, 2005; Irani et al., 2007; Kubicek and Hagen, 2000]).

The second dimension, *process orientation*, has been on the management agenda for several decades now and has been highlighted as an ideal, for example, in Business Process Reengineering (BPR) [Davenport and Short, 1990; Hammer, 1990] and continuous improvement approaches (e.g. Total Quality Management (TQM), Business Process Management (BPM), Kaizen) [Deming, 1986; Imai, 1986; Juran, 1989] and in recent years in e-government initiatives [MacIntosh, 2003; Pardo and Tayi, 2007]. In brief, process orientation means that a horizontal dimension of one or several organizations will form the main focus , together with a customer focus, improvement, a cross departmental view, and an overall reaction against a far-reaching division of labour etc. (e.g. [Hammer, 1990; Hammer, 1996; Juran, 1989]). The use of IT systems is more or less integrated in the striving for improvement or reengineering (e.g. [Hammer, 1990; Davenport, 1993]), but used in different ways as an incentive to achieve organizational change. The process concept, however, is not a

single coherent concept. Keen [1997] for example characterizes the many definitions of process as a "process swamp".

The third dimension used in the analysis of the action plan below is *coordination*. The concept of organizing is central when describing major actions taken by humans in organizations in order to generate appropriate outcomes [Weick, 1979]. When people act, they also create and recreate fundamental elements of social interaction: meaning, power, and norms [Giddens, 1979]. One important purpose of coordination is to formalize actions thereby reducing undesired variation, and to control and to anticipate actions [March and Simon, 1958; Mintzberg, 1983; Thompson, 1967]. Lack of coordination and cooperation between departments is also identified as a barrier to e-government [Ebrahim and Irani, 2005] and therefore it is important for it to be studied in e-government. Launching an action plan for e-government as such is certainly an explicit act to *organize* and to *coordinate* e-government development on a national level. On a operational level e-services or e-administration can also be used as the means to organize and to coordinate the handling of errands, different e-services through one-stop shops (e.g web portals) etc.

The need to discuss and critically analyse e-government development is not merely a Swedish phenomenon. The challenges in developing e-government (e.g. Andersen et al., 2007; Irani et al., 2007; Gil-García and Pardo, 2005; Rosacker and [Olson, 2008]) are for example studied in the Scandinavian countries as well as for example in the U.S., the U.K, Singapore and Canada.

Several issues and questions can be raised based on the action plan for the Swedish e-government. Which underlying values can be identified? What is the role of IT (e.g. e-services and e-administration) when reforming the public sector? Is the action plan like the emperor's new clothes[1], leaving the public administration naked, or does it have a real potential to act as a guide or an instrument to control and to efficiently deliver coordinated and in some sense better e-services for everyone?

The purpose of this paper is to critically analyse the Swedish action plan for e-government. The analysis is made based on the dimensions introduced above. The results of the analysis should be regarded as part of an ongoing discussion of the action plan itself, but also with regards to how to perform e-government development in general. The following research questions are investigated in the paper:

- How is the relationship between information systems and organizational change described? What kinds of effects are expected and what are the points of departure for change?
- How is process improvement and change described? What kind of change is expected? Which ideals are promoted? What about customer/client value and focus? Is there a focus on internal efficiency?
- Which principles and patterns regarding how to coordinate the e-government development are present?

[1] "The Emperor's New Clothes" (In Danish: "Keiserens nye Klæder") is a famous fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen, poet, about an emperor who unwittingly hires two swindlers to create a beautiful new suit of clothes for him. The suit, they tell him, is invisible to anyone who was either stupid or unfit for his position. The Emperor cannot see the (non-existent) cloth, but pretends that he can for fear of appearing stupid; his ministers do the same. When the swindlers report that the suit is finished, they dress him in mime. The Emperor then goes on a procession through the capital showing off his new "suit". During the course of the procession, a small child cries out, "But he has nothing on!" The crowd realizes the child is telling the truth. The Emperor, however, holds his head high and continues the procession (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_emperor%27s_new_clothes).

The paper is structured in the following way. In the following section the research approach will be presented. In section 3 three dimensions are presented and summarized with a framework for analysis. In section 4 the National Action Plan for the Swedish eGovernment is summarized and analysed. The concluding section contains results and future research.

2. Research Approach

The empirical part of this paper is represented by the National Action Plan for the Swedish eGovernment. The action plan represents the primary source of empirical data in this paper; and is considered as a document made of text (with expressions, utterances, interpretations, goals etc) from the Swedish Government. The analysis of the action plan is guided by three dimensions generated from theory. This means that they have guided the analysis of the empirical material (cf. [Eisenhardt, 1989; Walsham, 1995]). However, in order to be sensitive to what the e-government action plan might communicate besides the guide provided by the dimensions generated based on theory I will also attempt to identify important contextual aspects. Otherwise there is an obvious risk namely that "there is a danger of the researcher only seeing what the theory suggests" [Walsham, 1995, p. 76]. The risk of being "one-eyed" in the analysis is also reduced by using three dimensions – and not one. The use of three dimensions during the analysis can be viewed as a triangulation of theories [Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1989; Klein and Myers, 1999]. The three dimensions are chosen because they represent general issues within the information systems area and trends in e-government research and e-government practice. The dimensions are also present in the action plan.

The triangulation is limited to theory triangulation through the use of several perspectives (labelled as analytical dimensions, building up an analytical framework, in this paper). There is no data triangulation etc. Another limitation concerning the research approach is that there are only statements at the rhetorical level being studied; no action plan in use – or in action in the action plan. The analysis focuses on the policy level of the action plan and the potential effects of the action plan based on the three dimensions used when analysing the text (the statements; the communicative acts) in the plan.

The analytical framework with its three dimensions is used to analyse the action plan on different levels. The action plan, as such, is located at a macro level (governmental policy document) covering aspects on a macro level (e.g. prerequisites for e-government), meso level and micro level. The action plan prescribes perspectives, solutions, pointing out responsibilities and tasks on a meso and micro level. At the same time the result for the macro level is highly dependent upon the interpretations, translations and negotiations that take place on both the meso and micro levels. The analysis in this paper covers the three levels; the action plan, as such, (as a governmental strategic and coordinating policy document; its role and nature) and different aspects of the action plan specified on both a meso and micro level. The analytical framework presented in the next section is located mainly on the meso and micro levels (even if the micro level dimension is covered for example in the technological imperative category below); and the focus of the analysis is on those levels as a result of the action plan on the macro level.

3. Analytical Framework

In this section, the three dimensions for the analysis are generated based on theory. After the presentation of the dimensions a framework for the analysis of the National Action Plan for the Swedish eGovernment is outlined.

3.1. Information Systems and Organizational Change

When studying the relationship between information systems and organizational change in this paper the seminal article from Markus and Robey [1988] is chosen. Markus and Robey [1988], based on Pfeffer [1982], outline three categories (Figure **1**) covering the relationships (causal agency):

1. Technological imperative
2. Organizational imperative
3. Emergent perspective

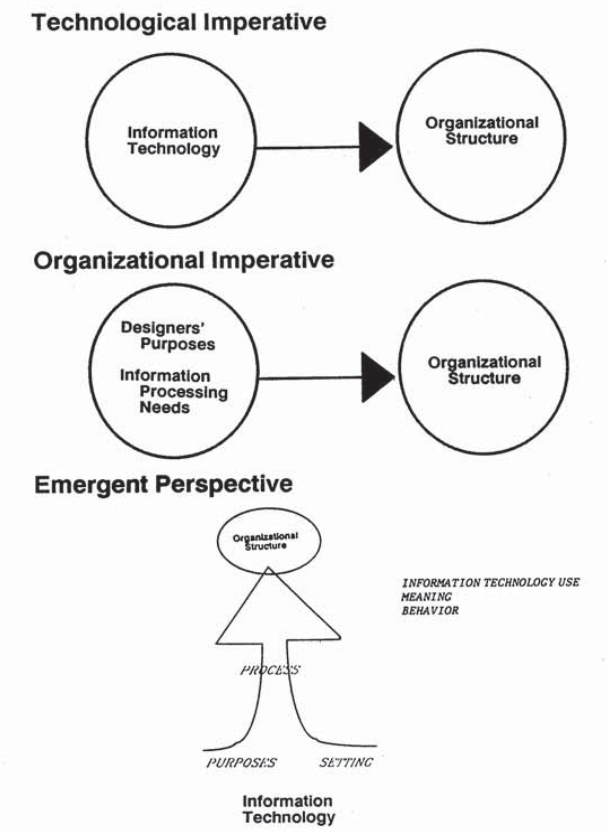

Figure 1: Causal Agency [Markus and Robey, 1988, p. 586]

In the first category, a *technological imperative*, the word *impact* is essential [ibid.]. From this perspective technology is viewed as an exogenous force that "[…] determines or strongly constrains the behaviour of individuals and organizations" [ibid., p. 585]. Action in organizations, is, from this perspective, seen as a result of external constraints, demands, or forces that a social actor may have limited control over or even cognizance of. Markus and Robey [1988] locate this category on a macro level of analysis. This can be contrasted by, for example, actions taken as a result of conscious choices. In the second category, an *organizational imperative*, an almost "[…] unlimited choice over technological options and almost unlimited control over

consequences" [ibid., p. 587] is assumed. In this category an "intendedly rational" perspective is inherited. This means that behaviour is chosen and is based on a set of consistent preferences, occurring prior to an action. It is also assumed that the action is goal directed [Pfeffer, 1982, p. 6]. IT is considered as the dependent variable, caused by an organization's information processing needs [Markus and Robey, 1988]. In the normative line of information system literature the organizational imperative occurs very frequently. It also occurs frequently in organizational and management literature where IT is seen as a tool for solving organizational problems. Contextual variables are viewed as constraints or determinants that managers have to take into account [ibid.]. Examples of contextual variables are work unit technology, organizational level, environment, decision making style etc. It is also assumed that systems designers can manage the impacts of IT by being aware of technical and social concerns [ibid.].

The third category, the *emergent perspective*, "[…] holds that the uses and the consequences of IT emerge unpredictability from complex social interactions" [Markus and Robey, 1988, p. 588]. This perspective recognizes organizational decisions as being segmented, based on changing preferences developing over time. The same reasoning is also applied to the results of actions in organizations. From this perspective, behaviour cannot be predicted a priori by the intention of human actors or by conditions in the environment [ibid.; Pfeffer, 1982]. Non-rational objectives and choice processes are also highlighted within this perspective, together with the view of IT taking a role in the interplay between conflicting objectives and preferences in organizations. Organizational change is not, compared to the first category above, primarily seen as being generated by actor intent or exogenous technology. Instead, the focus is on the dynamic interplay between actors, technology and context, together with an overall greater complexity in causal agency and towards the goal of predicting IT associated change [Markus and Robey, 1988]. Markus and Robey [1988] locate the two latter categories at a micro level of analysis and also at a mixed level (which in this paper is interpreted as level flexibility; covering mainly a meso level and a micro level). A detailed understanding of dynamic organizational processes, actors' intentions and IT features is required, based on this perspective, in order to capture the relationship between IT and organizational change, when studying both the private and the public sector. The action plan, below, contains several aspects of the relationship between information systems and organizational change. It is therefore interesting to apply the three categories presented above in an analysis in order to understand and critically examine the action plan, e.g. regarding system design issues, intentions with IT, expected organizational effects, information needs etc.

3.2. Process Orientation

E-government is considered to be one of most interesting innovations introduced in public administration. As is the case with many managerial concepts and practices in public administration (e.g. TQM), the idea of e-government followed e-business and e-commerce initiatives in the private sector [Moon, 2002]. Process orientation, as part of, for example, TQM, is one example regarding how a concept and a practice has travelled from the private sector to the public sector. However the import of concepts and solutions from e-business and e-commerce into the e-government field is not uncomplicated [Contini and Lanzara, 2009]. There are several domain specific concerns and institutional arrangements that differ; one example is the role of citizens with their rights and obligations (compared to customers buying and selling at a market). At the same time several similarities can be identified. Process orientation

and a process perspective, core issues in e.g. TQM, are investigated theoretically in the following section.

A process perspective, used as a vehicle for process orientation, is a means of increasing customer focus and market orientation in order to achieve a competitive advantage. Process orientation implies a focus on activities, transformation, coordination, and communication from a horizontal view of an organization. There is a focus on how to create value for customers together with a comprehensive and integrated view of an organization. An attempt is made to focus on a view beyond organizational divisions or departments, often outlined as being opposite to the traditional, more functional and hierarchal oriented, organizations. A process perspective is present in several management approaches and these are developed in order to achieve organizational change, as introduced in the first part of the paper.

The process perspective can be contrasted by the vertically rigid "silos" that are often reported in government organizations. Punia [2004] for example reports on situations where government organizations work, basically, without any collaboration from other agencies involved with the other activities of the same process. This results in poor coordination between participating departments and leads to poor performance of government services. In this situations citizens have to "run from one department to another" to facilitate coordination. One example of citizen focus can be to reduce the number of contacts and organize one-stop solutions [Gouscos et al., 2007; Tambouris and Wimmer, 2004].

We can identify process orientation as a management ideal in, for example, BPR [Davenport and Short, 1990; Hammer, 1990] and continuous improvement approaches (e.g. TQM, BPM and Kaizen) [Deming, 1986; Imai, 1986; Juran, 1989] and in recent years in e-government initiatives [MacIntosh, 2003; Pardo and Tayi, 2007].

If we take a closer look at BPR and TQM, as two common and widespread management approaches representing two types of change with an explicit process oriented perspective, we can identify that:

- BPR has a *radical* and *innovative* way, often from a so called clean slate (e.g. according to [Hammer, 1990]), of dealing with processes and organizational change. Keywords such as redesign, dramatic, innovation, radical change, fundamental, revolutionary, use of IT (cf. the technological imperative in section 3.1 above), broad, top down approach etc. are present.
- TQM has a *continuous improvement* dominated, evolutionary, view of processes (e.g. according to [Deming, 1986]) and organizational change. TQM typically uses quality tools and methods to deal with process improvement and a PDSA cycle[2] (Plan, Do, Study and Act) to systematically deal with the ongoing change. Keywords such as continuously, learning, systematic, measurement, bottom up approach, conventional knowledge will all appear.

However the dichotomy between radical and evolutionary change can be criticized [Melin, 1999]. Imai [1986] and Juran [1989] from the TQM field identify the need for innovation even within the overall continuous improvement approach. Within the BPR field, on the other hand, Hammer [1996] criticizes his own work from 1990, using the approach based on a "clean slate", and is more positive using a blue print of an organization as a means of attempting to be innovative. However, the dichotomy

[2] Also called a Shewhart cycle (Shewhart, 1939, p. 45).

can serve as a weberian ideal type, and a theoretical lens, a guide (cf. [Walsham, 1995]) highlighting differences, when attempting to analyse empirical data (as discussed in section 2).

Process as such has always existed in organizations, independently of the approaches presented above [Hammer, 1996; Tolis, 2005]. The processes have, however, often been invisible, fragmented, not labelled and even not managed or coordinated [Hammer, 1990; Hammer and Champy, 1993]. An explicit process perspective, and often horizontal integration, as described above, can be a means to thinking outside the bounds of functional departments and to creating a competitive opportunity and advantage [Keen, 1997]. The horizontal integration is a major theme in process orientation, regardless of TQM or BPR. This type of business integration, supported by the use of IT systems is the focus both in the private and public sectors [Scholl and Klischewski, 2007]. BPR is reported as being used in the public sector according to for example McAdam and Donaghy [1999], MacIntosh [2003] as well as Sundberg and Sandberg [2006].

3.2.1. Incentives for Process Orientation

The incentives focused on when discussing process orientation can be described by means of five categories; customer or client focus, continuous improvement, structuring work, optimizing processes and understanding organizational complexity [Bergman et al., 1995].

A strong *customer focus* is an explicit theme in process orientation; regardless of an analysis or using BPR and TQM. Processes are, from a customer focus, important because they produce potential value through the transformation of products and services. Customers can be located both within an organization (internal customers) and outside. The latter category is the one which is present most often, when the literature is analysed. Even if the customer focus is strong and present, it has its limitations (cf. [Hammer, 1996; Keen, 1997]). There can, for example, be several customers with disparate needs and values located inside and outside an organization. A narrow customer focus perspective is also discussed by Keen [1997]. The situation where different needs exist is of course also present in the public sector when the focus is on the citizens. A government agency is bound by law to serve every citizen.

In TQM *continuous improvement* of processes is the focus. To identify and eliminate sources of unwanted variation is a major theme when handling the repetitive nature of processes [Deming, 1986] using e.g. the Shewhart Cycle (1939). In the BPR approach organizational improvement is discussed in terms of radical change; continuous is not considered as being sufficient [Hammer, 1990]. The use of IT when reengineering an organization is explicit and highlighted for example by Hammer [1990, p. 104]: “We should reengineer our business; use the power of modern IT to radically redesign our business processes in order to achieve dramatic improvements and their performance”.

Structuring work means that the process perspective should be used to structure both the work and the embedded activities. To structure work is a natural part of organizing and in coordinating activities within and between processes.

To *optimize processes* is mainly discussed by scholars in the TQM field (e.g. [Juran, 1989]). The optimization is often based on the Shewhart Cycle discussed above and should prevent failures and increase predictability. Within the BPR field one seldom focuses on the term optimization – radical change and customer focus is discussed instead together with IT [Melin, 1999]. Scholars from the BPR field

identify the lack of a proactive use of IT as a tool for reshaping the business, and argue that the change potential is not being exploited.

Bergman et al. [1995] propose that using a process perspective is an appropriate way to understand *organizational complexity*. A process perspective can be used to identify, analyse and understand the core business of an organization. The major flows of products or services can for example be highlighted [ibid.]. Activities can also be related to processes and can provide an appropriate simplification of "things going on" in an organization. In this paper the process perspective is used to understand the process orientation that is promoted in the action plan and the images for future government building and in using a process perspective. Apart from the physical flow presented above that is required to be understood, a thorough understanding of communication and coordination in order to grasp organizational complexity is important. It may, actually, be more important in the case of e-government. The need to focus on communication and coordination is for example discussed by Winograd and Flores [1986].

3.3. Coordination

The concept of organizing is central when describing major actions taken by humans in organizations in order to generate appropriate outcomes: "To organize is to assemble ongoing interdependent actions into sensible sequences that generate sensible outcomes." [Weick, 1979, p. 3]

When people act, they also create and recreate fundamental elements of social interaction: meaning, power, and norms [Giddens, 1979]. These concepts make an important contribution to the understanding of organizing an organization and its information systems. An organizing act can also be viewed as a coordinating act. One important purpose of coordination is to formalize actions thereby reducing undesired variation, and to control and to anticipate actions [March and Simon, 1958; Mintzberg, 1983; Thompson, 1967].

However, to reduce variation in organizations by formalizing action, can be in conflict with the demands for flexibility that are highly ranked in the organizational agenda. It is probably a question of reducing undesired flexibility and allowing and encouraging desired variation. Time and actors play a pivotal role in the desired and undesired variation which poses yet another challenge.

Actions are mutually dependent, and one important part of coordination is to handle these dependencies [Malone and Crowston, 1994; Thompson, 1967]. Several definitions of coordination (e.g. according to [Schiefloe and Syvertsen, 1993; Weiseth, 1993]) also contain key words and phrases such as; the acts of dividing goals into tasks, the allocation of resources to the completion of actions, and the migration of different actions into a whole and evaluation of actions compared to goals.

Mechanisms for coordination are discussed by March and Simon [1958] and Mintzberg [1983, 1998]. The first two researchers identify three activities that are necessary in order to perform coordination: coordination through standardization, coordination through planning, and coordination through feedback. The latter researcher also identifies a set of coordination mechanisms, partly based on March and Simon's [1958] work, mutual adjustment (1), direct supervision (2), standardization of skills and norms (3), work processes (4), and results (5) [Mintzberg, 1983, 1998]. See Figure 2.

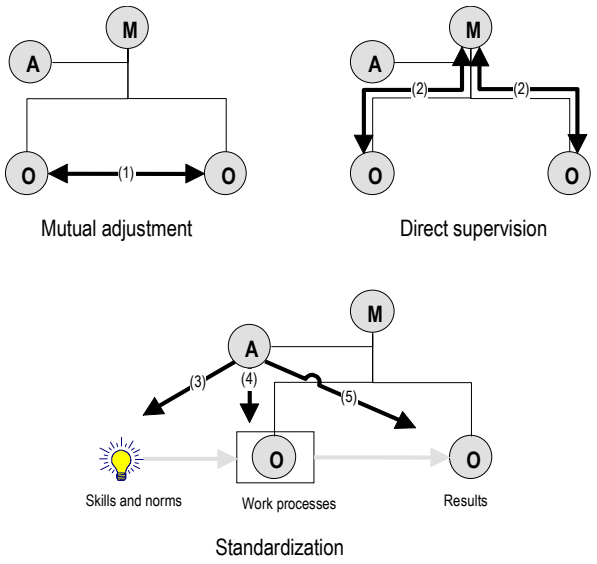

Figure 2: Coordination Mechanisms [Mintzberg, 1983, p. 6; revised]

Mutual adjustment (1) achieves coordination of work by the process of informal coordination. The control of the work rests in "the hands of the doers" at an operative organizational level ("O" in Figure 1). Direct supervision (2) achieves coordination by having one person responsible for the work of others ("M", manager, in Figure 1), issuing instructions to them and monitoring their actions. Work can also be coordinated (often by an analyst, "A" in Figure 1) with standardization (3, 4, and 5). Work processes (4) are standardized when the content of the work is specified, or programmed. Outputs are standardized when the results of the work (5), for example the qualities of a product, are specified. Skills (3) are standardized when the kind of training required to perform the work is specified (commonly the worker is trained before joining the organization) [Mintzberg, 1983]. Norms (3) are standardized in order to have an influence on human action – and are a form of indirect coordination [Mintzberg, 1998] (cf. organizational culture).

When studying the coordination of e-government initiatives, as a special case coordination, several challenges are present. According to several research reports e-government initiatives have a large potential for developing and delivering better services for citizens and in providing possibilities for more open interaction with agency constituents as well as a potential for transforming government structures and processes (i.e. the way in which governments offer their services) [Allen et al., 2001; Irani et al., 2007]. However, it is a fact as described above, that e-government initiatives face a number of challenges of complexity and risk (e.g. [Irani et al., 2007; Gil-García and Pardo, 2005]. Peters [1998], based on e.g. Pressman and Wildavsky, describes that the lack of coordination in government as being a frequent complaint. Suggesting that government needs more coordination is very common in reforms; the National Action Plan for the Swedish eGovernment is no exemption to this case. Peters [1998, p. 296] also provides a more domain specific definition of coordination focusing on policies and programmes: "I refer to co-ordination as an end-state in which the policies and programmes of government are characterized by minimal redundancy, incoherence and lacunae." Peters [ibid.] also argues for the importance of thinking about interactions beyond just single public organizations and broadens the scope with regards to how networks of organizations interact.

3.4. An Action Plan Analysis Framework

The action plan for e-government will be analysed using the following categories (in Table **1**) based on the theoretically generated dimensions presented above.

Table 1: Action Plan Analysis Framework

ANALYSIS DIMENSIONS	CATEGORIES	MAJOR SOURCES	COMMENTS
Information Systems and Organizational Change (used in section 4.2.1; 5.1.1)	Causal agency	Markus and Robey (1988) (section 3.1)	Analysis of causal agency based on three imperatives/perspectives: 1) Technological Imperative 2) Organizational Imperative 3) Emergent Perspective
Process Orientation (used in section 4.2.2; 5.1.2)	Type of change	Davenport and Short (1990); Deming (1986); Hammer (1990); Imai (1986); Juran; (1989) etc. (section 3.2)	Continuous (TQM) or reengineering (BPR) or something in between?
	Trigger		Conventional wisdom or innovation?
	Participation/approach		Bottom up or top-down?
	Customer/client needs (external efficiency)		E.g. value for citizens
	Internal efficiency		E.g. internal cost reductions such as "lean production", automation etc.
Coordination (used in section 4.2.3; 5.1.3)	Coordination patterns and principles Coordination mechanisms	Malone and Crowston (1994); March and Simon (1958); Mintzberg (1983); Thompson (1967) etc. (section 3.3)	Type of actions taken Coordination style

4. Analysis of the Action Plan for the Swedish eGovernment

In the section below the action plan will be analysed using the dimensions from the framework generated above. A brief summary of the content of the action plan will be presented before the analysis is conducted.

4.1. Action Plan for the Swedish eGovernment – a Summary

The Swedish action plan for e-government [2008] was launched as: "new grounds for IT-based business development in public administration". The action plan consists of four major themes:

(a) Rules for overall agency cooperation and information management.

(b) Technological prerequisites and standardization of IT.
(c) Common business support, knowledge support and coordinated evaluation.
(d) Agency contacts with citizens and entrepreneurs.

In the action plan, relationships between the themes are described. Themes (a) and (b) are prerequisites for processes in theme (c). Those three themes are then a prerequisite in order to achieve results in (d). A feedback loop is also identified as being important from theme (d) to themes (a), (b) and (c) [2008, p. 5].

The key content in the action plan is expressed in the following manner: "The action plan highlights the prioritised policy areas until 2010, indicates the responsible government agencies and defines the necessary coordination with municipalities and regions (county councils). The primary objective of the action plan is for Sweden to regain a leading position within the eGovernment area by 2010 by having 'the world's simplest Administration'. In other words, the administration should be 'as simple as possible for as many as possible'." http://www.epractice.eu/en/library/281686 and [2008, p. 4].

The action plan is labelled as reformist; to take the Swedish means of organizing the public sector, as a point of departure, when developing e-government [2008, p. 4]. The Swedish action plan for e-government should present a joint set of objectives that should create a common ground for actors to move in the same direction and should assist Sweden to compete in a global market. E-government is also regarded as organizational change and development, with an active use of IT and competence development.

Cooperation between agencies with the public sector is also highlighted in order to achieve good service; quality, security and efficiency. The standardization of certain government support processes [2008, p. 5] is also highlighted in order to "[...] produce visible results towards the citizens and the entrepreneurs in terms of simplified contact channels" (one-stop shops) [2008, p. 5]. The need for a common infrastructure is also highlighted; the work with information technological prerequisites and the standardization of IT as part of an infrastructure is placed firmly in the foreground. Common functions to support public administration should also be shared among different agencies. Those functions should be standardized and automated at an appropriate level. This should be conducted in order to avoid unnecessary costs and to increase the overall productivity. To have the necessary competence to manage and evaluate these types of change processes is regarded as important in the action plan. [2008, p. 6]. The action plan also contains the need for creating rules (a legal framework) that enable public administrations to cooperate, share information and to make information accessible [2008, p. 6].

A centralised control of the implementation of the action plan [2008, p. 7] – coordination is also an important aspect of the plan itself. Increased, centralized, coordination of e-government development is launched in combination with some larger agencies having the responsibility for coordinating e-government development within certain public sectors.

Public agencies should (and have the responsibility to) cooperate [2008, p. 7]. To benefit from cooperation, from a citizen's perspective, an agency perspective and an overall government perspective should be applied. Each agency is also responsible for promoting the development of an efficient and secure electronic information interchange. Presently the situation is often that there is duplication of work. Increased coordination between local government and county councils [2008, p. 8] are

also an important point. The Swedish action plan for e-government is also linked to the European Union within the i2010 strategy [2008, p. 8].

If we take a closer look at the four themes in the action plan, the themes can be summarised as follows.

4.1.1. (a) Rules for overall agency cooperation and information management

In the action plan there is a call for more efficient information management [2008, p. 9]. Efficient information management is regarded as a prerequisite for interagency information exchange and the efficient handling of errands. This is based on the present situation in which: "Government agencies that are trying to cooperative today face a number of legal, organizational and financial challenges" [2008, p. 10].

The effects of more cooperation, coordination and information management are considered to be higher quality and value for citizens, less risk of errors in handling and less social benefit fiddles. Better quality development and thereby higher efficiency and effectiveness are major conclusions based on adapted rules and regulations. It is also clearly indicated that rules and regulations should not hinder electronic information interchange.

Based on adjusted rules for agency cooperation and coordinated information management, agencies should be able to *act coordinated, as one actor* [2008, p. 9]. The coordinated work within sectors and an efficient information exchange and management is promoted in order to increase security, quality and accessibility in e-services [2008, p. 9]. The role of IT when achieving this is that IT is pointed out as providing opportunities to systematize and to coordinate different information systems within government agencies [2008, p. 9].

4.1.2. (b) Technological prerequisites and standardization of IT

Information security is a major interest in this theme. "An agency common perspective on information security" [2008, p. 11] is highlighted. A need for increased information security is identified and it should cover: the IT infrastructure, build on common standards, requirements and interfaces [2008, p. 11]. e-ID is also highlighted as an important part of further e-government development.

Another major interest in this theme is standardization. "The purpose with standardization is to simplify business in the society". To achieve this demands cooperation and mutual agreement between different actors, such as suppliers, consumers, trade and industry and different stakeholders in society [2008, p. 12]. A standardization where technical, social, economic and other aspects are balanced is the objective. This work should be conducted and should also meet the goals concerning competitive advantage, open markets, improved quality, and security. Standardization should make it possible to communicate efficiently across organizational and national borders [2008, p. 12] (cf. section 4.1.1). Standardizing data interchange between IT systems (interoperability) is also seen as an important prerequisite [2008, p. 12] in order to realize efficient e-government. In this work the public administration shall, as much as possible, use open standards and gradually free itself from the dependency on single technical platforms and solutions.

4.1.3. (c) Common business support, knowledge support and coordinated evaluation

This theme in the action plan focuses on the processes, based on two important keywords; support and evaluation. In the action plan it is stated that: "Different

agencies needs of business support are in several cases common. Core business processes are often, but not always agency unique. Support processes on the other hand are based on similar components that can serve as a common ground for a joint IT system or a harmonization of business processes" [2008, p. 14]. This represents a clear intention to standardize and share resources between agencies in order to achieve a high level of efficiency [2008, p. 14]. These intentions are also described in terms of harmonization and also containing knowledge: "A harmonization of public agency business support and knowledge support" [2008, p. 14].

An organizational perspective is also present in this theme, taking business needs and business processes into account. "It is important that the implementation of information systems is combined with a business process analysis. The process analysis should explicitly make clear how the process should be designed in order to achieve the best possible effectiveness and efficiency." [2008, p. 14] It is stated that without such analysis, benefits from investments in IT can be difficult to realize. It is also argued as being important that processes are analysed within an organizational context. Business process analysis should also be a foundation when identifying sectors where a high level of integration between processes is possible. At the same time IT should be used to develop processes and services [2008, p. 15]. Processes for procurement and the handling of errands [2008, p. 14] are prioritized. For example electronic invoices in the procurement process are regarded as important, supported by common IT systems and standardization of the procurement processes. Another step is to implement IT systems supporting general agreements and innovative ways of procuring; balancing the needs from local government, citizens, and commercial actors. [2008, p. 14] Prioritized tasks, besides the automated handling of errands and electronic procurement, are secure electronic communications, concentrated management of administrative processes etc. [2008, p. 15].

Another major aspect in this theme is evaluation. All government IT investments and costs should be systematically followed-up and evaluated [2008, p. 14]. This work is motivated by the fact that one third of the costs within Swedish public administration are IT related. Due to limited resources, there definite and extensive needs for the evaluation of IT costs. Cost reduction regarding IT is also an objective [2008, p. 15] as well as strategic planning for overall investments in IT. Investments in IT should therefore be coordinated and evaluated according to the action plan. Several tasks are initiated in order to achieve this, e.g. mapping of IT costs for the authorities, mapping of IT strategic effects in different sectors (for example in the care sector).

4.1.4. (d) Agency contacts with citizens and entrepreneurs

This theme in the action plan focuses on results, based on the earlier themes (prerequisites and processes). User orientation should be the focus when developing government services according to the action plan; "User needs in focus" [2008, p. 16]. The solutions developed for agency contacts with citizens should be one-stop shop solutions - integrated e-services [2008, p. 16]. The development of integrated e-services and service outlets should be based on process analysis, be citizen and entrepreneur oriented, and be supplied in integrated portals in order to for it to be an easy task to make contacts with the agencies [2008, p. 17]. An aim associated with this work is also to reduce the digital divide [2008, p. 17].

To capture the data at the source (e.g. from citizens) – once should be the ideal in relation to this work. Local service (citizen) offices with common IT system support and common telecom services [2008, p. 16] should also be used. A channel

strategy based on the development and use of different communication media are present today within different agencies. Such channel strategy is also necessary for those services, named above, that cross one or more agency boundaries. [2008, p. 16]; a multi-channel strategy is proposed.

The action plan also focuses on the benefits from e-services: "The benefits from an e-service are, to a high extent, generated when it is used" [2008, p. 16]. The degree of user orientation should also be a vehicle attempting to achieve internal goals; "A high degree of used orientation leads to a high degree of efficiency, i.e. reaching goals" [2008, p. 16]. In order to deliver more integrated e-services providing better service and are more usable, [2008, p. 16, 17] then agency cooperation across organizational borders must be (further) developed.

Standardization is also an issue dealt with in this theme concerning information exchange [2008, p. 17].

4.2. Analysis of the Action Plan for the Swedish eGovernment

Below, the national action plan for e-government will be analysed using the categories (in Table **1**) from the theoretically generated dimensions presented in section 3.

4.2.1. Information Systems and Organizational Change

Analysis of causal agency is based on three imperatives/perspectives: 1) Technological Imperative, 2) Organizational Imperative, and 3) Emergent Perspective [Markus and Robey, 1988; Pfeffer, 1982].

The *technological imperative* is present in the action plan for e-government. The action plan assumes IT as being a driving force for organizational change and change in G2C communication and interaction. IT should have an *impact* on organizations, following the technological imperative as outlined by Markus and Robey [1988]. Using this line of reasoning, e-government also determines certain actions that are taken by the internal users or citizens/entrepreneurs (for example using standardized IT systems for handling errands, standardized, or even automated, public e-services in predefined channels etc). An active use of IT, e-services and e-administration, is promoted, for example in the overall characterization of the action plan: "new grounds for IT-based business development in public administration".

If the technology "[...] strongly constrains the behaviour of individuals and organizations" [ibid., p. 585] and it is not possible to identify in the action plan – this is a more empirically oriented question that can be addressed in e-government implementation studies.

Structural aspects of government organizations are highlighted in the action plan with the active use of IT (cf. the technological imperative, e.g. as illustrated in Figure **1**). Certain structural effects and impacts in the organization are expected to be the result of the use of standardization of platforms, overall technical infrastructure and communication, common IT systems etc. Examples of effects identified in the action plan are: increased cooperation between agencies, shared and coordinated information management, standardized processes, and overall increased efficiency.

The *organizational imperative* [ibid.] has been identified in the action plan in parallel with the technological one. The organizational imperative is also very visible in the action plan. A rational perspective, as in the technological imperative, is present. Choices, based on preferences of different IT-solutions, applications and platforms, are made in order to reach certain organizational effects and in order to achieve certain results for citizens and entrepreneurs. These kinds of actions are thereby goal directed (cf. [Pfeffer, 1982, p. 6]). In accordance with the organizational

imperative, as described by Markus and Robey [1988, p. 587], an almost unlimited choice exists regarding technological options (e.g. different public e-services in different channels, integrated e-services using portals etc.). In accordance with the organizational imperative it is also identified in the action plan that an explicit ambition to control the consequences must be outlined (e.g. more usable, better, easier, e-services for "empowered" citizens, efficiently supplied).

An organizational perspective, in concordance with the organizational imperative [ibid.], is also present, taking business needs and business processes into account. "It is important that the implementation of information systems is combined with a business process analysis. The process analysis should explicitly make clear how the process should be design in order to achieve the best possible effectiveness and efficiency." [(2008, p. 14]. In this statement from the action plan, IT is considered as being the dependent variable, caused by an organization's information processing needs [Markus and Robey, 1988]. In the action plan contextual variables are also used as arguments in order to change IT and organization. Globalization, global competition and Sweden's role as an "IT nation" are some examples of this.

The overall rational underpinnings and the relationships between the different themes in the action plan can be criticised as being too rational and over simplified, compared for example with the emergent perspective presented by Markus and Robey [1988] and Pfeffer [1982]. As identified above there is a clear presence of the technological imperative as well as the organizational imperative – but the *emergent perspective* is not identified; at least not in the policy. For example the action plan does not contain the unpredictability and the dynamics connected with the use of IT and its consequences (cf. [Markus and Robey, 1988, p. 588]). No reasoning about, for example, changing preferences which develop over time is present in the action plan. Neither are non-rational objectives and choice processes highlighted, nor IT taking a role in the interplay between conflicting objectives and preferences within organizations and/or society. There is no focus on a dynamic interplay between actors, technology and context. This will also be further discussed in the concluding section.

4.2.2. Process Orientation

The *overall approach* in the action plan can be characterised as process oriented. In the action plan, relationships between the four themes are described. Inputs and prerequisites are outlined (themes (a)) and (b), a process is highlighted (in theme (c)), and results (outputs) are presented in theme (d). A feedback loop (cf. the PDSA cycle; Shewhart, 1939, in section 3.2) is also identified as being important from theme (d) to themes (a), (b) and (c) [2008, p. 5]. This means that the action plan description as such, is even process oriented. The action plan, as such, is also a way of increasing a national competitive advantage at an international level.

If we characterise the *type of change* promoted and described in the action plan, then it could be interpreted as; use of innovative IT, but based on a reformist organizational perspective. This means that innovative and more radical IT-solutions are discussed and promoted in order to achieve better and more usable e-services and to create citizen/entrepreneur value and benefits. Automation of e-service is also present. The interpretation of the action plan, regarding this aspect, is close to the core values in BPR (e.g. [Hammer, 1990; Hammer and Champy, 1993]). However, when organizational impacts and the effects of an internal IT system, e-administration, are described and promoted in the action plan, the tone is more moderate; more into reforms, than explicit organizational innovation. This interpretation of the action plan, regarding this aspect, is close to the core values in TQM. Values, can, for example, be

the focus on the improvement and on an evolutionary view of processes (e.g. according to [Deming, 1986]) and organizational change. Keywords such as continuously, *learning* and competence, *systematic*, *measurement*, conventional knowledge are present in the TQM literature [Deming, 1986; Imai, 1986; Juran, 1989] as well as in the equivalent parts of the action plan. Reducing errors in handling (achieving less social benefit fiddles), to standardizing processes and artefacts and avoiding duplications are also explicit points in the action plan and are also explicit in, particularly, TQM regarding e.g. lean production.

The process perspective, the horizontal view of organizing, highlighted in the action plan is an answer to the common vertically rigid "silos" often reported in government organizations [Punia, 2004]. The cross departmental and cross agency perspective is evident in the action plan, and the agency cooperation to deliver client value. Of course processes have always existed in government agencies, but the arguments in the action plan place t a clear focus on process in order to make them visible, integrated, labelled and coordinated/managed (cf. the essential ideals in process orientation according to [Hammer, 1990; Hammer and Champy, 1993]). To think outside the bounds of functional departments and create opportunities and advantages [Keen, 1997] and to integrate them horizontally is a major theme in process orientation, regardless of TQM or BPR and regardless of whether it involves the private or the public sector [Scholl and Klischewski, 2007].

Based on the divided interpretation of the type of change above, the *trigger* to the change described in the action plan is also divided into two parts. On one hand the trigger is conventional wisdom concerning how to organize based on process oriented values (section 3.2). On the other hand a number of innovative issues are related to the use of IT as part of the public e-services and e-administration as stated above.

If we take a look at the level of *participation* involved in changing a traditional government into an e-government and characterise the action plan as *bottom up* (most common in TQM) or *top-down* (most common in BPR) then the picture is multi facetted. If we interpret the action plan as an instrument of control in order to manage and coordinate e-government initiatives in Sweden from a Government point of view, a top-down approach appears. If we, on the other hand, interpret the responsibility and the authority that is placed at an agency level, one can also classify the participation as more bottom up. The nature of coordination will be further analysed in section 4.2.3.

Customer/client needs expressed also as *external efficiency – value for citizens*, an important category in Table 1, are expressed explicitly in the action plan in several contexts and sections. User needs should be the focus when developing government services according to the action plan [2008, p. 16]. Several characteristics of e-services are also described. Integrated e-services are described and are expected to be more usable for users and provide a better service to the users [2008, p. 16 f.]. Simplicity is also a label used to characterize the overall administration, including the e-services. To have access to services is also combined with simplicity: "as simple as possible for as many as possible". It is also expressed in the action plan that, in order to deliver more integrated e-services, agency cooperation across organizational borders needs to be (further) developed (c.f. process orientation, above). We can also identify, in the action plan, that the effects of more cooperation, coordination and information management are considered to be higher quality and value for citizens.

"Users", however, forms a complex and multi-faceted concept, e.g. we have internal system users within public agencies, at different hierarchal levels, and within this group seldom users and frequent users (for example management respectively

administrative officials). There are also external users – a heterogeneous group, using public e-services. Different users or user groups in terms of stakeholders (discussed e.g. by [Scholl, 2001]) are not mentioned in the action plan.

Internal government efficiency is also a major theme in the action plan. The use of IT should cause certain steps in processes to be automated (for example automated handling of errands) and result in internal government efficiency. This can be compared to process orientation, both in terms of TQM and BPR and supports lean production. Business processes and the need to focus on common and unique processes as a point of departure when developing e-services and e-administration are also focused upon in the action plan. The standardization of a business process is also discussed using IT as a springboard. This means that several agencies are supposed to harmonize their business processes using common IT systems [2008, p. 14]. This represents a clear intention to standardize and share resources between agencies in order to achieve a high level of efficiency [2008, p. 14]. These intentions also contain knowledge [2008, p. 14].

An organizational perspective is also present in this theme, taking business needs and business processes into account. In the action plan it is described as being important that the implementation of information systems is combined with a business process analysis. The process analysis should explicitly make it clear how the process should be designed in order to achieve the best possible effectiveness and efficiency. The use of process analysis and to develop knowledge based on an existing business is typical for both TQM and for continuous improvement approaches (see section 3.2).

Another major aspect in theme (c) is *evaluation* (evaluation is an important aspect in process orientation attempting to achieve learning and continuous improvements, cf. the PDSA cycle above). All government IT investments and costs should be strategically planned, cost reduced and systematically followed-up and evaluated [2008, p. 14]. Learning from the evaluation of investments and costs provides a point of departure for future and coordinated investments and cost reductions in the spirit of the action plan and the feedback loops expressed in the action plan.

4.2.3. Coordination

The action plan for e-government as such is a coordinative act – an act to organize e-government development and initiatives at a national level. The act is performed by the Swedish Government and is directed towards all public agencies. Agency information management is one activity that should be coordinated. The action plan is therefore a creation and recreation of meaning, power and norms (cf. [Giddens, 1979]). Meanings are created for example by defining important concepts related to e-government. Power is exercised by the Government through the action plan as discussed above. This can also be interpreted as *direct supervision*, using Mintzberg's [1983, 1998] terms. The action plan can be interpreted as a central instruction for agencies regarding how to develop e-government as determined by the Swedish Government and also including processes for the implementation and monitoring action taken (evaluation). This interpretation is also valid for situations in the action plan where some larger agencies are pointed out as being responsible for initiating and developing e-services etc. within their sectors. Norms [Giddens, 1979] are also created through the action plan regarding, for example, perspectives on information security. Based on adjusting and facilitating rules with regards to agency cooperation

and coordinated information management, agencies should be able to *act coordinated, as one actor* [2008, p. 9].

The coordinated work within sectors and an efficient information exchange and management is promoted in the action plan in order to increase security, quality and accessibility in e-services [2008, p. 9]. The role of IT is pointed out as providing opportunities to systematize and to coordinate different information handling and for exchange and management in government agencies [ibid.]. However, the coordination patterns or the mechanisms are not well defined in the action plan; but integrated systems for e-administration and integrated e-services are examples of coordinated efforts and coordinated objects.

The overall call for "more coordination" in the action plan is very common in the government context, comparing it with e.g. Peters [1998]. This call takes interpretations of "uncoordinated" e-service development and even "uncoordinated" government agencies as a point of departure. It is probably not the case of not being coordinated – it is more a different type of coordination – in line with next category by Mintzberg [1993, 1998]; below.

Mintzberg's category *mutual adjustment* is also present in the action plan where coordination is distributed to agencies and their cooperation when e.g. developing cross organizational e-services or systems for cross organizational internal e-administration (e.g. [2008, p. 5]).

Several aspects of coordination in the action plan can be related to Mintzberg's *standardization* [1983, 1998]. The standardization of *processes* is the one that is most visible as described above in section 4.2.2 covering for example common processes for handling errands, supporting processes and for procurement processes [2008, p. 14]. The standardization of IT systems, platforms and infrastructure, data and information exchange are also highlighted in the action plan and are examples of a means to standardize processes.

The standardization of *norms* is identified in the action plan concerning, for example, different concepts defined and framed in the text. Perspectives regarding information security, also commented on by Giddens [1979], form one example of the standardization of norms. On an overall level the action plan as such can also be classified as an act, a statement of standardizing norms "this is the way to develop e-government in Sweden".

The standardization of *skills* is also present in the action plan in terms of knowledge support [2008, p. 15]. There is a call for dealing with the demand for skills in a strategic, coordinated, way in order to be ready for organizational change, triggered by e.g. e-government.

5. Conclusions and Further Research

The following section summarizes the results from the analysis of the action plan and outlines some areas for further research.

5.1. Conclusions

In this paper the National Action Plan for the Swedish eGovernment [2008], "new grounds for IT-based business development in public administration", was critically analysed. The analysis was made based on three dimensions, generated from theory: (1) the relationship between information systems and organizational change, (2) process orientation and (3) coordination. The three dimensions form the structure for

the conclusions below and for the focus on the three levels of analysis (macro, meso and micro level, discussed in section 2).

5.1.1. Information Systems and Organizational Change

Questions formulated in the introduction of the paper cover how the relationship between information systems and organizational change are described in the action plan. A second question raised the kinds of effects that are expected and what are the points of departure ("the new grounds for IT-based business development") for change. The relationship between information systems and organizational change as identified in this analysis of the action plan can be summarized as follows:

- A *technological imperative* (section 4.2.1) is present in the action plan – impacts (e.g. structural, communicational etc.) of IS/IT investments and use are presented and considered as a change driver. The latter theme is even used as a catchword "new grounds for IT-based business development in public administration" in the action plan. Impacts are well described in the action plan, but there is less focus on, for example, the role of IT when considering IT and e-services as being involved in constraining behaviour.
- An *organizational imperative* is also present in the action plan, another example of a rational perspective of the relationship between information systems and organizational change. Rational choices, when designing information systems for public administration, are assumed to be made based on business needs, citizen needs and business processes. An explicit ambition to control the consequences is also outlined in the action plan.

As declared in section 4.2.1 the overall rational underpinnings and the relationships between the different perspectives can be criticised as being *too rational and over simplified*, compared to, for example, the emergent perspective presented by Markus and Robey [1988] and Pfeffer [1982]. The action plan *does not contain the unpredictability and the dynamics connected with the use of IT and its consequences* (cf. Markus and Robey, 1988). Here, neither are non-rational objectives and choice processes highlighted, nor is IT taking a role in the interplay between conflicting objectives and preferences within organizations and/or society. There is no focus on a dynamic interplay between actors, technology and context.

It is very easy to criticise the action as being too rationalistic and simplified, using the literature and the perspectives above as a point of departure but it is important to also interpret the action plan as a policy document – a kind of marketing (policy making) initiative towards government agencies, citizens, entrepreneurs and society as a whole. As such it must, most probably, have a more direct, "marketing tone". The risk of having such a tone is, of course, that actors can be surprised by it and overloaded with the dynamics and complexity in the development of e-service and e-administration and its implementation. However, this can be considered more as a risk in terms of communicating the content in the action plan. The high complexity in e-government has been well reported in practice and research and "not only or simply e-service provision or putting online what is currently traded and delivered offline – it involves much more [...]" [Contini and Lanzara, 2009, p. 2]. Based on these lessons a high complexity should be uncovered in the action plan and be more present and explicit than it is in its present version. One important reason for this is also to maintain or even strengthen the level of trust for the Government issuing the action plan for e-government.

However, there are after all, several excellent possibilities for introducing e-government and an action plan for coordination; several enabling possibilities using information systems for e-services, e-administration etc. are probably present and reports have probably been made . However it is important to develop e-government from a more open perspective, using and being aware of the structural potential that information systems have (cf. [DeSanctis and Poole, 1994]). But being more pessimistic or challenging; what can we really expect from the "e" in e-government? From a U.S. context Kraemer and King claim that the main impact of IT applications has been to reinforce existing structures of communication, authority and power in organizations, whether centralised or decentralised. Their findings are that IT has brought relatively little change to organizational structures and seems to reinforce existing structures [Kraemer and King, 2008, p. 8]. We can also find that debureaucratization is not the evident result of investments in IT; it can be rebureaucratization instead [Hodgson, 2004]. The expectations reported here can be regarded as *a call for a perspective on e-government taking contextual and organizational issues more into account* than have been presented so far e.g. in the rational imperatives empirically identified in the action plan, and reported above.

5.1.2. Process Orientation

How is process improvement and change described? What kind of change is expected? Which ideals are promoted? What about customer/client values and focus? Is internal efficiency focused upon? These are questions formulated in the introduction of the paper and which were analysed in section 4.2.2.

The overall approach in the action plan, and even the action plan as a document, is process oriented. Inputs and prerequisites are outlined followed by actions and results. A feedback loop is also present, following the schoolbook of process orientation (e.g. in terms of TQM according to [Deming, 1986] and a PDSA cycle according to [Shewhart, 1939]). Vertical, rigid "silos" often reported in government organizations [Punia, 2004] are used more as an antithesis to the process oriented; a horizontal view is promoted in the action plan.

The type of change promoted in the action plan can be linked both to BPR and to TQM. The linkages to BPR are more evident when analysing IT in the action plan (e.g. innovative IT should be used to achieve better and more usable e-services and create value, automation etc.). On the other hand linkages to TQM are more evident when analysing the organizational prerequisites and results (e.g. the discussion of organizational impacts is more moderate – more into reforms than into explicit innovation within government organizations). The TQM perspective is also obvious when standardization is outlined in the action plan.

One risk connected innovative use of IT in the action plan, in terms of BPR, is failure. Failures are well reported even from previous BPR-gurus [Hammer, 1996]. One risk connected with moderate organizational impacts in the action plan, in terms of TQM, is that the impacts or effects from e-government development are underestimated in the action plan. This is in line with the conclusion above concerning the rational and over simplified tone in the relationship between information systems and organizational change. If the intentions in the action plan are fully, or even partially, and in some terms successfully implemented in the government agencies, then the organizational impacts will certainly go beyond the point of "moderate".

The approach of achieving change corresponds, regarding participation, more to the BPR approach. The top-down approach is also present in the action plan; and by releasing the action plan as such as a part of a steering process.

The customer/client needs are meritoriously expressed explicitly in the action plan, in several contexts and combined with internal efficiency efforts in a balanced way. The challenges here are to be explicit about the "users" and different stakeholders (cf. [Scholl, 2001]). The internal efficiency can be exemplified by the ambition to automate the handling of a subset of errands, standardization, sharing resources, and the use of systematic evaluation of investments and costs related to IT.

5.1.3. Coordination

An important question formulated in the introduction of the paper is: Which principles and patterns regarding how to coordinate the e-government development are present?

In the analysis (section 4.2.3) the action plan as such is found to be a coordinative act – an act to organize e-government development and initiatives at a national level. The action plan is certainly a creation of meaning, power and norms (cf. [Giddens, 1979]) defining important interpretations, concepts etc. related to e-government. Based on rules and coordinated information management, agencies should be able to act as one, coordinated actor.

Several principles and patterns [Mintzberg, 1983, 1998] of coordination are identified in the analysis. The Government practises direct supervision by launching the action plan as such. Several aspects of standardization as a means to coordinate are also identified. Standardization of processes [ibid.] is the most obvious and visible coordination principle and object identified in the action plan. Standardization of concepts, IT systems, platforms and infrastructure, data and information exchange are also identified as objects for coordination. Standardization of norms [ibid.] is also present, related to Giddens [1979] above.

5.2. Concluding Discussion and Further Research

So is the "National Action Plan for the Swedish eGovernment" like the emperor's new clothes, leaving the public administration naked? Or is the action plan a real lever as a guide or instrument of control to efficiently deliver coordinated and in some sense better e-services for everyone?

In some sense the action plan for e-government is too simplistic and does not take different stakeholders, emergent, context, citizen perspectives into account from the general IS area and knowledge generated from the private sector (e.g. from e-business) as stated above. However, it will probably have an important role for e-government development representing a more strategic and coordinated effort than has been used previously in Swedish e-government development. As an explicit effort and plan coming from a micro level it can be discussed, questioned and used as a point of departure for emerging initiatives on the meso and micro levels. The previous self coordination model (built on mutual adjustment and some elements of standardization through norms, using Mintzberg's, [1983; 1998], terms), with "soft coordination" has not provided standardized platforms, legal conditions, common security solutions (e.g. eIDs) for governments agencies to build or buy their own e-services and e-administration systems. The wheel has been reinvented many times! This has probably also created extra costs etc.

One risk associated with the action plan (and some of the simplistic elements summarized in section 5.1), using the perspective from the fairy tale, is that different stakeholders are not able to see distinct results and good examples from e-government

development (cf. the "suit" in the fairy tale) – the Government can turn up "naked" with a non-existent e-government initiative.

Based on the conclusions regarding the innovative use of IT and the more reformist organizational effects in section 4.2 we may have an old emperor in new, and visible, clothes! Or maybe "new wine in old bottles", using a variant of Ilshammar et al.'s [2005] subtitle and a question from a panel at a Scandinavian Workshop on e-government in Kristiansand, Norway, in February 2009.

Some of the results and comments on the action plan in the analysis above depend on how we interpret the nature of the action plan as such. The intentions from the Swedish Government are to coordinate the e-government initiatives on a strategic level. The role of the action plan, as a policy document on a macro level, is also to highlight important themes (four themes described in section 3), tasks and responsibilities. The nature of the action plan, as interpreted in this paper, is therefore multidimensional and spans from the strategic level of e-government development, via a tactical level, down to an operative level (the latter also covering e.g. technological aspects, standards, user values etc.). I consider the action plan as a powerful policy document with a clear coordinating intention, with prescribed perspectives, solutions, pointing out responsibilities etc. The tone in the action plan is more mandatory than advisory.

The present analysis can be interpreted as a contribution to the development of e-government policy making and practice. It highlights both the benefits associated with an action plan and its risks. The analytical framework in this paper also provides an example of how one can analyse, understand and critically evaluate e-government initiatives; both for practitioners and for researchers. Results from the critical evaluation of the action plan can be used by practitioners at different levels within the public authorities, the Government, and authorities that are implementing different public e-services or drawing up strategies for e-government. Service providers in the private sector, designing and delivering e-services, can also benefit from the results and the analytical framework presented in this paper.

Several issues in this paper could form the subject for further studies. Important stakeholders can for example be interviewed as a complement to the analysis of the text in the action plan. To add empirical data such as interviews could provide more "life" and "dynamics" into the statements, plans etc. expressed in the text based on the action plan. Another important aspect could be to study the implementation and the strategies in the action plan when in use, e.g. using dimensions from the analysis framework presented in this paper. The use in this case can include how actors in government agencies act upon the action plan, how policies are translated and negotiated when implemented in agency settings. Standardization is an important theme in the action plan that can be further studied in this way. Standardization is now a part of the coordination theory (a coordination mechanism also presented in section 3.4 and used in the analysis; section 4). However standardization can, in further studies, be a major analytical dimension since it is an important issue in order to be able to realize the benefits of e-government in practice and an important issue to systematically study. The action plan could also be linked to other government policies in Sweden or at the EU level in order to be put into context.

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