"We do not Talk about this" – Problematical Silences in e-Government

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Abstract. The Swedish public sector is currently in a process of transformation, often referred to as e-Government. In this paper stories are told of problematic silences in an e-Government implementation project in a Swedish government agency. e-Government is discussed as something that is articulated differently by a range of actors in various locations. This enables articulations of multiple e-Government and the multiple articulations can also be a means to contest dominant and possibly problematic articulations of e-Government. The dominant discourse of e-Government is the rationalisation of the public sector as a means of saving public resources. The improvement of quality and availability of public services, and to improve democratic processes are central in the dominant discourse. In this discourse there is a silence about the dismissal of employees in the public sector. There is neither talk about how the public sector is an important labour market for women nor how the rationalisation will affect the employees. Employees' knowledges are not considered as being a resource for strategic IT-planning, and thus they are not invited to participate in the further design of IT-systems. The purpose of the paper is to explore the participation of the administrative officers in an e-Government implementation project, and the meanings of e-Government articulated in the project. Ethnographic methods were used in the collection of empirical material, and central ideas in participatory design and feminist technoscience were used in the analysis. The main argument is that the administrative officers participated in an ambiguous way. They were central actors but were at the same time marginalised within the organisation. The ambiguity regarding how they participated is related to different and more inclusive articulations of e-Government in the project. The paper is concluded with a discussion concerning how alternative articulations of e-Government can offer alternatives to the dominant e-Government discourse.

Keywords: e-Government, public sector employees, silences, feminist technoscience, participatory design

1. Introduction

> "[A]ny entity is a word "in the first instance"… but not necessarily in the last instance" (Bruun Jensen, 2004, p. 11, italics in original)

In this paper stories of problematical silences within an e-Government implementation project in a Swedish government agency will be told. The argument in the paper is that the employees in the agency participated as central actors in the project, but were, at the same time, marginalised. The stories concern the silences around public sector employees' participation in the current transformation of the Swedish public sector. This transformation process is often referred to in terms of the general concept of e-Government. The meaning of e-Government is not uniform but is articulated differently by a range of actors in various locations. With the help of the quotation at the beginning of the paper we would like to discuss how e-Government – as any phenomenon – is multiple and heterogeneous. The quotation expresses how no phenomenon is stabilized, but is always in an ongoing process of becoming. With this point of departure the focus moves from the study of how predefined phenomena relate to each other, to the study of how phenomena materialize or come into existence as seemingly unified phenomena (Suchman, 2007, Barad, 2007, Bruun Jensen, 2004). Thus, e-Government comes into existence in ongoing doings and actions; it is not fixed and stable. This enables us to make visible multiple definitions of e-Government. It can also be part of a strategy to challenge dominant and possibly problematic articulations of e-Government. Thus e-Government is a political initiative expressed with a number of ideas, objectives and hopes in political documents or policies. e-Government is also a research field which is dealt with in several journals and by a number of researchers who write papers and books. Furthermore e-Government is a set of ideas which are translated and implemented locally into existing national and local governments. Importantly, e-Government is enacted and materialized in day-to-day practices in public sector organisations.

When phenomena such as e-Government have multiple meanings, it becomes interesting to explore these; how they are materialised in particular settings, and if any of these dominate, or are problematical. There appear to be some central ideas that form a dominant discourse or a grand narrative of e-Government. A key incentive in the dominant Swedish discourse is the rationalisation of

the public sector as a means of saving public resources (Ilshammar et al, 2005). It is also central in the discourse to improve the quality and availability of public services, and to improve the democratic processes (Grönlund, 2004). Three central aspects of e-Government are usually highlighted; eAdministration, eServices and eDemocracy (Grönlund, 2004). Bekkers and Homburg (2007, p. 380) argue that the dominant mythical component in e-Government is the idea that "technology itself enables or even causes public sector agencies to transform themselves from self-centred conglomerates to citizen-oriented administrative apparatuses". This idea builds on technological optimism, rationalism, and the idea of the active citizen (see also Elovaara & Mörtberg, 2007, Mörtberg, 2004a). One might think that the employees in the public sector should be considered as important actors in the making of e-Government; after all they are the experts of the public sector businesses. The Swedish action plan for eAdministration states that the employees are an important asset and that public administration is required to be a good working site[1] (The Swedish Government Offices, 2008). However, in this eighteen pages long document, only three sentences refer to the employees. Mörtberg and Elovaara (forthcoming 2009) highlight how, in the dominant discourse there appears to be a silence with reference to the risks of dismissals and reorganisations of employees in public sector. In addition there is a silence about the public sector as an important labour market for women, or what will happen to the employees in the rationalisation of the public sector. Mörtberg and Elovaara (forthcoming 2009) write: "The question how the experiences, knowledge and skills of these employees could provide valuable bits and pieces for the process of developing IT-based work practices and also a good service environment for citizens, is not articulated in the dominant discourse" (ibid., p. 1). Mörtberg and Elovaara (ibid.) discuss how the experiences and skills of the public sector employees are not included in the dominant discourse, and how their work is often shadow work (Star & Strauss, 1999). The knowledges of the employees are not considered as resources for strategic IT-planning, and they are not invited to participate in the further design of IT-systems (Mörtberg & Elovaara, forthcoming 2009). Since there are problematical silences in the dominant discourse, the question is whether there are other articulations of e-Government that could be different.

In this paper we will tell stories of a systems design project in a Swedish government agency. The purpose is to explore the participation of the administrative officers in the project, and how e-Government was articulated in the project. The argument that will be developed is that the administrative officers in this local e-Government project were central actors, but were not recognized as such. One kind of e-Government that materialised in this project concerned the automation of public administration and services. The administrative officers' knowledge and work practices were essential to the process. Without their knowledge there could be no automated system. Despite this, the project appeared to lead to a marginalisation of the administrative officers within the overall organisation – if not in the project. However, alternative and more inclusive meanings of e-Government were also articulated. These will be discussed in the concluding discussion.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The introductory section is followed by a second section concerning the frame of reference, in which Participatory Design (PD) and feminist technoscience are presented. The third section concerns the research method, and in this the ethnographic methods used in the study are discussed. The e-Government implementation project is presented in the fourth section. This is followed by a presentation of the empirical material, in which the administrative officers, their participation and their positions in the project form the main focus. The paper ends with a discussion about the participation and its relationship to the various meanings of e-Government articulated in the project.

2. Frame of reference – where PD meets feminist technoscience

In order to tell the stories in the paper we invite several voices and perspectives. Some of these come from PD. A central idea in PD is that designers during the design of information systems cooperate with the people or practitioners[2] who in the future will use the systems. The participation of practitioners in the design of information systems is important for several reasons. The first is to improve the knowledge of the practices upon which these systems are designed. Another is to enable

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[1] "The employees are the strength of the Swedish public administration. In a time when we face large coming pension retirements and when the public administration compete with a strong private labour market the public administration must do what it can in order to increase its attraction. This we can do among other things through offering a stimulating work environment in which quality, development and user orientation are in focus" (The Swedish Government Offices, 2008, p. 3, our translation).

[2] These are usually referred to as 'users', but this concept is problematic for several reasons and in this paper we will instead use the term practitioners (see Brereton, 2009). Some researchers talk about 'use' rather than 'users' (see e.g. Bratteteig, 2004). For more about this discussion see also Suchman (2002), Markussen (1996), Kyng (1995), and Boivie (2005).

practitioners to develop realistic expectations for the systems, while at the same time reducing resistance to change. Finally an important aim is to increase workplace democracy by giving employees the right to participate in decisions that will affect their work situations (Bjerknes & Bratteteig, 1995, Bødker et al, 2004). In PD it is central "to talk and exercise participation that enables and allows different realities, experiences and knowledge" (Elovaara et al, 2006, p. 113). However, at the same time as PD is about the inclusion of multiple voices in information systems (IS) design, PD is not a homogeneous movement but also *has* multiple voices (Törpel, 2005). For us, PD is about always being attentive to patterns of dominance and marginalisation (Beck, 2002). A central question in all design projects is: "How can the dominant notions of 'relevant expertise and views' be challenged?" (Karasti, 2003, p. 36). e-Government is often developed and implemented through IS design projects in the public sector, and hence PD comes to concern also participation in the materialisation of e-Government.

Our use of PD is inspired by the voices of feminist technoscience. The concept of technoscience highlights how science, technology and society are intertwined (Latour, 1987). Feminist technoscience can be useful for increasing the methodological sensibility towards the lower frequencies, or fine-tuned aspects of participation and marginalisation (Haraway, 1997). Feminist technoscience is a set of ideas and perspectives with a critical focus on the production of (scientific and other kinds of) knowledge. From this perspective (information) technologies are considered as being materialised knowledge, and the design of information technologies as processes of knowledge production (Suchman, 2002). These ideas can be used in order to critically analyze and formulate alternatives to dominant and problematic understandings of technoscience. Another issue in feminist technoscience is to point to alternatives and to how things could be different, and in this endeavour, to also pay special attention to lower frequencies and to gender performances. Feminist technoscience goes beyond the relations of women and men and focuses on epistemological and ontological issues (Barad, 1999, Elovaara, 2004). Lucy Suchman (2007) writes that technoscientific practices are central sites for the emergence of new subjects and objects through which we can explore "alternate conceptualizations of what it means to be human" (ibid., p. 281). In an interview Donna Haraway (2000, p. 157) explains how she understands feminist technoscience:

> "Feminist technoscience studies … involves technoscientific liberty, technoscientific democracy, understanding that democracy is about the empowering of people who are involved in putting worlds together and taking them apart, that technoscience processes are dealing with some worlds rather than others, that democracy requires people to be substantively involved and know themselves to be involved and are empowered to be accountable and collectively responsible to each other. And feminist technoscience keeps looping through the permanent and painful contradictions of gender".

Karen Barad (1999, 2003, 2007) argues that the world is a dynamic process of becoming, and as we are part of the world, it is our responsibility to intervene in this process. In practice intervening is unavoidable; the question is rather how to intervene, and with what consequences. With the focus on the emergence of new subjects and objects it becomes central to explore the processes in which certain phenomena – e.g. participation, agency, e-Government, or a new information system – become seemingly unified. Donna Haraway (1991) reminds us that there can be no innocent positions, and accountability is central in feminist technoscience. Using feminist technoscience as a framework it becomes central to ask whose knowledge is dominant and whose knowledge is marginalised in technoscientific practices (Elovaara et al, 2006, Karasti, 2003), and what consequences this causes. Barad (1999, p. 102) writes: "We are responsible for the world within which we live not because it is an arbitrary construction of our choosing, but because it is sedimented out of particular practices that we have a role in shaping".

Participation is closely related to the possibility both to exert influence and to act. Hence participation is closely related to agency. In feminist technoscience however, agency is not something that someone 'has'. Rather, agency is something that is produced by specific material-semiotic[3] (Haraway, 1991) configurations. This concept is used to indicate the ways in which the material and cultural are inextricably intertwined. "Capacities for action are recast… from inherent capabilities [of humans] to possibilities generated and reiterated through specific sociomaterial assemblages and enactments" (Suchman, 2007, p. 241-42).

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[3] Suchman (2007) uses the word sociomaterial in a similar way, while Barad (2007) uses the concept material-discursive.

2.1 Listening to silences

When analysing technoscientific practices such as the design of information systems it can be important to listen to what is said, but also to what is expressed through silences and hesitations (Mörtberg & Stuedahl, 2005). The main source of ideas with regards to the importance of silences for the analysis of power is Foucault (ibid., p. 27) who writes that:

> *"Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less about the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies … There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses".*

Discourse in this account is not only what is said, but also that which defines and enables what can be said (Barad, 2007). Even tough participatory approaches are used in IT design everyone might not have access to the language used in the design practice in order to articulate their perspectives, wishes and requirements (Mörtberg & Stuedahl, 2005, Berg et al, 2005). Stuedahl (2004, p. 225) means that silences can signify that a phenomenon requires new concepts that participants from different professions can understand and share when communicating. Silences can also be about processes involving sorting or learning, in which old frames for interpretation are adjusted. Additionally silences can be a sign that a knowledge tradition's rules for interpretation are reconfigured. Therefore "we need methods also to pay attention to what people not talk about, what we find in the silence, if the aim is to cast light on a variety of voices, experiences and knowledge, and to legitimize them in the design process" (Mörtberg & Stuedahl, 2005, p. 144).

3. Research method

The empirical material used for this paper was gathered through the use of ethnographic methods. The empirical study was conducted by the first author (Johanna). The project that was followed was a regular IS design project in a Swedish government agency (it was not run by researchers). It started in September 2005, and Johanna joined the project as a participant observer almost at its inception. Thus she attended and recorded project work meetings and discussions, workshops etc. She also took field notes, photographs, and gathered project documentation. It was the business analysts who were the main focus for the observations. In addition there was a dialogue with the project manager, the method expert, and the project client. Furthermore, formal and informal interviews with several actors in the project were conducted. The time allocated to the fieldwork usually involved two to three part-days per week for approximately six months. Johanna was a rather passive observer; while she was present during the project meetings; she mostly listened and wrote. Occasionally she asked questions during coffee breaks or after the ordinary project meetings in order to better understand what was going on, both with regards to the business process analysis, the project organization, and the overall organization. Every now and then she also talked to John, the method expert, and to Ingrid, the project manager, in order to understand how the business analysts worked and why.

It was a somewhat traditional ethnographic study, but in the analysis ideas from feminist technoscience and also from PD were used. Thus we understand phenomena and meanings such as for instance e-Government as multiple and dynamic processes. In the words of Suchman (2007, p. 269), the production of artifacts as uniform phenomena "involve[s] continuous work across particular occasions and multiple sites of use". Suchman (2007) highlights how phenomena such as humans and nonhumans are mutually constituted, and how the boundaries between them are configured and enacted, rather than given. This can be related to Haraway's diffraction figuration (Haraway, 1992, 1997, 2000). Diffraction is what happens when light passes through slits, and the light is broken up. If a screen on the other side of the slits records what happens with the light, the result is a record of the history of the light's passage through the slits. Diffraction does not show the same in a different location, but does show interference patterns. These interference patterns trace where the effects of differences appear (Haraway, 1992). The figuration of diffraction is used to trace the history of something, and to show how there can, simultaneously, be many different contexts, meanings and references to something, none of which can (or should) be forgotten. The diffraction figuration can be used as a methodological strategy to avoid oversimplification. We use the figuration in order to analyse the multiple meanings of e-Government. Researchers in feminist technoscience also give special attention to silences and omissions, and ask questions regarding whose voices and perspectives are silence(d) and made invisible.

The ideas of feminist technoscience and PD allow us to not take as a given the existence of e.g. participation, but instead to focus on ways in which it materializes as a specific participation in specific sociomaterial configurations. The ideas invite us to recognize that e-Government and participation can be constituted in multiple ways by differently situated actors. They also invite us to pay attention to silences; to what was not said or talked about (Mörtberg & Stuedahl, 2005). Inspired by feminist technoscience and PD, the guiding questions for the analysis were: What kinds of participation were enacted in the project? What kinds of silences were there, and what could these silences mean? How were both the participation and the silences related to the administrative officers and their positions in the project and in the organisation? What kinds of e-Government materialised in the project? How were these related to the participation of the administrative officers, and to the silences?

With these questions in our minds we went through the empirical material of field-notes, recordings of project meetings, interviews and informal talks, and project documentation. This can be considered as being an attempt to recreate a course of events, from the perspective of the purpose associated with this particular paper, and our interest in the silences surrounding the administrative officers. This search back and forth in the empirical material was combined with reading texts about related issues in e-Government and the theoretical approaches mentioned above. We were looking for when and how someone talked about what would happen to the administrative officers, and when they were not. In the empirical material we searched for when and how the administrative officers were considered to be the central experts in the business process analysis, and when they ceased to be considered as such. Bossen (2008) vividly describes the process of qualitative research as a dance between theory, method and encounters with the world of 'creative mess'. This is how we understand this paper; it is the result of what we met at the field site, the ideas we brought with us, the method we used, and the theoretical and methodological ideas we have encountered on the way.

4. The e-government implementation project

The empirical material used in the paper is based on a systems design project in a government agency in Sweden, here referred to as The Government Agency (TGA). At the time of the observations TGA had approximately 320 employees. The administrative officers formed the largest professional group within the organization; 200 out of the total of 320 employees. Of these administrative officers 80 percent were women. The core business of TGA was the administration of a part of the Swedish public social insurance system. The project started in September 2005 and was called 'Project IT support for administrative officers'. The project was extensive and spanned several years, and was considered critical for TGA.

There were two different objectives associated with the project. One objective was to provide an IT support for the administrative officers in their case administrating tasks. The IT support was expected to ease the work of the administrative officers and also to minimize simple, monotonous and repetitive tasks. Another objective of the project was to automate as much as possible of the administrative process. Johanna was told that the underlying aim was to handle an expected increase in incoming cases, and to enable the administrative officers to spend more time supporting the customers of the organization. In terms of e-Government, the project was part of an effort to turn TGA into an eAdministration. In addition, one part of the system, designed within the project, was a public eService aimed at external customers to TGA.

The project was conducted as a business development project, and Johanna followed the project mainly during the business process analysis phase. The project was conducted in-house, and there was a project organisation consisting of a project team, a project manager (Ingrid[4]), a client (John), and a project steering committee. A map of the project organisation is presented in Figure 1. The role of the client was to determine how to allocate the project resources and what the result of the project would be[5], and the role of the project steering committee was to be the advisors for the client. The project team consisted of a number of people, some of whom worked part-time and some full-time in the project. The project core team, at this time, consisted of five members who were working full-time with the business process analysis. Hence during the business process analysis a project team consisting of less engaged people, and a smaller project core team working full time were involved. The project core team was conducting a business process analysis and will henceforth be referred to as the business analysts. The business analysts were:

▪   Sonja, administrative officer.

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[4] All names mentioned are fictitious.
[5] The client was one of the higher directors in TGA but he was not very active in this phase of the project. Instead his tasks were delegated to a representative, a delegated client (John).

- Maria, administrative officer.

- Ulf, "business client". He was supposed to act as a link between the business part of the organization and the IT part.

- Jacob, an expert in graphical user interfaces (GUIs).

- Hans, an expert in the business process analysis method, who was leading the day-to-day work of the business analysts.
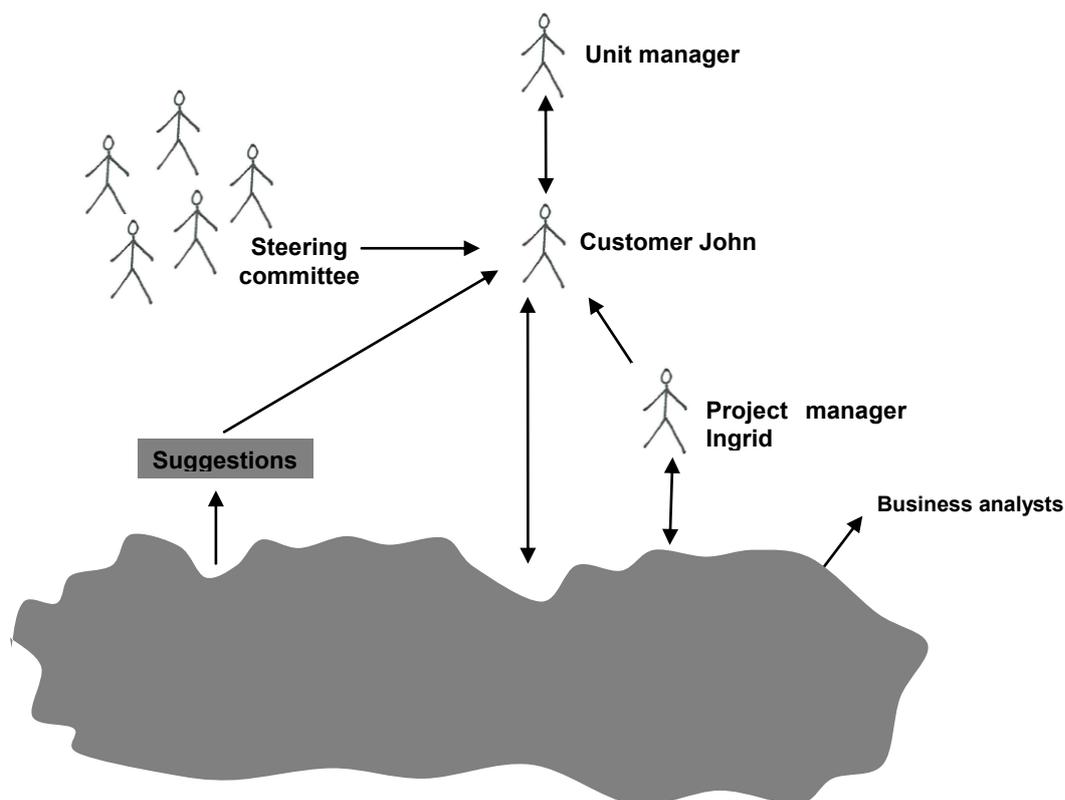

Figure 1: Model of the project organisation

4.1 The business development process

The project group had already been formed by the start of the fieldwork and the business analysts had begun their work. The business process analysis consisted of three steps; today, tomorrow, and the future. As discussed above, one of the project objectives was to improve the work situation of the administrative officers, who were thus considered as being the users of the system to be built. Two administrative officers took part in the business process analysis work as business analysts, experts of the work processes to be analysed, and as representatives of the administrative officers. Paper prototypes of graphical user interfaces (GUIs) were used as a method of analysing the existing work practices and to develop the user requirements for a better system for tomorrow and the future. The focus in this part of the business process analysis was on work practices. This focus on work practices made the knowledge of the administrative officers central in the business process analysis. However, even when the project focus moved to an automation of the administrative process the ideas about how to develop an automated system departed from the knowledge of the administrative officers.

The result of the business process analysis was supposed to be formulated in a document that would be used as the basis for the decision regarding how to continue with the project and also used as part of a feasibility study. During the business process analysis, business requirements were supposed to be formulated. After the business process analysis, a systems requirements formulation process was supposed to follow. During the business process analysis many different systems were articulated by different actors such as the administrative officers, the client, the project manager, the business

analysts and the IT representatives. During this part of the design work there was clearly not *one* new system, but several.

5. What kind of participation?

TGA administrated several public social insurances, but 'Project IT support for administrative officers' only concerned one of these (here we call it insurance BA12). BA12 was regulated by a complicated legislation system and included many different special cases and exceptions. The insurances administrated by TGA were related to employment, and the administration of BA12 involved accordance and the calculation of an amount to be paid to the insured. The amount would depend on, for instance, the age of the insured, number of employments, type of employments, previous parental leaves, absences due to illness, periods of adult education, and previous salaries. Thus every administrative case was individual and required extensive knowledge both of the legislation for that particular insurance, and of the systems and practices currently being used in its administration. There was a check-list regarding how to work with BA12, but no comprehensive descriptions of the administrative work practices existed.

One day, one of the IT architects and Johanna (the first author) were allowed to follow Maria, one of the administrative officers, when she demonstrated how she conducted the administration of a case. The story is told here in order to show the complexities involved in being an administrative officer, and the amount of situated and embodied knowledge required. The story is also told in order to show how e-Government is enacted with regards to the practices of employees such as Maria. Maria's story is concerned with how she worked before the new system was developed and how it would be impossible to develop the automated administration system without the input of her situated knowledge. Consequently this would also be the case for the eAdministration or the eService associated with the project. Many times we (the researchers), were deeply impressed by all the exceptions and special instances Maria and the other administrative officers handled during their daily work; it was obvious how the project depended on their skills.

5.1 Maria's story

Maria had her own desk in a rather small open-plan office. On top of her desk her computer screen was placed, framed by post-it notes. She turned on her computer and then opened up the internal organisational portal of TGA. Then she also opened up her work instruments, that is, systems, databases and programs with which she worked. These were:

- A, a first mainframe. Two systems were related to this (Mareg and CICS).

- B, a second mainframe.

- Diahist, a program for tracking the history of previously administrated cases.

- Diabas, a case handling system.

- My workplace, a system which retrieved information from Direct Report, in which employers reported to TGA about their employees.

- MS Visio, a tool for creating diagrams.

- A program for retrieving information from a business partner.

- A system for Swedish statistics about deceased people.

- MS Word, for making notes.

Thus she had a total of ten program or system windows open, and talked about this as a problem. She attempted to retain as many of these as was possible open at the same time on the screen in small windows that she fitted side by side, but this proved impossible to work with and so she still had to flip between the windows. Maria worked with three of the social insurances that TGA administered. Furthermore, as no written descriptions existed with regards to how to work with a case in BA12, she had to write notes to herself on post-its in order to remember how to proceed with a specific case. These notes she placed around her computer screen.

Maria opened a case by writing a personal security number in Diabas, the case handling system. In Diabas she could see the information gathered about a particular individual and her/his case. She

stated that a regularly encountered problem was when cases were not made active. The case would then have to be returned to the department at TGA which handled the activation of cases. A case could only be active if all the necessary information had been gathered. Information about an insured person often existed in several systems handled by Maria, since information came from different sources (such as from the employer and the insured). This sometimes resulted in different information in different systems about the same insured person. Thus Maria could not trust the reliability of the information in the systems or that it was in agreement, and this had to be controlled. Furthermore the system could not control whether an insured person would receive double payments, and this had to be performed manually by Maria and the other administrative officers. Another problem was that the calculations of the sums to be paid to the insured person had to be made in stand-alone programs. This increased the risks of mistakes and miscalculations[6].

Clearly there were several problems associated with the system currently used by Maria and the other administrative officers and there were difficulties associated with manoeuvring within it. Furthermore it was not one system Maria had to deal with but several heterogeneous technical systems. Thus even though these were sometimes referred to as 'the administrative system', as if it was only one uniform or coherent system, it was not. It was rather an assemblage of different non-related systems. Only some of these were directly related to the administration of cases. However, in working with a case, Maria did the job of relating the different systems into a meaningful whole; an administrative system. Thus she configured these heterogeneous systems into a system that was useful for the purpose of case administration. This is what Suchman (2002, p. 99) calls 'artful integrations'. It appeared as though Maria was one of "those actants who configure material-semiotic networks", at the same time as she was part of the network (Suchman, 2007, p. 270).

5.2 Translating situated knowledge to an automated system

There were no formal descriptions of work practices that concerned the administration of the insurance BA12 and only the administrative officers possessed this knowledge. Thus the knowledge required to administer this insurance and its related cases was situated, and embodied by the administrative officers. The idea of an automated system relied on the possibility of verbalising and translating as much as possible of Maria's and Sonja's tacit knowledge. This knowledge would then be used to design a system that would automatically administer the work previously conducted by the administrative officers. Thus the participation of (some) administrative officers in this project was completely central. Their knowledge would enable the automation of the administrative process, and thus the success of the whole project. Without the participation of these administrative officers and their willingness to translate their knowledge, there could be no automated system. At least one administrative officer was present at every work meeting included in the ethnographic study. Without the contributions brought by both Sonja and Mari contributions little progress could be achieved within the project – neither during the business process analysis nor during the later project phases.

Despite this, the administrative officers did not appear to be recognized either as a resource for the strategic planning of the project or for the organisational efforts to become an eAdministration. Others had laid the strategic plans for the project before the administrative officers were even engaged. The administrative officers did not form part of the steering committee which discussed the further development of the project. They were also not considered to be IT workers, but were defined as belonging to business rather than to IT, even though they clearly worked with the design of IT.

In these stories at least two different kinds of e-Government appeared; one with regards to how central the administrative officers were to the project, and one story with regards to how they, despite this, were not considered as a strategic resource. Thus the stories about participation in the project were ambiguous.

5.3 What would happen with the administrative officers?

To us (the researchers), it appeared as though the dominant objective with the project was to rationalise the organisation, and that the guiding ideas were visions relating to a more efficient administration. What puzzled us was that initially – approximately during the first two months – no one in the project openly talked about rationalisation, automation, or reorganisations. Ingrid, the project manager, said that the automation of the system was conducted in order to be able to handle an expected increase in insurance cases, and to enable the administrative officers to spend more time with customer support. This appeared to be official project rhetoric, and when Ingrid was asked about

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[6] Field notes from November 30, 2005.

what would happen to the administrative officers once the new system was implemented in the organisation, she confirmed that the project would lead to downsizing within the organisation. She said that the solution to the problem of employees was that, as the average age in TGA was rather high, several administrative officers would anyway retire in the normal manner[7] (through pension retirements). At a later stage, Ingrid said that the administrative officers with the lowest education would be dismissed. She also said: "we do not talk about this" because this would create fear and uncertainty within the organisation, and that this was not part of the aim of the project[8]. At other times Ingrid explained that some of the administrative officers would be moved to the customer service department, and the rest would remain as administrative officers. Thus it appeared as though one meaning of e-Government that materialized in the project was that of the dominant Swedish e-Government discourse.

Hence at the same time as (some) administrative officers held central positions in the implementation of e-Government in TGA, (several of) the administrative officers risked being retired, or transferred to the customer service department. The administrative officers who would be relocated to the customer service department would no longer be administrative officers, so their skills as administrative officers would not be required. Thus they would lose their professional identity, not to mention that their professional skills would no longer be considered important. In this way, even though (some) administrative officers were central to the project, as a group they were marginalised within the organisation. This shows the kind of risks there might be in making ones knowledge and skills visible (Star & Strauss, 1999, Elovaara et al, 2006).

It was only after a period of time had elapsed that the business analysts realised that the project objective to be given the highest priority was not to improve the work situation of the administrative officers but to automate the administrative process. At this stage they realized that the administrative officers might face redundancy as a result of the project. After this realization the matter was discussed in an awkward manner, and jokes were made about what would happen to the (few) administrative officers who would still remain in TGA, as if they expected that there would be only a few of them left.

5.4 What's in a silence?

So what did it mean that (initially) no one in the project talked about the automation objective? What did this silence signify? There can be several meanings or articulations to this silence. We will not attempt to present an exhaustive list of meanings; we only wish to suggest some possibilities for the interpretation of the silence. One is related to what Ingrid, the project manager, said about a wish from the project management to have a smoothly running project in which uncomfortable questions were not articulated. Articulating such issues might lead to uncertainty within the organisation, and this might hamper the progress of the project. The question of rationalisation and reorganisation might be controversial, painful, unpleasant and difficult to handle. Therefore it might be easier for the project management to postpone these discussions. From a PD perspective postponing such discussions is problematic; if a systems design project is aimed at downsizing, this should be openly stated (Bødker et al, 2004). Another interpretation of the silence is that the e-Government initiative and the information systems design projects through which the initiative is realised are closely linked to technological optimism (Mörtberg, 2004b, Bekkers & Homburg, 2007). Hence in the e-Government policy documents there is a strong belief in technology as something positive, as a driving force for development and social and economic growth. Bekkers and Homburg (2007, p. 378) refer to this as "a myth of (unquestioned and ubiquitous) material and technological progress". The ideas formulated in Swedish e-Government policy documents, and thus the associated technological optimism, travel, are translated, and are implemented in systems design projects (Lindblad-Gidlund & Giritli-Nygren, forthcoming, Dittrich et al, 2003). In such a strong discourse of technological optimism it might not be legitimate or possible to voice hesitations, objections, or problematic implications, such as the redundancy of employees.

5.5 Alternative articulations of e government

It appeared as though the dominant Swedish discourse of e-Government was not only reiterated in the project, but that alternative stories also materialized. There was the tale regarding the hard work required to make e-Government happen, and of the skills and knowledge of the administrative officers

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[7] Field notes from September 12, 2006.

[8] Field notes from November 3, 2005.

who participated in order to enable the automated system to become a reality. There was the essential participation of these administrative officers during the business process analysis, the dependency on their participation and thus their enablement of the success of the project. There was a story concerning how the administrative officers were defined as belonging to business even though they were essential in the design of an information system, and thus might as well be regarded IT workers. There were the risks of becoming unemployed as an administrative officer, or of being moved to the customer service department and thus risks to lose their professional skills and identities. There was the silence about these issues on the part of the management. Additionally, there were nervous jokes among the business analysts about the risky future of the administrative officers in TGA.

6. Discussion

The purpose with this paper was to explore the participation of the administrative officers in the project, and how e-Government was articulated in the project. The administrative officers participated and held central positions in the project, and were not marginalized during the business process analysis. Their centrality in this process was recognized. In fact, they were not only central to the business process analysis, but, additionally, for the success of the whole project. Without their participation there would be no automated administration in TGA, that is, no eAdministration, no eService, and no e-Government. But their centrality was recognized only up to a certain point, and they were still regarded business specialists, not IT workers or information systems designers.

At the same time as the project was dependent on (some) administrative officers there was a silence about what was going to happen to this occupational group in TGA. The official project rhetoric was that the automation of the administrative process would relieve the administrative officers of tedious and repetitive work, and they would be able to spend more time on contacts with the customers. Underneath this rhetoric were plans to retire some of them, to move others to the customer service department, and still others (the least educated) would be dismissed. Thus some would be given other jobs in which their skills as administrative officers would be useless, while others would be unemployed. Some would, however, be left as administrative officers. These plans were not discussed openly in the project. Thus the administrative officers, their knowledge and skills, were central to the project, but marginalized within the organization. The point here is that the administrative officers were indispensible to the project, and therefore in the materialization of e-Government, but they were not recognized or rewarded for this; they were not offered a higher salary, or given high status positions in the project as systems designers or strategic advisors. Instead they risked being reorganized, dismissed or be offered an early retirement. This is why the silence was problematic. These conclusions emerged through the use of feminist technoscience as an analytical framework, in which the focus was on silences, and on e-Government as something shifting and multiple that comes into being in ongoing activities.

Karen Barad (2003) argues that there always are possibilities for agency, for intervening in the world's becoming, and that it is our responsibility to rework and to contest what matters and what is excluded from mattering. One way to do this is to contest the dominant discourse of e-Government. Understanding phenomena such as e-Government as open-ended and dynamic processes, as words in the first instance, opens up the possibilities for this kind of deconstruction. With this kind of exploration not only one but multiple e-Governments were constituted by differently situated actors. The diffraction figuration helped us in keeping these uncertainties alive and allowing heterogeneous e-Government*s* (in plural) to exist side by side and this is thus one way to deconstruct the dominant discourse (Haraway 1997). Then we might find that some of these e-Governments concern the reliance on public sector employees, and so perhaps these employees can become visible.

In 'Project IT support for administrative officers' several meanings of e-Government were articulated. One was a reiteration of a more efficient administration created within the dominant discourse. However, others were also articulated such as competent and skilled administrative officers who participated in and enabled the design of an automated administration. This articulation appears to be a hopeful one, but there were also problematic articulations such as the risks associated in making ones knowledge visible, of being moved to another department or even dismissed, and of the silence surrounding these issues. If we listen to these articulations, perhaps they can be used as resources in order to formulate alternative and more inclusive e-Governments to that articulated in the dominant Swedish discourse. Is it possible to invite employees in public sector into the process of developing e-Government, and treat them and their knowledge, skills and experiences as resources for this? Instead of treating them as shadow workers who are essential but invisible, perhaps they could be recognized as central in the activities in which e-Government is constituted. Perhaps they could also be recognized as IT workers?

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