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THE RHETORIC OF E-GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT AND THE REALITY OF E-GOVERNMENT WORK

- THE SWEDISH ACTION PLAN FOR E-GOVERNMENT CONSIDERED

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Abstract

In this article two different analytical aspects of organisational life, *the rhetoric of management* and *the reality of work* are used as a context for discussing some implications of the Swedish action plan for eGovernment. Through the lens of these dimensions it becomes obvious that the invisible values within the Swedish action plan for eGovernment are embedded in the rhetoric of management and visible in the reality of work.

Keywords: Swedish eGovernment Action plan, workplace digitalisation, government management

1. Introduction

In early 2008 the Cabinet Office released its latest version of the Swedish Action Plan for e-government which aims to improve the coordination of the national strategic e-government work. It demonstrates the need for a more strategic approach to ICT use in the public sector. The description and definition of eGovernment in the Swedish Action plan is, as so often elsewhere, the "the principal tool" by which public administrations can improve their government activities both internally, for improved efficiency and effectiveness, and externally for improved relations with stakeholders (see for example [Moon and Norris, 2005; Yildiz, 2007, Bekker and Homberg, 2007; Lindblad Gidlund and Giritli Nygren, 2009]). In this respect the centrally formulated eGovernment strategy will be considered as an administrative reform. This kind of ambitious and far-reaching attempt to transform public sector brings with it a shift in the nature of work in public administration.

The point put forward in this paper is that if we want to understand the organisational micro dynamic processes involved in the implementation of eGovernment we need to analyse how different socio-economic modes of production are intertwined regardless of whether or not they are contradictory. Drawing on some contingent approaches to the notion of "e" in both rhetoric and practices; this paper seeks to open the black box of ICT as it appears in the Swedish eGovernment Action plan.

The overall purpose of this paper is to contribute to the discussion of eGovernment implementation by making the implicit organisational micro dynamic processes involved in the framing and implementation of eGovernment explicit. The aim is to highlight the important process through which eGovernment is framed and translated by the national authority and how it might affect different divisions of practice. To do so, two different analytical aspects of organisational life, *the rhetoric of management* and *the reality of work* are used as a theoretical context for analysing some implications of eGovernment implementation. These theoretical dimensions of organisational life are used to discuss the Swedish *eGovernment Action Plan* [Cabinet Office State Secretary Group, 2008] in the empirical context of a larger case study following the implementation of eGovernment in a local Swedish municipality.

The main contribution of this paper is a theorisation regarding how to understand the organisational micro dynamic processes involved in the implementation of ICT in public administration.

The paper is structured in the following way: in section two a theoretical description of the "rhetoric of management" is presented together with an analysis of some implicit notions of "e" in the Swedish eGovernment action plan. In section three a theoretical description of the "reality of eGovernment work". In section four a description of the research method which is followed by a presentation of the result is provided. The paper ends with a discussion regarding the practical implications in section six and a summary of the conclusions in section seven.

2. The rhetoric of eGovernment management

This section consists of an ethnomethodological analysis of discursive practices, in which the focus is on the ways the e*Government Action Plan* [Cabinet Office State Secretary Group, 2008] uses different discourses and genres. The proponents of ethnomethodology are primarily interested in the meaning-engendering discourses that people use in their daily social practice. To apply this theory, it must be assumed that social actors make use of established forms of understanding (for which read discourses) in their descriptions of the content and thrust of the electronic administration. The statements are thus held to refer to an already established pattern that the social actors assume is both reasonable and intelligible, while at the same time they are part of the same pattern.

Within a semantic field, several discourses can operate simultaneously. The production of the text studied here is informed by the State secretary group for eGovernment, which allows for a specific idiom and a specific self-understanding. The method of close reading that Garfinkel [1967] advocates in his *Studies in ethnomethodology* means that the text or statement is viewed as a 'document about' something, in the present case a document about a public administration's underlying cognitive order. When the originators of the texts describe electronic administration, they have already made a choice from several possible descriptions. In viewing the texts as a 'document about' the national authority's underlying thought patterns, the attempt here is to identify some of the different discourses embedded in the produced texts, and the way in which they were expressed in the Swedish *eGovernment Action Plan*.

Bearing in mind that the discourses manifested in this text are spread at a later stage to the public, it means that several possible questions - and their answers - concerning electronic administration have already been formulated. It thus becomes particularly interesting to study this choice of information, and the cognitive order that

finds expression in the texts. Thus, it can be seen, that according to the cognitive order , taken for granted by the speakers in their descriptions, the introduction of electronic administration to local authority operations is more a matter of improved service and efficiency than of democracy. The texts reveal two central perspectives through which electronic administration is ascribed purpose and meaning. The first is the public perspective. This one might expect to be comprised of statements about influence and democratisation, but instead it is almost exclusively bound up with a service-oriented discursive practice. The sense of providing a service to the public is strong, as these passages demonstrate:

"The objective is: as simple as possible for as many as possible" [eGovernment Action Plan, p.3]

"The reform now being initiated aims to lay the foundation for long term economic development in which services to both citizens and business are in focus" [eGovernment Action Plan, p.3]

There is a very obvious focus on efficiency, increased services and instrumental development, for which IT is described as the main promoter, throughout the *eGovernment Action Plan.* This raises the question regarding how the technical and the social are related to each, an issue that has long been debated in the 'sociology of technology' field, and the question concerning where the line between the technical networks and social organisations should be drawn is far from obvious. It is not unusual that historians and social scientists attribute the role of a certain kind of technology in a certain period of a time as a change promoter [Sundqvist, 2001]. Such images can be described as casual technicism, where technology is assumed to have a primary role in societal change. Today, it is often information technology that is attributed to the role as social converter. Previous studies have shown that these images are common in today's Swedish IT-debate (see, e.g., [Wihlborg, 2000; Sundquist, 2001; Karlsson, 2005]). Not surprisingly, as is shown in the following quotation, this kind of statements also appears in the *eGovernment Action Plan.*

"IT also creates potential for resource and energy- efficient solutions, greater efficiency, changed life styles among citizens and international competitiveness" [eGovernment Action Plan, p.23]

This kind of rhetoric reflects and shows how IT becomes embedded in the *eGovernment Action Plan* as an active agent, whose development the administrations are expected to support:

"..public administration should work to realise the potential benefits of IT-use – that contributes to technical advancement and reduces environmental impact" [eGovernment Action Plan, p.24]

"To achieve the desired result, future development must be based on a holistic view of Swedish public administrations and on knowledge of how organisations, skills and governance can be better designed to support the aim of ICT-investments" [eGovernment Action Plan, p.14]

"Administrations should be alert to changes as a result of developments in eGovernment that affect skill provision. Their organisation, working methods and work environments shall support the development of efficient eGovernment" [eGovernment Action Plan, p.23]

These types of rhetoric position the working methods, skills, and employees found within an organisation as being subordinate because of technological innovations. The main objective is an IT-based organisational development and not the other way around i.e. organisationally based IT- development.

This kind of analysis focuses attention, in particular, on the metaphors which emerge and become established as defining what technology is and what it can do. According to Czarniawska and Joerges [1996], there are a number of dominant rationalisation myths that organisations are quick to adopt. In this way, different concepts are taken up and disseminated, and enjoy a status as 'modern' solutions. By adopting these IT-solutions and incorporating them into their operations, the public administrations increase their status and legitimacy. Sometimes having a leading position in the eGovernment field is held to be more important, or at any rate at least as important, as the actual results:

"The aim of the action plan is to improve the coordination of strategic eGovernment work within the Swedish Government offices. If the administrations make use of these new opportunities, Swedish public administration will be able to retake a leading position in the eGovernment field by 2010. (p.5)

Unquestioned tools or megatrends, such as eGovernment, have the possibility to travel rapidly from one area to another. For what reason (added value) it is important for the Swedish public administration to have a leading position in the eGovernment field is left untold.

However, the symbolic and mythological dimension associated with organisational megatrends means that it could simultaneously be closely coupled with a management paradigm and loosely coupled with a management strategy. At the paradigmatic level, regarding the idea of eGovernment, a critical discussion exists about the relationship between eGovernment and New public management (NPM) and traditional public management [Teicher et al., 2002; Criado et al., 2002; Hazlett and Hill, 2003; Homburg, 2004]. In the Swedish Action Plan for eGovernment, however, the strategic management level of eGovernment is quite unarticulated. It is most often described as IT-based organisational development without any further information as to how, or in which way:

"eGovernment is organisational development in public administrations that takes advantage of information and communication technologies (ICT) combined with organisational changes and new skills." [eGovernment Action Plan, p.5]

Despite the fact that the *eGovernment Action Plan* demonstrates the need for a more strategic approach to ICT use in the public sector it is not clearly related to any management paradigm beyond the fact that "organisation, working methods and work environments shall support the development of efficient eGovernment" [eGovernment Action Plan, p.23].

Here, Foucault [1992] and his analysis of the modern welfare state is drawn on in order to discuss the manner in which the texts on electronic administration are linked to a more dominant social practice. According to Foucault [1992], the modern era is marked by an all-encompassing social practice. All the phenomena that are characteristic of this era are designed either to strengthen or to counteract this practice. However, it should be noted that Foucault does not analyse liberalism as a theory or as an ideology, but rather as a method; a method characterised by an increased rationalisation of governing practices. These practices obtain their legitimacy from terms such as individual freedom and cost effectiveness. Foucault describes the development of modern governing techniques as a transition from a view of the modern state as a civil society to a view of it as a social market [Burchell, 1992; Barry et al., 1996].

Foucalt [1992] has inspired analyses of the welfare state that show that different social reforms are routinely linked to new styles of government. These techniques are characterised by a neo-liberal spirit that expects people to be active, engaged, and eager to participate. This is a form of government that in effect allows its citizens to administer themselves. The discourses evident in the texts on electronic administration also invoke the freedom of the individual. The individual is placed in such a way that self-service and accessibility are viewed as opportunities for citizens to conduct their own business, to meet their own needs, and at a time to suit them. Meanwhile, cost-efficiency incentives are intimately associated with other rationalisation and automation discourses. According to Foucault [1992], the modern state achieves its greatest efficiency when it can regulate as much as possible by the minimum of intervention. From such a perspective, it is possible to view electronic administration as merely one element in a social practice that attempts to extract as much as possible from the public by allowing them to handle more administrative business themselves.

Based on the Swedish *eGovernment Action Plan*, electronic administration appears to be strengthening or refining neo-liberal governing practices rather than challenging them. The understanding of electronic administration demonstrated in the action plan is at heart a matter of public service and instrumental operational development.

Yet, the rhetoric of eGovernment is built on arguments emphasizing public service and instrumental development. There is a well known insight from an institutional perspective that the adoption of new ideas regarding administrative reforms often affects organisational talk but has less effect on practice.

3. The reality of eGovernment work

Within the group of people that are associated with this organisational redesign there is a very central, though seldom acknowledged, group expected to implement the transformation on a daily basis: the public administrators. In the *eGovernment Action Plan* they are referred to as those who should 'support the aim of IT investments' (p.14). Since new technologies give rise to new modes of production and new modes of production in turn generate new kinds of work practices, employees might have to develop new work routines and skills to be able to apply the innovation to their work routines. Under different conditions and within different computerization strategies, jobs may become more or less skilled; work groups may gain or lose flexibility; power may shift to or from central administrators, etc [Barley, 1988; Burris, 1998]. In general, studies on the impact of technology on changes in skill demand in the past decade show that computerisation and organisational change are more complex than either deskilling or up-skilling. It appears that technological changes and other rationalisation activities appear to have different effects on "work practices" depending on type of technology, the nature of the service provided and the managerial policies [Burris, 1998; Salzman and Rosenthal, 1994]. As computerisation and information technology interact with social preferences and political choices in complex ways, it is difficult to predict the degree to which and in which way employees will be affected [Frenkel et al., 1998]. Changes such as these depend upon both social and technical contingencies, e.g. the kinds of systems introduced, who controls them, the kind of infrastructure devoted to their support, etc. One way of looking at skill trends is to consider them from the employee's perspective. Earlier research shows that employees working in the same organisational setting are passing through the restructuring of public administration in

different ways; some are going through processes of deskilling while others are going through processes of up-skilling (see for example [Webster, 2002]).

An underlying assumption of this paper is that understanding the changing nature of work is important in order to understand the institutional organisation and reorganisation of practice. Since the impact of increased workplace digitalisation appears to vary with both the type of technology and the nature of the service and managerial policies in a given context it is important to attempt to understand how technology is intertwined with political prescriptions, power and knowledge and embedded in socio-cultural practices [Burris, 1998; Salzman and Rosenthal, 1994].

Research on IT-implementation from a political perspective highlights the way the divergent interests of stakeholders and political ideologies affect the implementation process (see for example [Brown, 1995; Ebbers, 2002; Viborg Andersen, 2006]). An underlying assumption behind these types of analyses is that similar technology and organisational structure can serve different socio-economic aims. Ebbers [2002] argues that IT is always introduced with a certain set of values and if it is introduced in a setting where opposing values exist, the introduction of the new IT will be difficult. The most common examples of this can be found in situations where IT is used to improve economic value (customer orientation) in an administration dominated by legal values. This is not an uncommon situation in the implementation of eGovernment in public sector. Alongside this research, in the field of factor research, important key factors or enablers in the IT-implementation process are identified. Factor research has found that management support, IT-design, appropriate user design interaction and IT-understanding appear to have a significant impact on the implementation process (see for example [Moon, 2002]). Finally, there is the process research perspective which focuses on how the organisational processes are carried out. This perspective shows that organisational members' commitments to the implementation process are equally important ([Weick, 2001; Ebbers and van Dijk, 2007]). Both factor and process research emphasize the important role of the organisational members in the implementation process and the lack of commitment to change and IT understanding appears to reduce the potential for successful implementations [Ebbers and van Dijk, 2007; Weick, 2001; Cooper and Zmud, 1990].

Even though there is no management paradigm connected to the Swedish Action Plan for eGovernment, it could be said that there are certain kinds of confusing rationale embedded in the suggested directions for eGovernment in the Swedish context. Organisational developments that take advantage of ICT could, in fact, be conducted in many ways and with very different consequences. The empirical context, discussed in the sections that follow, serves as an example of that.

4. Method

The empirical material derives from a larger study, following the implementation of eGovernment in a local municipality from different perspectives [Giritli Nygren, 2009]. The study concerns a local municipality, which is at the moment facing this eGovernment transformation with several e-projects underway. Comprehensive facts about the municipality are however that it is a medium-sized Swedish municipality with about 95 000 inhabitants. In this study an interpretation of the overall collected data within the larger project is used as the empirical context. Based on the aim of the larger study three different types of empirical data were used within this broad case study design:

1. To be able to create an overview of the perceptions of efficiency and service among the employees, an extensive and quantitative study was chosen. The survey was given to the entire body of employees in the municipal administration (2624 employees). To manage such a large quantity, a web inquiry tool (eval) was used and to be able to distribute the inquiry to the total mailing list of all those employed at the municipal administration. From the total of 2624 employees, a response rate of 48. 4% was achieved. Of those who answered the survey where 71.2 % women, 61 % had a university examination and 23% were in a leading position.

2. The second survey consisted of open ended questions and was collected in two administrative departments. It was given to a total of 38 employees and they answered the questions during their staff meeting. The questions were focused on the usefulness of computer based work in their daily practices i.e. to what degree their work content was connected to computerised work and what that meant for them.

3. To gain a deeper understanding of some parts of the eGovernment practices, in-depth interviews were conducted with people in leading positions. Three people in non leading positions were asked to write personal narratives about how a certain e-solution had changed their work. The narrative method and the in-depth interviews provided an opportunity to make the process of e-government more visible [Kohler and Reissman, 1996].

To interpret the empirical material, the ideal type method was used. Ideal typologies have played an important role in sociological theory and research [Barley and Kunda, 2001]. In a similar manner to that used by Weber, the ideal type of bureaucracy sociologists have used images of ideal types for example "the worker on the assembly line". They could be described as a particular combination of characteristics formed by relevant attributes that make up the typology. The data has been thematically analysed in several steps. This involved developing initial categories, grouping data, identifying patterns. The empirical material was interpreted in the light of the "thematic dimensions" derived from theory: *job codification* as a matter of degree of performance specification, *rule observation* as a matter of the degree of routines of work and *job specify* as a matter of degree of operational freedom. The transcripts were read and re-read, to identify statements that reflected assumptions, knowledge and experiences of computerised work and organisational change in work practices (see [Doolin, 2004]). These statements were then used to construct the aforementioned ideal types in order to obtain a deeper understanding of both the how and the when of the implementation of e-government [Giritli Nygren, 2009].

However, since this study is based on a single case study with a local authority in Sweden there are of course limitations regarding the generalisation of the results. The empirical findings from this particular case serve more as an example regarding how different combinations of rationalisation, efficiency, quality and service can be manifested in the everyday practice of e-government work. In addition, by understanding something about this particular case, this could contribute to the understanding of the more general phenomena. At a later stage, these limitations can also be seen as fruitful avenues for future research under the same theme.

5. The divided workforce of eGovernment

In the empirical material two general themes or combinations became apparent: one mostly concerned with efficiency and rationalisation and one mostly concerned with increased quality and service.

In the survey given to the entire body of employees it was clear that the predominant aim of the eGovernment transformation was understood as a movement to improve the municipality's service (quicker and better services). Nearly all of the respondents provided such an answer. However, looking at the accounts of the everyday work situation another picture emerges. The increased use of IT-solutions is not referred to as something primarily rewarding for increased service but rather as a solution to problems identified by management. In other words, employees are under the impression that the implemented IT-solutions are a question of efficiency rather than of service. This contradiction indicates a tension between efficiency and service as well as between organisational talk and work practices. The author understands this as a tension between the rhetoric of management and the reality of work practices.

This gives rise to different types of employees who could be labelled as *monotonic case workers* and *professionally personalised bureaucrats* using words used by the informants. The monotonic case worker is an employee working within a mass production model of bureaucracy. His/her experiences indicate an emphasis on operational efficiency rather than service. He/she even expresses that the service quality he/she performs is less than before the e-government implementation. The Professionally personalised bureaucrat on the other hand is an employee working within a customer oriented bureaucracy. His/her experiences indicate an emphasis on customized services and quality issues rather than on operational efficiency. The Professional and personal bureaucrat could be considered as part of the more up-skilled labour in workplace computerisation. He/she is visible, visionary and positive to the change and, as opposed to the monotonic case handler, perceives service improvement as a result of internal efficiency. As mentioned previously, increased computerisation can cause both up-skilling and deskilling processes among the employees. The monotonic case worker is clearly part of the deskilling while the professional and personal bureaucrat is part of the up-skilling process.

The large survey indicates that the professionally personalised bureaucrats are those who expressed the view that the IT-solutions were implemented in order to support their daily work and that they, if it did not serve them, could do something about it while those who thought that they had to adjust to the change are the monotonic case workers. Their practical position in relation to either the implementation process and/or technology by itself varies between how they describe their degree of performance specification, routines of work and operational freedom. But, to understand their role fully, one must also consider another dimension present in the descriptions of the social meaning they ascribe to their work, which is also related to how they were situated in relation to a citizen and service. While those who describe their work as case administration, less qualified and with low ability to influence their work practices also emphasize that their relationship to the citizens are standardised and that their ability to give them service is very occasional. Many of them felt that they had become invisible while those who felt that they had received a wider work description also said that they were working to find solutions where no standardised solution were deemed to be appropriate, felt that their relationship to the clients was personal and of a consultative nature.

6. Practical implications

The practical implementation of eGovernment as increased digitalisation has the ability, as shown by this empirical example, to differentiate employees working within the same organisational settings is determined by the degree of performance specification, routines, operational freedom and relationship to the citizen present in their daily work practices. Some scholars have argued that eGovernment is part of the shift from the conventional, 'mass customised bureaucracy' to the 'customer-oriented bureaucracy' [Korczynski, 2002]. This would imply that the organisational consequences for employees should be matters of the post-industrial change in computerised workplaces i.e. flatter hierarchies, a more skilled workforce and worker empowerment [Frenkel et al., 1998]. As shown here, a *post bureaucratic* eGovernment appears to be a complex hybrid of a "mass customised bureaucracy" and a "customer oriented bureaucracy".

Based on the empirical findings of this study, it can be concluded that administrative rationalisation could be connected with the mass customised bureaucracy and the citizen service appears to be connected with the customer oriented bureaucracy. These two bureaucracy models are then able to divide the workforce into two categories of employees working within the same organisations but with completely different types of working practices differentiated by the degree of performance specification, routines and operational freedom present in their daily work practices. It is a complex hybrid of work organisation, which has pessimistic and monotonic case handlers on one side and optimistic, professional and personal bureaucrats on the other. For the professional and personal bureaucrat, who has experienced an up-skilling of his/her work, this change is perceived as a good thing. For the monotonic case worker on the other hand, whose work is deskilled, this change is a change for the worse.

Focusing upon those pure idealtypes' means an exaggeration of certain specific features, and in the particular case of eGovernment, they are constructed to capture the practical consequences of organising and reorganising. The suggestion here is that identifying new occupational idealtypes can provide a deeper understanding with reference to how new modes of governmental work and relations of production reflect the changing nature of work in public administration. By viewing the electronic administration as a refinement - and a reform - of a bureaucracy's techniques, it is possible to understand the intentions and the reform as a "post bureaucratic" attempt to reorganise the public administration. By identifying occupational ideal types within a "post bureaucratic" eGovernment, it might be possible to conceptualise the attempted reform and offer a lens through which to view the link between work and organising in the transformation of institutional practices.

Also, it is obvious that eGovernment is related to a management paradigm with two parallel themes, as it aims at both rationalising the public administration and increasing the service quality towards its citizens. The argument put forward here is that the production and distribution of public administration services are intertwined within the eGovernment transformation. A central tension that became apparent previously in the industrial age (see for example [Piore and Sabel, 1984], is also visible in the stories from the everyday practice of eGovernment— the tension between internal efficiency and quality of service. The double objectives of quantity and quality are fundamentally contradictory. On the one hand, the government seeks to reduce the costs per citizen/customer transaction by increasing the speed with which cases are processed, and on the other hand they praise the qualities of customer

service and encourage their employees to be quality-orientated. While espousing the goal of customer satisfaction and service quality, the mass production model, indicated by the narratives of employees rather leads to an emphasis on operational efficiency. The study shows that public administration and governments have to balance the conflicting principles of standardization with the principles for quality of citizen service.

Publicly provided services have at least two distinctive characteristics: they are not primarily provided under the conditions of profit maximisation, even though there might have been such attempts, and they are obliged to provide more or less equal services to everyone [Lash and Urry, 1994]. Governments are, at least in democratic settings, expected to provide equal and similar services for all citizens and the possibilities of product transformation are to some extent limited [ibid]. Enhancement of quality, efficiency and cost savings should therefore be considered as a question of distribution rather than production [Hogget, 1996]. Resource rationalisation and quality in both production and distribution are part of the eGovernment idea. The goals of eGovernment sophisticatedly combine quality as well as efficiency since both are seemingly required in order to provide service. But without reference to any possible contradiction between efficiency and quality, they are combined with a rhetoric that implies that both can be attained simultaneously. The argument put forward here is that efficiency and quality are not interchangeable and that efficiency is but one aspect of quality in the production and distribution of public administration services within the eGovernment transformation.

7. Conclusion

The overall purpose of this paper was to contribute to the discussion of the Swedish *Action Plan for eGovernment* by making some underlying organisational micro dynamic processes involved in the implementation of eGovernment visible. Through the lens of some empirical material, the relationship between the rhetoric of management on the one hand and the reality of work on the other has been discussed and it is obvious that eGovernment is related to a management paradigm with two parallel themes. One involves an aim to simultaneously rationalise the public administration and the other to increase the service quality towards its citizens. The argument put forward here is that the production and distribution of public administration services are intertwined within the eGovernment transformation. A central tension that had already become apparent in the industrial age is also visible in stories from the everyday practice of eGovernment, namely the tension between internal efficiency and quality of service. The double objectives of quantity and quality are fundamentally contradictory. On the one hand, the government seeks to reduce the costs per citizen/customer transaction by increasing the speed with which cases are processed, and on the other hand they praise the qualities of customer service and encourage their employees to be quality-orientated. While espousing the goal of customer satisfaction and service quality, the mass production model, indicated by the narratives of employees leads rather to an emphasis on operational efficiency. The study shows that public administration and governments have to balance the conflicting principles of standardization with the principles for quality of citizen-service.

At a later point, the study shows that consideration must be given to how the rhetoric of the Swedish *eGovernment Action plan* is guilty of a casual technicism i.e. an implicit belief in an unproblematic casual progression from technological innovations to social and administrative change. This kind of rhetoric reflects and

shows how IT becomes embedded in the institutions of governance as an active agent, and by positioning , working methods, skills, and employees of an organisation as being subordinate due to these technological innovations.

The viewpoint presented here, clearly holds a political dimension in which a power and relational analysis has been required, which is rewarding when analysing large IT-implementation processes in the public sector. Particular attention should be given to the fact that information technology interacts with social preferences and political choices in complex ways and that this needs to be emphasized when discussing IT-adoption among employees in the public sector. The resistance towards, or a slowdown in the implementation process might not only be a matter of IT- skill, competence or organisational boundaries etc. In fact it might be a struggling against technological and technocratic expansion in terms of increased control, degradation and threatened work autonomy. Perhaps, those who are managing these processes should be considering how to implement IT without making the employees feel powerless, meaningless, socially isolated and/or self estranged.

Positioned as subordinate actors, employees have to appropriate the technologies with which they are involved and adapt them to meanings that enhance their work. The adoption/implementation process depends upon both social and technical contingencies, e.g. the kinds of systems introduced, who controls them, the kind of infrastructure devoted to their support, etc. An important implication of these insights is that the status of the individual in technical systems is more than or at least as important as the procedures of IT-work in public administration.

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