Chapter 18
Leaders as Mediators of Global Megatrends: A Diagnostic Framework in Praxis

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ABSTRACT

The idea of eGovernment is moving rapidly within supra-national and national and local institutions. At every level leaders are interpreting the idea, attempting to grasp either the next step or indeed the very essence of the idea itself. This chapter outlines a diagnostic framework, resting on three different dimensions; translation, interpretative frames and sensemaking, to create knowledge about the translation processes and by doing so, emphasize enactment rather than vision. The diagnostic framework is then empirically examined to explore its possible contribution to the understanding of the complexity of leader’s translating and mediating the idea of eGovernment in their local context. In conclusion it is noted that the diagnostic framework reveals a logic of appropriateness between local mediators, eGovernment, different areas of interest and appropriate organisational practices.

INTRODUCTION

When overarching ideas such as that of eGovernment begin to travel (through different types of policy documents), this causes the operative leaders to play a specific role in translating the ideas into their own division’s “language” (Røvik, 2000; Latour, 1996; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Local authorities are placed in the role of institutional mediators between global megatrends and local conditions (Anttiroikko, 2002; O’Toole, 2007). In the perspective of translation institutional entrepreneurs has an important role in organisational transformation processes (see Di Maggio, 1988; Lawrence & Phillips, 2004). Institutional entrepreneurs are described as “organised actors with sufficient resources” (Di Maggio, 1988, p.14) whom, by attributing their subjective and intersubjective meaning to the idea, construct meaningful means of using it, which also can be seen as an activity of sense making (Weick, 1995; Orlikowski & Gash, 1994).
This activity is often referred to as an enactment process, the ideas become enacted, and it is in this first/early enactment process that leaders play an important role (see for example Fountain, 2001; Weick, 2001; and Yildiz, 2007). Additionally, the strategic management level of eGovernment is quite unarticulated and unproblematised and the correct way forward becomes difficult to decipher (Andersen, 2004; Andersen & Henriksen, 2005).

In this paper we develop an analytical framework to analyse how leaders, in their role of institutional entrepreneurs or mediators, make sense of eGovernment goals. The objective of the article is then to analyse leaders as mediators of megatrends with the help of a theoretical framework resting on the concept of translation by Shein, interpretative frames by Orlikowski and sensemaking by Weick. The aim is therefore one of theory testing with the aspiration of gaining deeper insight into the local interpretation processes of global megatrends. In addition the value of the framework as a practical tool has been further analysed through two different workshops and the results of those are presented and discussed.

The main argument put forward in this paper is that it is important to examine and analyse the actions of operative leaders and how they make sense of overarching eGovernment goals. Analysing leaders’ translations of the concept of eGovernment becomes interesting as leaders not only shape their own image of information technology’s potential (Moon & Norris, 2005; Ogawa & Scribner, 2002; Avolio et al., 2001) but are also important actors in shaping how the organisation makes sense of technological implementations i.e. how leaders influence the way technology is assimilated and adapted by organisations.

After this introduction the paper has the following disposition: in section two the discussion focuses on eGovernment as a megatrend. In section three, a theoretical framework in order to analyse the enactment of eGovernment is put forward. The framework consists of three analytically different dimensions (i) translation of the goals and their reasons, (ii) how they make sense and are legitimated according to the organisational understanding, and (iii) interpretative frames related to position and responsibility. To provide an enriched picture an explorative examination of the diagnostic framework is provided in section five. In section six the value of the framework as a practical tool is further discussed in view of two different workshop settings. The implications relating to unreflected and unarticulated management strategies that are enacted are then discussed and the manner in which this proposed framework might contribute to the strategic management level of eGovernment.

THE MEGATREND OF EGOVERNMENT

We focus on eGovernment as a travelling megatrend acquired by its own rhetoric and special attributes. For an idea to achieve status as a “megatrend” it has to be in unison with the, at the time, dominating discourse. A homogenisation is taking place when an organisational concept becomes a symbol for the modern society. By becoming a symbol the idea obtains a penetrating power and is legitimated as the “best” or “only” way to reform and modernise an organisation. A common aspect relating to overarching megatrends (Røvik, 2002; Anttiroikko, 2002; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996) is their global sphere of action and that they are associated with foundational modern values such as rationality, efficiency, science, nous and progress.

The idea of eGovernment is often described (Löfgren, 2007; Moon & Norris, 2005; Yildiz, 2007; Bekker & Homberg, 2007; Kraemer & King, 2006) as an object or 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. The idea of eGovernment therefore consists of different processes which, with the assistance of ICT, are
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