Chapter XVII
The Myth of E–Government

Katarina Lindblad-Gidlund
Midsweden University, Sweden

Katarina Giritli-Nygren
Midsweden University, Sweden

ABSTRACT

The idea of e-government is spread at a rapid rate. In almost the entire world governments are attempting to adapt to the suggested changes which implies that e-government has become a global phenomenon. We suggest that the idea of e-government is best understood as a mythologised megatrend. It has become a symbol for the modernised government of today. A symbol which, in some sense, has to be demythologized in order to to be able to be realised. It is argued that it is possible to gain further insights into, and tools to cope with, the gap between myth and reality by differentiate between general and specific interpretations of the idea. By analysing these interpretations the myth can be partially unravelled, which is illustrated by a large scale study based on 2,624 employees in public administration. The result indicates a loose coupling between the general and the specific level.

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade computerised technology and advanced information systems in public administration has increased. Today these implementations in public sector are often part of the overarching idea of e-government. Included in the e-government concept there is also an expectation of an organizational redesign and a rethinking of public administration work in general. Lenk & Traunmuller (2000) points out that if the guid-

ing vision 'e-government' should be realised, the public administration has to go through an institutional change. This is, as many researchers (Fountain 2001, Lin & Conford 2000, and Lenk & Traunmuller 2000) have noticed, not something that happens automatically. The public sector has a long institutional memory with ingrained habits which are embedded in routines, norms and bureaucratic politics. These institutional settings are carried by both individuals, cultures and structures within the organization and will

of course influence the transformation process, and to be able to achieve institutional change the electronic government has to bring about adjustments of the whole set of institutional entities (Yang 2003).

As all-embracing ideas such as that of e-government begin to be adopted in different parts of the world, they have to be translated in order to suit the local context (Bekker & Homberg 2007, Czarniawska & Joerges 1996). In this chapter we focus on the complex relationship between the general and specific translations or interpretations regarding the myth of e-government. We assume that myths are interpreted differently according to the general and specific point of reference and that the knowledge regarding how these interpretations differ provides valuable insights into the demythologization of a realisable e-government.

In order to gain knowledge with regards to the concerns of general and specific interpretations of e-government we put forward the Relation with technology-model (Lindblad-Gidlund 2005) as an analysis strategy. It highlights the importance of creating a more in-depth understanding of the reference point from which myths such as e-government are translated. The objective here is to show how general and specific points of references could enhance the understanding of the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of e-government implementation. We consider the general level to be more closely related to the all-embracing idea of e-government and the specific level to be more closely related to the employees' understanding of the implementation of the e-government with reference to their daily work life praxis.

The chapter will take its starting point in a general description about the idea of e-government to then move forward by analysing e-government through a discussion about mythologization. While doing so, the quality of individualisation is especially focused upon. To further illustrate the process of individualisation the Relation with

technology-model is used as an analysis strategy to go deeper into the relation between the idea of transformation and the praxis of the same.

The linkage between the arguments is explored with the help of a large scale study. And the results give at hand that it is important to investigate the coupling between the general level (the idea of transformation) and the specific level (the praxis) to gain further insight about how the myth is actually embedded.

BACKGROUND

Since e-government has, in many respects, become a global symbol for a new and modern government we found it rewarding to view the idea of e-government as a megatrend. In order to do this, our starting point was the Scandinavian version of neo institutionalism as presented by Røvik (2002) and Czarniawska & Joerges (1996). From this perspective megatrends are seen as travelling ideas which have to be translated into local contexts.

Ideas that have been selected and entered the chain of translations acquire almost physical, objective attributes; in other words, they become quasi-objects, and then objects. (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996, p. 32)

For an idea to achieve the status of a "megatrend" it has to be unison with the dominant discourse of the time. Homogenisation is deemed to be taking place when an organisational concept becomes a symbol for modern society. In becoming a symbol, the idea gains a penetrating power and is legitimated as the "best" or "only" way to reform and modernise an organisation. A common feature for all-embracing megatrends (Røvik 2002, Anttiroikko 2002, Czarniawska & Joerges 1996) is their global sphere of action and that they are associated with basic modern values such as rationality, efficiency, science and

progress. At the point when different sectors, in order to achieve credibility and to become socially accepted and legitimised, are adjusting to the same organisational reform, they become more alike and such a process could be described as a process of isomorphism (Powell & DiMaggio 1983, Røvik 2002).

According to Czarniawska and Joerges (1996), as travelling ideas become more harmonised, they obtain their power by being mythologized. To mythologize and strengthen its existence, the origin and description of a megatrend idea often remains unknown and occurs as the result of a rhetorical strategy:

When the translation of ideas into action is well advanced, the actors involved feel a need to mythologize by dramatizing origins. (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996, p. 26)

To be able to identify whether an idea has achieved the status of a myth (or institutionalised organisational recipe) some crucial common qualities have been outlined. They should have undergone and indeed have successfully proceeded with *social authorisation, universalising, comodification, timing, harmonising, dramatising and individualising* processes (Røvik 2002). To be *socially authorised* means that the organisational idea is legitimised through social authorisation and to be *universalised* means that the idea has a universal relevance. C*omodification* refers to the process through which the idea is transformed into a recipe (object), ready to be used in every single organisation. To be *timed* has to do with how the idea responds to other ongoing changes. When an idea is *harmonised* it is "neutral" and neither provokes nor strengthens existing conflict dimensions and when it is *dramatised* it is joined together by means of dramatic elements and histories. Finally, when it is *individualised,* the individual organisational members perceive it as an embodied change considering both their organisation and their personal adjustments (ibid).

If it is possible to consider e-government as a megatrend with the capability of reflecting the institutionalised norms and values of modern life, then its status to the above mentioned requirements should be investigated. In addition, the ability of the idea to travel increases according to the number of requirements fulfilled and if the concept has not been successful in proceeding with some of these factors then its ability to travel will be limited (ibid). Our aim, in the following section, is to examine, according to previous research, how e-government is fulfilling the requirements to be called a megatrend.

The Megatrend of E-Government

The idea of e-government is often described (Löfgren 2007, Moon & Norris 2005, Yildiz 2007, Bekker & Homberg 2007) as an object or the "the principal tool" by which public administrations can improve their governmental activities both internally, for improved efficiency and effectiveness, and externally for improved relations with their stakeholders. The idea of e-government therefore consists of different processes which, with the assistance of ICT, are supposed to increase: accountability, quality delivery of service, efficient delivery of service, transparency, access, political participation of citizens and data transfer services (information exchange) (Yildiz 2007, Bekker & Homberg 2007, Löfgren 2007, Grönlund 2002 among others).

The e-government idea has passed through a *social authorisation* phase*,* which means that the organisational idea has been legitimated by means of social authorisation. Social authorisation is thus a question of being related to instances perceived as authoritative within the field (Røvik 2002). The concept of e-government has been spread throughout the world by policy documents referring to the vision associated with e-government from both national and supranational agencies. During the 1990s supranational agencies (EU, UN, IMF, OECD and the World Bank) declared

e-government to be a core issue on their agenda (de Senarclens 2004). A myth was being created; the only chance for a democratic government to survive in the future, as social and economic advancement has become more and more bound to technology creation, was to invest in e-government (Kakabadse & Kouzmin 2003).

For the idea to become *universalised* it has to be described as universal, which means that it should not be limited to one particular type of organisation (Røvik 2002). According to Jaeger (2003) the idea of e-government could be described as an idea embraced with great enthusiasm by many governments. It should also be relevant to many different sectors since a universalised idea has a universal relevance. This universality is normally (Røvik 2002) accumulated by means of a very general and abstract description of the concept. According to Czarniawska & Joerges (1996) global ideas or megatrends are to be regarded as solutions of problems. The implication behind the consideration that e-government is the solution to governmental problems is that, at present, the means of increasing certain aspects does not exist. This, in turn, implies that there are governmental shortcomings in several areas including; low accessibility, effectiveness, transparency and satisfactory service to citizens. As no standard definition exists regarding the exact nature of e-government (Yildiz 2007, Bekker & Homberg 2007), the idea gaining ground is that it is both a general and abstract common set of beliefs.

The *comodification* process refers to the process through which the idea is transformed into something, often presented as an object. The idea is described in terms similar to that of a recipe and with obvious positive effects ready to be used in every single organisation (Røvik 2002). Firstly, the presence of the prefix "e" indicates a comodification i.e. that e-government is something other than or something more specific than the more general concept of government. A characteristic of the rhetoric of e-government is

the citizen perspective/approach, which focuses on how governments, by adopting e-government, will be able to provide better and faster services to its citizens and businesses (Bekker & Homburg 2007). This is also something which appears to be rather general and easy to adopt. By adopting a "scientific" rhetoric the concept becomes an "object" with a rational logic. This criterion is almost related to the others because it is part of the process causing the idea to appear as being general, easy to adopt and usable in many respects.

The idea should also be properly *timed* "as a new, modern and future oriented answer to ongoing processes of environmental change" (Røvik 2002). It is obvious that the rhetoric of e-government rests heavily upon a belief in both scientific and technological progress and could therefore be readily connected to the discourse of modernity. At a later stage, these ideas are often suggested to be the organisational answer to ongoing societal changes or paradigm shifts and are the "only way" to deal with future challenges. Since the "myth" of e-government is closely linked to the "myth" of technological progress and rationalism it reviews many of the major trends and issues in public administration and governance which have occurred over the previous decades. From such a perspective, e-government is certainly "properly timed". It is suggested as being the solution to a host of diverse problems and has strong connotations with ongoing societal changes.

The general objective of e-government has, since the 1990s, focused on the reform of core state functions and the building of state capacity for development and progress, described as liberalization, customer orientation and unfiltered integration in the world economy (Bekkers & Homburg 2007, Amoretti 2007). The rethinking of the state's role in development is perceived as being a prerequisite for the e-government idea. In this phase states are committed to the redefinition of the government's economic priorities (Amoretti 2007). The state delegates its accountability to its citizens while the global neoliberal political

development continues to be the guiding principle of international organizations' policies and strategies as far as e-government rhetoric is concerned. Therefore, the idea of e-government travels into the local agencies as a new and refined technology of administration described with words such as rationalisation, cost effectiveness and customer orientation, which are not contradictory to the contemporary all-embracing neoliberal discourse. And, the idea receives the status of a megatrend after being considered as being the only way of dealing with future challenges (such as the age of globalization).

When a concept is so general and non-specific such that different groups (with for example different political views) can commit to the reform, it has been *harmonised*. The concept should be "neutral" and not provoke or strengthen existing conflict dimensions (Røvik 2002). The concept of e-government is generally not considered as being either a political tool or a question of party politics; it is presented as being ideologically neutral, with positive outcomes for all and in such a way that it would be unthinkable to view it otherwise (Ilshammar, Bjurström & Grönlund 2005). At a later stage, the e-government concept is sufficiently flexible to be adopted at different levels by governments possessing differing political views and can be adopted by both the developed and developing nations. It is not merely a transformation taking place in the Anglo-Saxon part of the world (Kakabadse & Kouzmin 2003)

The statement is frequently cited that it will be impossible to face future challenges such as ageing, climate change and terrorism (i2010 e-government action plan) without there being an e-government transformation. For example, the September 11, 2001 attack is sometimes mentioned as having made it necessary to share information among agencies (Halchin 2004) as a means of increasing security. To present the idea closely linked with such challenges could be seen a step toward dramatising the concept, since an idea has to be successfully *dramatised*, which means

that it must be joined with dramatic elements and histories. However, this criterion is not as clearly fulfilled as the others.

If we now have examined the status of e-government as a "mythologized" megatrend according to the processes of social authorisation, universalisation, comodification, timing, harmonisation and dramatisation, there is still one criterion to be dealt with namely, the *individualisation*. As mentioned above, individualisation has to do with the organisational members' interpretations of the megatrend and this is the focus of the next section of the article i.e. how the relation between the myth of e-government and its realisation could be analysed by the use of general and specific interpretations.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

When a concept is *individualised* it means that the individual organisational members perceive it as an embodied change, considering both their organisation and their personal adjustments i.e. it is not something above and far away, it is connected and related to some extent (Røvik 2002). This could be considered as organisational members' general and specific interpretations of the idea which is something we, in this article, aim to investigate. In addition, by distinguishing between general and specific interpretations we want to analyse the degree to which and the manner in which the concept of e-government is individualised. Our starting point is that the general level is more closely related to the all-embracing idea of e-government and the specific level more closely related to the employees understanding of e-government implementation in their daily work life praxis. The analysis within this article takes it starting point in such an argumentation; gaining insight concerning the organisational members' general and specific relations with the megatrend, and how these relations correspond to each other and how these will create valuable

knowledge about the transformation process of e-government.

General and Specific Relation with e: An Analysis Strategy

In order to gain further understanding of the process of individualisation the relation with technology (RwT)-model by Lindblad-Gidlund (2005) is used as an analysis strategy since it provides tools to go deeper into the relation between the idea of transformation and the praxis of the same. To be able to do so the RwT-model highlights the importance of being sensitive to the reference point when analysing our relation with different forms of technology related change.

It does this by separating the general and specific points of reference. In this context, the general level is more closely related to the all-embracing idea of an e-government transformation and, as such, to the rhetorical strategy. In this regard, the specific level is, on the other hand, more closely related to the enacted idea i.e. to the understanding by the employees of the e-government transformation within their daily work life/praxis.

Another part of the model involves the combination of subject positioning and action strategy to illustrate and formulate the perceived ability to make a change. The combination of this pair of concepts provides the possibility of recognising whether the all-embracing idea and the enacted idea is perceived as being subordinate or dominant and whether they are subject to alterations. The argument, in this case, is that as long as we are unaware of our relation with technology we could hardly, at least not with any precision, make decisions as the result of conscious thoughts. We require mental pictures to assist us to see and acknowledge our relation. In this regard, the model could be used as a basis for a mutual understanding and could also inspire us into having further discussions. The model could be illustrated as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The relation with technology-model by Lindblad-Gidlund 2005
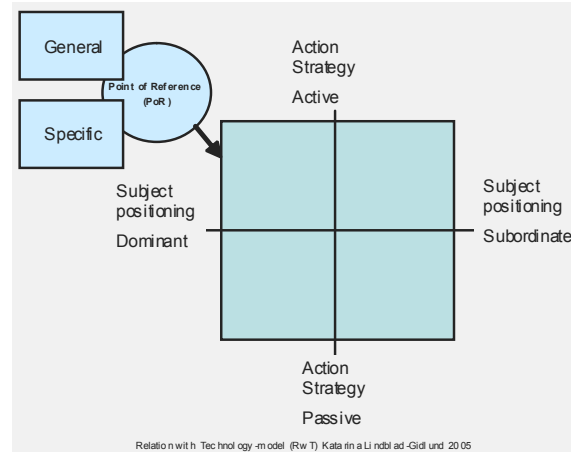
In the model, the *point of reference* symbolises the need for the employee to have a point of reference in order to be able to describe his or her relation with technology, which in this context is the e-government transformation. The reference point also serves as a distinction between general and specific relations with the concept. The general apprehension is seldom a thought, which is either particularly elaborated or analysed and often refers to a general perception about the concept. The specific point of reference, on the other hand, is generally elaborated to a greater extent and is also more often considered to be an object of change and is, finally, referring to a more specific situation of information technology implementation. The two dimensions *subject positioning* (dominant-subordinate) and *action strategies* (active-passive) illustrate different ways of describing ones relation with the electronic transformation both to make it clear and conscious for the respondent him/herself but also for others.

Method

The choice of the RwT-model as the analysis strategy meant that several other steps were implied, but it was still possible to perform both a qualitative and quantitative study. In this case a

quantitative and extensive study was chosen in order to create an as overall picture as possible of the perceptions among the employees in the municipal administration. Our data has therefore been collected from a local municipality (medium-sized with 95 000 inhabitants). We are, in more general terms, following a local Swedish municipality's transformation and its implementation of e-government from several perspectives.

The empirical analysis presented in this paper is therefore based on a survey 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, we were provided with a set of given prerequisites. One of these stated that the inquiry should not take more than approximately five minutes to answer. It should also be noted that in this specific municipality the concept of 24-hour government was the most frequently used term in different policy documents, which caused the choice of this term rather than e-government.

The structure of the inquiry relies heavily upon the RwT-model with three questions directed towards each level, namely the general and specific. The three questions concern (i) the primary aim related to the idea and (ii) the problem identifier and finally (iii) how the idea is perceived, as either subordinate or dominant, in combination with whether or not it is subject to alterations. Each question had four fixed answer alternatives. By altering the reference point the respondents were asked to change their perspective between the general (24-hour municipality) and specific (IT implementation) level.

The first question, primarily aimed at the idea of a 24-hour municipality, asked the respondents to relate the idea to the concepts; *efficiency, democracy (transparency, participation), service* or other. These three alternatives were chosen as they are the prevailing incentives which have been identified as the reasons for e-government

transformation1. For the second question, the problem identifier, the respondents were asked to reflect upon whether it was primarily the *politicians/managers*, *administration*, *citizens* or others who had identified a need for this transformation. With regards to the general level, politicians are considered to be important actors due to the Swedish duality system. Finally, since the idea of e-government has been stated, over and over, as being a citizen-driven project, it was interesting to determine whether this corresponds to the understanding of those involved in actually conducting the transformation.
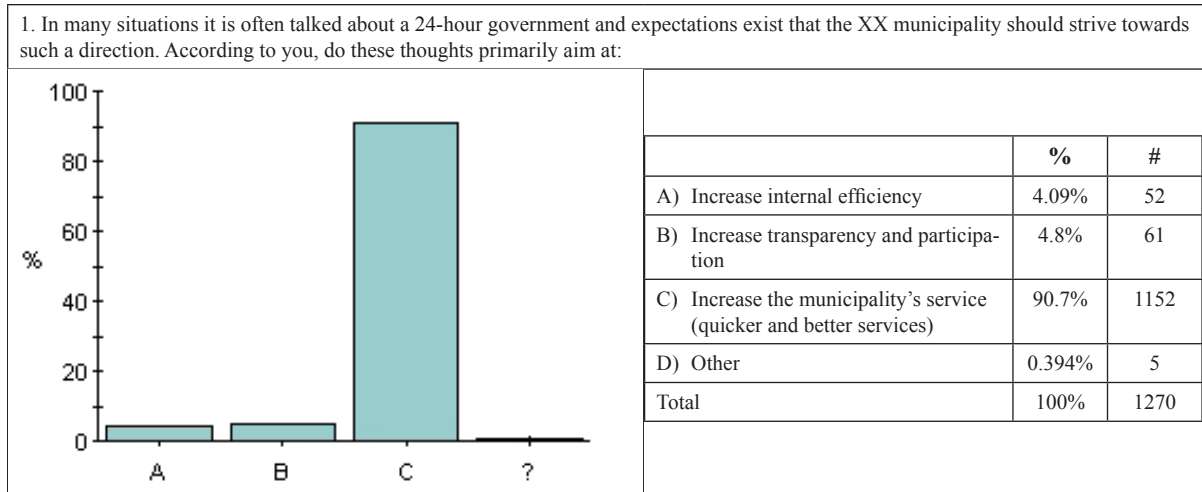
From the total of 2624 employees, a response rate of 48.4%, was achieved, i.e.1270 answers were received within two weeks (with a reminder after one week). It was not possible to determine the reasons for all the non-answers, but some involved automatic mail replies (stating holidays, maternity leave, sick leave) while others contacted us and said that they could not answer the inquiry since they did not know what we meant by '24-hour municipality' (we intentionally did not provide an explanation for this term as the idea was to receive responses which were not affected by a definition given by us but by the one given by the municipality, and, additionally, if such a reaction would come, our intentions were to follow up in a separate study).

The empirical findings are divided into two parts; general and specific relations. These will be analysed at a later stage in relation to each other and some conclusions will be suggested.

General Relation with 24-Hour Government

In accordance with the theoretical basis and the analytical model, our first question is related to the all-embracing idea of e-government transformation and, as such, to the rhetorical strategy. The respondents were asked to reflect upon the idea of a 24-hour government and given three fixed alternatives and, in addition, the option of
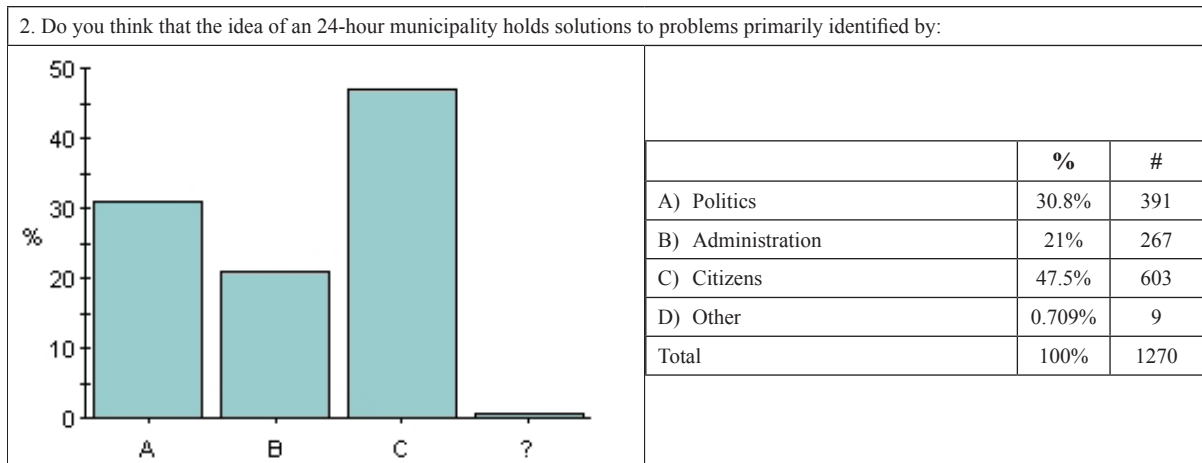
Table 1.

1. In many situations it is often talked about a 24-hour government and expectations exist that the XX municipality should strive towards such a direction. According to you, do these thoughts primarily aim at:		

	%	#
A) Increase internal efficiency	4.09%	52
B) Increase transparency and participation	4.8%	61
C) Increase the municipality's service (quicker and better services)	90.7%	1152
D) Other	0.394%	5
Total	100%	1270

answering 'other', for what they perceived to be the primary aim of such a transformation (see Table 1). However, it is important to note that it is not suggested that it is possible to totally separate between these three options as they do connect to each other and are intertwined to a large extent. The aim of the question is rather to investigate what kind of picture is perceived as being the most prominent and suggested most often.

As the table shows, according to the employees in the municipal administration, the predominant aim of 24-hour government transformation is that it should increase the municipality's service (quicker and better services). As 90.7% of the respondents provided such an answer, question two became even more interesting; who did they think identified the need for such an increase in the municipality's service?

The response to the second question, whether the idea of a 24-hour municipality is able to provide solutions to problems primarily identified by politics, administration or citizens (or other), did not display such a dominant response as for question one. However, it was found that as many as 47.5% saw the municipal citizens as being the primary identifiers with regards to the

Table 2.

2. Do you think that the idea of an 24-hour municipality holds solutions to problems primarily identified by:		

	%	#
A) Politics	30.8%	391
B) Administration	21%	267
C) Citizens	47.5%	603
D) Other	0.709%	9
Total	100%	1270

necessity for increased service (see Table 2). If the 'problem' was felt to be a lack of service, an increase in service was perceived to be what the citizens wanted.

The third question was a combination of two dimensions; (i) whether they thought that the transformation should serve the citizens or if the citizens should adjust to the transformation and (ii) whether or not they thought that if it did not serve the citizens they could do something about it. The response shows that the majority (50.1%) of the employees in the municipal administration thought that the idea of 24-hour government should serve the citizens (i.e. the citizens were in a dominant and active position). and that it was not the transformation itself that was important for any reason (such as image or ratings). In addition, that if it did not do so, the citizens could do something about it and create a change.

But, at the same time, as many as 20.9% of the respondents (the combination of 12.4% and 8.5%) placed themselves in a subordinate relation where the idea of 24-hour government where perceived as dominant (see Figure 2). And additionally 27.7% respondents placed themselves in the complicated position were they perceived the idea of 24-hour municipality as something that should serve the

Figure 2. Relation with technology model (RwT)

citizens, but if it did not, the citizens could not to anything to change it.

This is rather remarkable in what is put forward as a citizen-driven transformation and, what is further interesting is that the idea of 24-hour municipality seems to have reached the status of something that is accepted as "the only way forward".

The Specific Relation

In a similar structure to the three questions about the 24-hour municipality, the respondents were asked to reflect upon the implementation of IT-solutions into their daily work situation. The reason for focusing on the implementation of IT-solutions on the specific level is simple; our point of departure is that the prefix 'e' in e-government refers to ICT enabled transformation. If not, another prefix would be more suitable. And in relation to how the idea of e-government is put forward today the starting point seems reasonable. However, this should not be seen as a declaration in one direction or the other, but in a study of the idea of e-government the above starting point is relevant.

The respondents were again given three fixed alternatives plus the additional option of answering 'other'. The three fixed alternatives related to those used concerning the 24-hour municipality, but were expressed in a more concrete manner in accordance with the division between general and specific.

It showed that what the respondents perceived to be the primary aim of such a transformation (information technology implementation process i.e. the specific level), differs somewhat with the aim with reference to the general level i.e. to increase the municipality's service. Only 30.9% answered that they wanted the implementation of IT-solutions to increase their options to provide a better service. Instead they chose (66.5%) the first alternative, to increase effectiveness and facilitate their daily work. See Table 3.

Table 3.

3. When different forms of IT-solutions are implemented into you daily work situation, do you primarily want them to:		

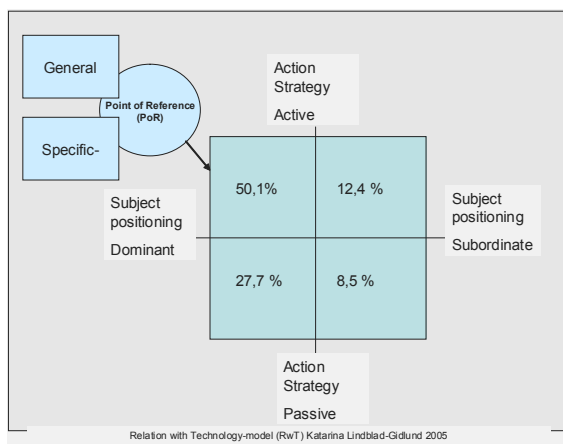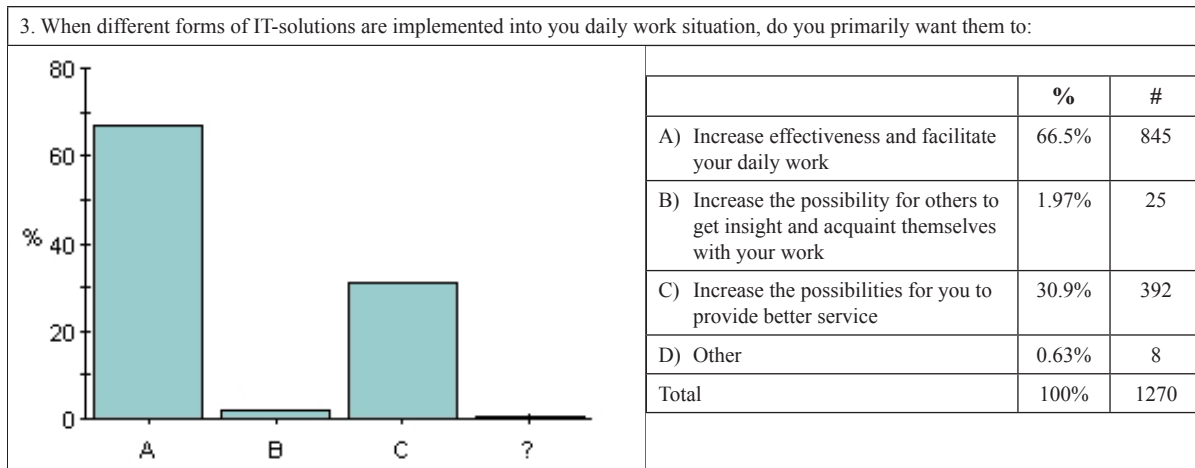|	**%**	**#**
A) Increase effectiveness and facilitate your daily work	66.5%	845
B) Increase the possibility for others to get insight and acquaint themselves with your work	1.97%	25
C) Increase the possibilities for you to provide better service	30.9%	392
D) Other	0.63%	8
Total	100%	1270

The results might be interpreted as, that there exists a causal relationship between internal efficiency and ability to provide external service, where internal efficiency is closely related and maybe even seen as a prerequisite for the ability to provide external service. This alternative interpretation might however be more suitable in the private market but in public sector the relationship between the two is not that obvious and certainly needs to be more closely analysed (which we will come back to later on).

The response to the second question on the specific level, whether the implementation of

IT-solutions offers solutions to problems primarily identified by the management, public administrators or citizens (or other) did not show a similar domination as the related question for the general level. Instead, the answers given were that IT-solution implementation offer solutions to problems primarily identified by the management (42%), secondly by the public administrators (30.4%) and thirdly, the citizens (26.1%). In the same manner as for the question above (table 3), the results indicate a loose coupling between the general and the specific level. In their daily work situation the results indicate that they do not
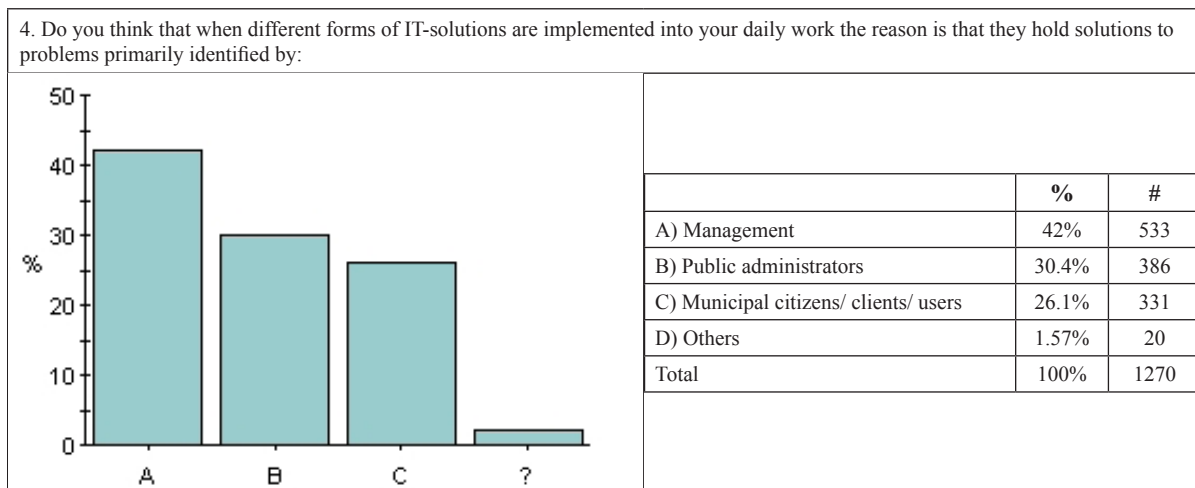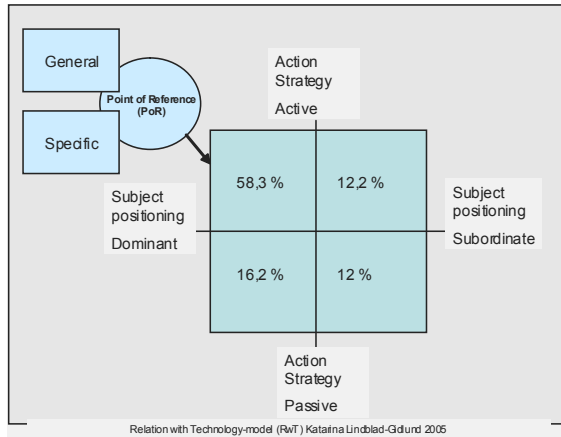
Table 4.

4. Do you think that when different forms of IT-solutions are implemented into your daily work the reason is that they hold solutions to problems primarily identified by:		

	%	**#**
A) Management	42%	533
B) Public administrators	30.4%	386
C) Municipal citizens/ clients/ users	26.1%	331
D) Others	1.57%	20
Total	100%	1270

Figure 3. Relationship with technology model (RwT)

Relation with Technology-model (RwT) Katarina Lindblad-Gidlund 2005

strongly relate the increased use of IT-solutions as something rewarding for the citizens. It is mostly a solution for problems identified by the management. See Table 4.

The third question referring to the specific level was (in a similar manner to that for the general level) a combination of two dimensions; (i) whether they thought that the implementation of IT-solutions should serve them, or if they were under the impression that they should adjust to the implemented IT-solutions and (ii) whether they thought that if it did not serve them they could do something about or not. The response shows that the majority (58.3%) of the employees in the municipal administration thought that IT-solutions were implemented to support their daily work (i.e. a dominant relation) and if it did not do so they could do something about it and create a change (an active action strategy).

It is however noticeable that as many as 24.2% (the combination of 12.2% and 12%) described their relation with the implementation of IT-solutions as subordinate (i.e. the IT-implementation in itself were dominant) and 16.2% described a dominant relation but with no possibility to make a change if needed.

The Relation Between General and Specific Interpretations

To consider the degree to which the concept of e-government is *individualised,* the question is whether the employees perceived the transformation as an embodied change when considering both their organisation and their personal adjustments (Røvik 2002). And it appears to be since 50.1% at the general level and 58.3% at the specific level showed a dominant and active relation i.e. the transformation were supposed to support them and they could influence it if they thought it to be necessary. In this sense it could be argued that the concept is, to some extent, individualised, the employees had embraced the idea of transformation. Our results also show that the respondents saw a slightly lower possibility with regards to changing the transformation process for the general rather than for a specific level (which is quite natural and also implied by the RwT-model).

In addition, it is interesting to further analyse the how the results on each level correspond to each other. A characteristic of the rhetoric of e-government, as we have touched upon above, is the citizen perspective, which focused on how governments (by adopting e-government) would be able to provide both better and faster services to their citizens and businesses (Bekker & Homburg 2007). What is noticeable is however that their understanding of the all-embracing idea of e-government transformation appears to be have been formed in a somewhat unreflected manner, or at least is very similar to the existing public discourse, and their interpretations of the more tangible transformation of IT-implementation (in their daily work situation) are not that closely related to the actual idea.

They do not relate the increased use of IT-solutions as something primarily rewarding for the citizens (the answer from an internal office perspective was chosen ahead of the two alternatives based on a more external starting point). It is mostly perceived as a solution to problems

identified by management i.e. they are not under the impression that the implemented IT-solutions are able to solve those problems identified and experienced by citizens. This could indicate that the implementation of IT-solutions is perceived as the answer to other types of questions, which are more typically associated with internal office questions such as internal efficiency and financial budget.

So, the relation between enhanced service towards citizens through improved efficiency in their daily work situation is a bit complicated. However, the same loose coupling has strong support in the popular rhetoric regarding e-government transformation and the results of this study shows that further analysis is needed. Not only to understand the relationship in between the general and specific level but also to be able to manage this relation into realisable processes.

Moreover, the response to the second question, whether the idea of e-government municipality has the ability to provide solutions to problems primarily identified by politics, administration or citizens, 47.5% saw the municipal citizens as the primary identifier while they, with regards to the specific level, mainly envisaged the management as being the primarily identifiers (42 %) and only 26.1% saw the citizens as identifier. This is quite interesting since it implies that the respondents separated between the general and specific level and not that strongly saw the citizens as the ones critically reviewing their daily work performance. If IT-solutions should be implemented in their daily work life it was not that strongly perceived as something the citizens would identify as needed.

Taken together, these results indicate a loose coupling between the general and the specific level and the results shows the complexity in how the coupling between the general and specific level is done. Such an analysis could provide valuable knowledge concerning the hindrances to the transformation process for the future since it might identify conflicts in goal perception and processes to achieve what is expected.

FUTURE TRENDS

As the idea of e-government continues its global journey, it simultaneously continues its local translation processes. These processes are being witnessed, at present, both nationally and regionally and several questions are arising during the process of actually trying to put the idea of e-government into practice. Of course these processes hold contextual prerequisites without generalisation possibilities but there are some shared features where generic analysis strategies could enhance the understanding of these local translation processes.

To this point we have examined to which degree e-government has received the status of a megatrend. Our result shows that e-government to quite a high degree fulfil the criteria for being a megatrend. Due to this, we argue that e-government is best understood as a mythologized managerial reform. The symbolic production of e-government on an ideological level is connected with words as liberalization, customer orientation and unfiltered integration in the world economy while the practical production of e-government, new IT-solutions, are mostly perceived as a solution to problems identified by management. This indicates that the practical production of e-government is connected with words as internal efficiency and financial budget. How the symbolic and practical production of e-government is connected to each other is still a question to discover.

What we have showed by arguing that e-government has become a mythologized managerial reform is that e-government heavily rests upon the global neoliberal political development as the guiding principle of international organizations' policies and strategies. However, from a transformational perspective, similar technology and organisational structure can serve different socio-economic aims and it might be the case, for good or bad, that the technological progression is impeded by existing socio-economic modes of production.

Furthermore, a well known insight from an institutional perspective is that the adoption of new ideas regarding administrative reforms often affects organisational talk but has less effect on practice. By contrast, some researchers warn against the conclusion about decoupling as the final outcome of a translation. Such a conclusion is often a result from a study without a time perspective and they suggest that organisational talk might cause changes in practice later on (see for example Brunsson and Sahlin Andersson 2000, and Røvik 2002). When an idea reaches the status of a mythologized megatrend it is necessary to remember that they are fabricated. They have gone through processes of comodification, harmonising, universalising and they have the power of a shared myth. They are to some degree taken for granted, without awareness, as a way of representing a unified and understood reality. They also have the power to render neutral what is in value. Therefore, we want to put attention to the important process trough which the myth is translated into different divisions of practice. It is necessary to analyse how different socio-economic modes of production are intermingled without taken into consideration if they are of contradictory nature or not.

When e-government appears in local policy statements the first translation has been taking place, and the first step in framing the transformation as organisational talk is done. In this semantic implementation process operative leaders are often left to play a specific role in translating the ideas into their own division's "language" (Røvik 2002, Latour 1987, Czarniawska & Joerges 1996). By attributing their subjective and intersubjective meaning to the idea they construct a meaningful way to use it which also can be seen as an activity of sense making (Weick 1995, Orlikowski & Gash 1994). In Grönlund et al., Anttiroiko (2002) states that local authorities are required to adjust to the external environment and adapt to so-called 'mega-trends'. According to Anttiroiko local decision makers deal with the ambiguity and/or uncertainty inherent in strategic decision making and as such, local authorities are placed in the role of institutional mediators between global mega-trends and local conditions.

For that reason, researchers, as well as local practitioners, could gain new insights by analysing the transformation of practice as an ongoing process characterised by micro-political processes (interplay or struggle between interests) among actors, actions and meanings.

CONCLUSION

In this article we have suggested that the idea of e-government is best understood as a mythologized megatrend, which has become a symbol for the present day modern government. By examining the concept of e-government, it has been noted that nearly all the criteria for mythologized mega-trends have been fulfilled. The processes of social authorisation, universalisation, comodification, timing, harmonisation and dramatisation have been analysed theoretically, while the process of individualisation was investigated empirically. According to our empirical findings the idea of e-government appears to be individualised in such a way that the organisational members interpret the transformation at the general/organisational level as a means of increasing the municipality's service towards the citizen and at the specific/personal level as being able to increase the effectiveness and to facilitate their daily work. In addition, it also shows that the idea is individualised, to some extent, since the organisational members, on both levels, are under the impression that this is something they might be able to influence and positions themselves in a dominant position.

This indicates that the idea of e-government has become a myth, which, in some sense, has to be demythologized in order to be realisable, which is illuminated by the fact that, in this study, the relation between the general and the specific interpretations are loosely coupled and rather

complex. In the introduction we said that the electronic government has to bring about adjustments of the whole set of institutional entities to achieve change. The concept of praxis has to be congruent with the concept of ideology and to be able to obtain legitimacy among the whole set of institutional entities it has to be congruent with broader social norms and values of government issues. In this article it is argued that it is possible to gain further insights about, and tools to cope with, the gap between myth and reality by means of the differentiation between the general and specific interpretations of the idea.

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KEY TERMS

Comodification: One of the seven criteria an idea has to successfully pass to perceive the status of a super standard or megatrend. It refers to the process through which an idea (reform) becomes a product.

General and Specific Interpretations: Refer to a distinction between different reference points. The general (and primary) interpretation is seldom a particularly elaborated or analysed thought, and it often refers to a general perception about a concept. Specific (and secondary) point of reference on the other hand is more elaborated and is also, often to a higher degree, an object of change and finally, referring to a more specific situation of information technology implementation.

Individualisation: One of the seven criteria an idea has to successfully undergo to perceive the status of a super standard or megatrend. It has to be understood as something beneficent not only for the organisation also for their personal adjustments.

Myth: Something that is believed to be true by those who attach significance to it but could be questioned by others. In this context, a myth is considered as an institutionalised organisational recipe which is believed to cause certain effects if it is implemented.

Neo Institutionalism: An approach in social theory that focuses on the way that institutions interact and affect society. This perspective provides a way to explain and analyse why so many businesses end up having the same organizational structure (isomorphism) even though they evolved in different ways.

Relation with Technology: Highlights the importance of analysing technology related change as relationistic i.e. not perceive our relation as an attitude towards technology related change but an ongoing dialectical process. This process

gains from being analysed with sensitivity to the starting point (point of reference) and a separation between the general and specific level.

Social Authorisation: One of the seven criteria an idea has to successfully pass to perceive the status of a super standard or megatrend. It refers to the process by which an idea is becoming legitimated and related to instances perceived as authoritative in the field.

Translation: Refers to the process through which an organisational recipe is adopted. It involves the process of interpretation, when making sense of an organisational change in order to change existing routines, norms and way of functioning.

Universalising: One of the seven criteria an idea has to successfully pass to perceive the status of a super standard or megatrend. It has to do with to which degree an idea has universal relevance. It should not be delimited to a certain type of organisation, field or country.

ENDNOTE

[1]   See for example: *Handlingsplan för eFörvaltning. Nya grunder för IT-baserad verksamhetsutveckling i offentlig förvaltning.* Regeringskansliet 2008 (*eGovernment Action Plan* the Swedish Government Offices 2008)