

7-2010

## Government Value Paradigms—Bureaucracy, New Public Management, and E-Government

Anders Persson

*Linköping University, Sweden, Anders.persson@liu.se*

Göran Goldkuhl

*Linköping University & Stockholm University, Sweden*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais>

---

### Recommended Citation

Persson, A., & Goldkuhl, G. (2010). Government Value Paradigms—Bureaucracy, New Public Management, and E-Government. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 27, pp-pp.  
<https://doi.org/10.17705/1CAIS.02704>

This material is brought to you by the AIS Journals at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact [elibrary@aisnet.org](mailto:elibrary@aisnet.org).

# Communications of the Association for Information Systems

CAIS 

## Government Value Paradigms—Bureaucracy, New Public Management, and E-Government

Anders Persson

*Linköping University, Sweden*

*Anders.persson@liu.se*

Göran Goldkuhl

*Linköping University & Stockholm University, Sweden*

---

### Abstract:

There are different interpretations of which core values e-government build on and promote. Some scholars see e-government as a direct follower to New Public Management (NPM), and as such supporting and promoting values and principles from the business sector. Others see e-government as a promoter of bureaucratic values supporting and promoting the values of traditional weberian ideal bureaucracy. The main issue in this paper is management strategy for public administration. Three examples of such management strategies are examined and compared: traditional bureaucracy, New Public Management and e-government. When investigating these strategies it is necessary to distinguish between strategy as idea and strategy in action. Core values of the management strategies are reconstructed and used as a lens through which a case study of e-government is analyzed. The implemented e-government-solution comprise values from both NPM and bureaucracy. Neither bureaucracy nor NPM alone supply the core values for e-government as a practical management strategy. The paper concludes with a dialectical structure where Bureaucracy is the thesis, NPM the anti-thesis and e-government the practical synthesis.

**Keywords:** e-government, management theory, societal change, organizational behavior, collaboration, inter-organizational system

Volume 27, Article 4, pp. 45-62, July 2010

The manuscript was received 8/18/2008 and was with the authors 11 months for 2 revisions.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This section introduces the background discussion on how technology can alter public institutions. The discussion is summarized and the research problem is identified. Further on, the purpose of the paper is identified and the need for the IS community and the public administration community to move closer together is discussed, as both are supplying problems as well as solutions for e-government. The focus is to introduce the need for further discussion on what e-government is and what role it has to play in the further evolution of public administration. Thus, this paper presents an attempt at discussing how e-government can be seen in relation to previous core management paradigms in public administration. In our view; it is an important prerequisite for e-government to further evolve into a core management strategy for public administration, rather than a set of tools and a technological add-on to public administration.

### Background

Under the watchword of e-government, government agencies worldwide are going through a rapid process of change toward redefined public values, such as client centricity and external and internal efficiency [Grönlund, 2002]. There are many views expressed of what the goals of e-government really are, but simplicity and efficiency are frequent keywords. Layne and Lee [2001] claim that one of the important goals is faster and cheaper services for citizens. Other definitions and expressed views on what e-government really is vary from external use of information and communication technologies (ICT), as in the World Bank definition below, to internal and external ICT-usages. Examples of the latter type are broad definitions of internal and external use of digital information technologies [Heeks, 2006; OECD, 2003]. OECD [2003] simply states that e-government is the use of ICT in order to achieve better government and Heeks [2006] refers to all kinds of use of digital information technology in the public sector. According to the World Bank [2003], “E-government’ refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government.”

Early e-government strategies had more technology determinist driven assumptions for change in public administration [Bouwman et al., 2005]. In comparison to this, later e-government policies and research have adopted a less technocentric approach, focusing less on technology and more on management and change in public administration, aided by information and communication technologies (ICT), organizational change, and new competence. Thus, e-government in practice has somewhat changed from ICT in public administration to ICT-mediated change in public administration. This implies that e-government research should focus more on public administration policies, core values of public administration paradigms and management strategies in public administration. Joined-up government [e.g., Pollitt, 2003; Bogdanor, 2005] is frequently discussed without clear connections to technology [Margetts, 2003]. In the main body of literature on public administration there is also a lack of interest in ICT in public administration. In the IS community the opposite frequently occurs, as e-government is discussed as a technological issue and then often from the supply side [Reddick, 2005], with no clear connections to the public sector core values and management regimes [e.g., Kumar et al, 2007; Layne and Lee, 2001]. However, there are examples of the opposite. Intranet adoption and connections with reducing bureaucratic dysfunctions, such as red tape, are discussed in the light of the theory of bureaucracy [Welch and Prandey, 2006]. Digital Era Governance is discussed as a replacement for New Public Management [Dunleavy and Margetts, 2005]. Meijer [2007] discusses public accountability and e-government. Cordella [2007] criticizes the extensive focus on managerial values in e-government and the fact that Bureaucratic values are so often neglected. The same conclusion is drawn within public administration research as the need to rediscover bureaucracy [Olsen, 2005]. This means that the view on what e-government is differs between authors, and originating research domains.

In this paper we recognize wider definitions for e-government such as the use of ICT in order to discuss issues concerning the inside, outside, and between of government agencies. This is done since, in order to understand and discuss e-government as a management regime, we need to discuss the client side as well as the internal organizational changes.

### Values of E-Government

As stated above, there is a need to reconstruct the values of e-government as a theoretical and practical concept and how it can be addressed as a managerial concept for public administration. In this section the broader view of research on the information age, e-government, digital governance etc. is used to reconstruct the values focused in e-government research. E-government is big business, as huge amounts are spent on digitalization of services

[Fountain, 2001; Heeks, 2006], but the return from these large investments can be criticized as e-government projects too often tend to be expensive failures [Heeks, 2006]. One important distinction when discussing e-government research and practice is the boundaries between the surface of government operations and the inside. The inside digitization of government agencies has been discussed for decades, and one important conclusion from this research is that technology in public administration has rather enforced existing power distributions and organizational arrangements [Kraemer and King, 2003; Fountain 2001]. Fountain, however, promotes the potential of technology to reform government operations by making governments more effective and less bureaucratic, while still maintaining their accountability. Snellen [1998] focuses on the dysfunctions of bureaucratic discretion [Lipsky, 1980] and sees technology as a means of strengthening the bureaucratic identity by automating government operations, thus restoring and enforcing the bureaucratic values of impartiality and legality. Bovens and Zouridis [2002] have studied what they call “decision-making factories,” concluding that the impact of technology is rather that rules and regulations are made more distinct in order to make automatization easier and at the same time increasing the productivity of operations and decreasing the discretion. Other researchers draw the same conclusions about the impact of ICT in public administration as a means of strengthening the bureaucratic nature of agencies and public administration in general [Homburg, 2005; Kraemer and King, 1977]. One of the effects of screen-level bureaucracy [Bovens and Zouridis, 2002] computerization is that documentation is formalized, information gathering is routinized as well as the decision-making process, and many decisions are not made by officials any more. Automatization has led to further squeezing of the margins of discretions in decisions in order to digitize and automate the procedures. This view of e-government systems focuses on the unbiased implementation of the law, without paying attention to personal agendas and other unwanted side-effects of discretion. This is the smaller body of literature, however. As Homburg [2005] states, most governments and researchers focus on e-service provision toward what is usually discussed as customers. In this respect e-government can be and has been discussed as a follower to the NPM wave [Bellamy and Taylor, 1998; Heeks, 2002; Fountain, 2001], something which has also been contested [Homburg, 2005; Cordella, 2007].

The traditional bureaucratic paradigm of public management became increasingly criticized by the NPM movement for underperformance and poor legitimacy because of the failure in answering to customer needs [Jain, 2004]. The dysfunctions discussed in public management research are also frequently presented as the core motives for e-government. The NPM movement shifted focus to performance, effectiveness, citizen centricity, and efficiency in reforming public administration. The shift from identified bureaucratic dysfunctions is also a core element of large parts of e-government literature, such as stove-piped services [e.g., Bannister, 2001], hierarchical structures and facilitation of centralized yet distributed service delivery and promotion of efficiency and productivity [Esteves and Joseph, 2008]. According to King [2007], e-government has been seen as the cure of the rigidity, proceduralism, inefficiency, and the inability to serve the needs of the clients by increasing access to and improving the delivery of services. Van Duivenboden and Lips [2003], together with some other researchers, see the move from collective service productions to tailor-made solutions as a core element of e-government. E-government as a means of promoting accountability and trust in government is a commonly presented effect of technology-mediated change in public administration [Tolbert and Mossberger, 2006] but the lack of trust in e-government is also presented as a source of e-government failures [Jain, 2004]. The Swedish version of e-government policies states that the characteristic of e-government is to promote the image of the government as joined-up and to promote efficiency, transparency, higher productivity, availability, and higher service quality [STAKO, 2003].

*New public management* (NPM) has been criticized for using a reduced set of values when reducing the scope of the agenda to business-like measures of change [Cordella, 2007; Olsen, 2005]. This is even more true about many aspects of e-government, as the early advocates not only used a reduced set of values and business-like measures of change, but also a deterministic techno-centric approach as tools of change [Homburg, 2005]. Heeks [2006] states that government operations are not business operations and that views and models from business and eBusiness cannot be implemented without taking the differences in core values into account. In e-Government research the extensive treatment of the citizen as customer can be seen as inherited from NPM. The citizen as customer is considered the core focus of modern public management and e-government [Schedler and Summermatter, 2007; Bannister, 2002].

Within e-government research Jain [2004] has identified two themes of how the bureaucratic organization is expressed in relation to e-government. The first theme is that e-government is a way to reform and transform bureaucracy as Weber has described it; the second that many e-government failures are described as depending on the shortcomings of the bureaucracies. Furthermore, a large body of e-government research originates in some kind of bureaucratic dysfunction in need of correction. Gouscos et al. [2007] focus on a range of such dysfunctions when identifying the coping with bureaucracy, ambiguous procedures, functional disintegration, vague authority structures, and fragmented information as key starting-points for the need of one-stop e-government service provision. According to Ho [2002], e-government represents a shift from internal bureaucratic affairs, such as cost efficiency to external affairs, such as user experiences. Moreover, e-government facilitates remote contact and easy access, thus

reducing face-to-face contact and the need to discover the path through the bureaucracy [Schelin, 2003; Ho, 2002]. When reviewing e-government research, Jain [2004] has found that in terms of the theory of bureaucracy two apparent views are common: (1) e-government is about eradicating the dysfunctions of traditional Weberian bureaucracy and (2) e-government failures are often a consequence of bureaucracy. According to Homburg [2005], e-government and new public management are on the surface compatible reform strategies dealing with the dysfunctions of traditional bureaucracies, but as for the core trajectories of the particular reform strategies various goals tend to contradict each other.

A whole body of literature on e-government as integration, one-stop shops or functional integration of agencies [e.g., Kubicek and Hagen, 2000; Ho, 2002; Landsbergen and Wolken, 2001] constitute a parallel discussion to the public administration [Pollitt, 2003; Bogdanor, 2005] discussion on joined-up government. Frequent concepts used in e-government literature are one-stop e-government and vertical and horizontal integration. The public management discussion tends to focus on policy-level administrative, horizontal management and the e-government discussion tends to focus on digitally supported cross-functional information flow [e.g. Layne and Lee, 2001; Landsbergen and Wolken, 2001; Ho, 2002; Bellamy and Taylor, 1998]. Some researchers see e-government as a move from the NPM notion of the citizen as a customer to be served to the more balanced notion of the serving of citizens in all roles possible [Bannister, 2002; Van Duivenboden and Lips, 2005].

Building on much of the values from new public management, e-government research and practice have failed to recognize and follow the weberian core values of impartiality, objectivity, and equality when focusing on citizen-centric approaches of service-delivery and performance. NPM, and by consequence the e-government projects that rely on the same set of values, fail to address and build on core legitimizing values, thus potentially harming the legitimacy of the agency. Cordella [2007] focuses on a synthesis, an e-bureaucratic form, of management that combines the values of performance, effectiveness and efficiency, while maintaining and addressing the core values of the traditional bureaucratic paradigm. To sum up, the core elements and values of e-government as a management strategy range from:

- ❑ *A means of decreasing the impacts of dysfunctional bureaucracy*
  - *Less impact of rigidity*
  - *Less fragmentation*
  - *Less proceduralism*
  - *More tailor-made solutions*
  - *Higher degree of personalization*
  - *Vertical and Horizontal integration*
  - *Reducing face-to-face contact in order to ease the effect of functional borders*
- ❑ *A means of strengthening bureaucratic values*
  - *Centralization*
  - *Legality*
  - *Limiting discretion*
  - *Efficiency*
  - *Productivity*
  - *Distinct rule-application through automatization*
  - *Predictability*
  - *Reducing face-to-face contact in order to automate*
  - *Improving transparency*
  - *Improving accountability through equal treatment and legality*
- ❑ *A way of building on NPM and taking it a step further*
  - *Performance orientation*
  - *Citizen or user focus*
  - *More responsive to citizen needs*
  - *Focusing efficiency*
  - *Focusing effectiveness*
  - *Improving accountability for results*
  - *Better service provision*
  - *More accessible services*
- ❑ *A step back from NPM, replacing it with:*
  - *The refocus on bureaucratic values and discovery of eBureaucracy*
  - *Refocusing impartiality*
  - *Refocusing equality*
  - *Refocusing legality*
  - *The move from dysfunctions of NPM and the discovery of Digital era governance*

As seen in the list above, the core values and pivotal principles of contemporary e-government research are at some instances contradictory. Facilitating aspects of ICT in government are assumed to lead to opposite effects. To a large degree the reviewed research is not concerned with the core aspects of government functions, but rather addressing parts of what ought to be treated less on the surface and more as a means of improving all aspects of government. So the question to be asked is: *What is e-government about in terms of strategic management and governmental core values?*

## Research Problem

As we have seen, there is not a common view of what e-government really is in terms of strategic management ideas. Research and practice differ substantially as to how core government values are treated. Most research in the field simply does not cover and address core values. The neglected address of core values of government has been criticized [Cordella, 2007]. A common view in e-government research is that it is theoretically underdeveloped, or at least in the process of maturing [Homburg, 2005; Grönlund, 2004]. This is especially true regarding how e-government is related to management paradigms of public administration. The common view of e-government is that it is about reforming government and eradicating the dysfunctions of the earlier management paradigms. However, this can be reducing dysfunctions of NPM such as fragmentation or dysfunctions of bureaucracy such as rigid rule application. Commonly e-government is viewed as the transformation of public administration into a more citizen-responsive way of governing [Bannister, 2001]. In this paper we investigate and extract the effects and impacts of e-government through a lens of the management paradigms of bureaucracy and new public management. When doing this, there are some primary questions to be addressed. First, we need to define and describe the core values and dysfunctions of the traditional public administration paradigm. Second, we need to distinguish those from the core elements and focused values of new public management as well as the dysfunctions of this management strategy. Having established these sets of values as a lens we will then be able to clarify and reconstruct supported core values in practical e-government and what impact e-government projects will have on the involved agencies, clients and other stakeholders. In this paper we relate an e-government project to the dominating paradigms of public management in order to contribute to the e-government body of knowledge. These sets of values are applied to a current e-government project in order to distinguish and discuss variants between different typical case-handling processes. Further on the chosen paths for organizational development and e-service solutions are related to the management ideal and the actively pursued principles and goals. The search for core values in the minds of the project leaders and members of the development team form the practical management strategy in this e-service project.

The main issue in this paper is *management strategy for public administration*. Three examples of such management strategies are examined: traditional bureaucracy, new public management, and e-government. When investigating these strategies, it is necessary to distinguish between strategy as idea and strategy in practice. Strategy as idea is the description of the strategy; the strategy as an "ideal type"; how the major advocates of the strategy conceive its fundamental characteristics. Strategy in practice is the strategy applied in practical settings; how the strategy is utilized; and its impact and effects. There is of course a dialectical relation between strategy as idea and strategy in action. Strategy as idea can evolve over time, based on identified experiences of its application. Dysfunctions of a strategy in action (e.g., bureaucracy) can also influence the development of other strategies (e.g., NPM). Further on, the theoretical concepts of weberian bureaucracy [Weber, 1968], New Public Management [Hood, 1994] and e-government are reconstructed in terms of core values and principles. These core values are used to construct a lens through which the value foundation for e-government can be discussed. This is done in order to understand what core values that are strengthened, overlooked, or implicitly addressed in e-government realization and how the management strategies are linked to one another.

As stated above, there is a gap in knowledge concerning what e-government is in terms of strategic management paradigms. The purpose of the paper is to find a better description of what the practical incarnations of e-government are and how this can be related to the previous paradigms of bureaucracy and New Public Management.

## II. RESEARCH APPROACH

This section introduces the research approach behind the study presented in this paper. The research approach is a combined conceptual and empirical approach. The three management strategies for public administration (traditional bureaucracy, new public management, and e-government) are investigated in value paradigm analyses. Further on, the role of data and theory is presented and discussed.

Our research approach means that we make analyses of each management strategy as idea. In Section III we pursue an analysis of traditional bureaucracy, and in Section IV we make an analysis of NPM. These analyses are not pure ideal typical. Some critical remarks on their applications and identified dysfunctions are also discussed. A value paradigm analysis of e-government has been pursued above in Section I. To obtain an empirical basis for our inquiry, we have chosen to use data from an e-government project, which means that we have also studied the management strategy of e-government in action. In order to explore the values of e-government, we have used the reconstructed values from (the paradigm analyses of) bureaucracy and NPM as a lens when investigating the empirical e-Government project.

Empirically, this paper is based on data from a project involving representatives from a number of county administrative boards and other public agencies in Sweden for the development of an electronic application to enable citizens to get a provisional driver's license. Three Swedish agencies are involved in the project: Sweden's County Administrations (SCoA), who organizes the twenty-one county administrative boards of Sweden; the County Administrative Board of Stockholm, where the development project is hosted; and the Swedish Road Administration (SRoA). Our paper is based on a series of interviews conducted with employees on different levels in the county administrative boards and the SRoA. Other data sources are documentation from this development project and notes from the process of following the discussions in project meetings. The provisional driving license application has been analyzed in a research study (started in 2005 and finished in 2008) concerning e-service development in the public sector in Sweden.

The aim of the project was to develop one-stop government e-services for driving license matters, as well as a web-based portal where these e-services and information about the driving license process will be accessible. The e-services comprise electronic forms for provisional driving license applications, which will be possible to fill in and submit electronically. The simple cases, called "green cases," will be handled automatically and the "red cases" will be handled through an electronically managed workflow as they are received in the internal information system. Prior to the project these forms were only available to print out from the agency's website.

The empirical findings reported in this paper have been collected during action research activities, such as modeling seminars or project meetings, but also through semi-structured interviews with significant actors in the research project. This is a common way to conduct action research, which implies that the researcher alters between the roles of active change agent and reflective observer [Checkland 1991]. We have interviewed six persons who have the following roles in the three agencies: an IT strategist, a development project leader, a system manager, an internal investigator, a case officer, and an IT development manager. The interviewees have been selected in order to reach a broad view of apprehensions in the studied e-service development project. We have asked open questions about how they understand the notion of e-service, what opportunities and threats they apprehend, what kind of cooperation and coordination they regard as necessary for this development project. The interviews had a semi-structured and semi-standardized design and were recorded. The empirical data were analyzed in a qualitative, interpretive way [Walsham 1995]. Our research approach can, therefore, be described as qualitative and case study based. We use data from one in-depth case study. After having conducted our analysis of empirical data using the reconstructed lenses of traditional bureaucracy and NPM, we have been able to arrive at substantial conclusions about e-government in relation to these management paradigms. This is not to say that more insights cannot be gained from further and broader case studies.

### III. TRADITIONAL BUREAUCRACY

This section contains a presentation of the core values of traditional bureaucracy. The traditional bureaucracy described in this section has its foundations in the theory of bureaucracy as described by Max Weber [1968] and the following research on core values of management paradigms as well as identified dysfunctions of government value paradigms. This section is structured to discuss the strategy as idea and the strategy in action.

#### Strategy as Idea

The connotation of traditional weberian bureaucracy has not been positive for the past few decades [Homburg, 2005; du Gay, 2005]. *Banishing bureaucracy* has been a core theme in the reinvention of government [Osborne and Plastrik, 1997]. Since the turn of the millennium the bureaucratic values of government have seen a slight comeback after the popularity of New Public Management has declined [Thompson and Alvesson, 2005]. According to Weber [1968], the legitimacy of the established order was a core focus, and legitimacy is to a large extent drawn from the output side of government [Rothstein, 2003]. For Weber [1968], power and authority is used to increase legitimacy derived from rationality, efficiency, and logic, rather than the previously predominant sources of tradition, heritage, or charismatic leadership [Weber, 1968]. In order to function, such a rational organization needs to be based on legitimate rules and regulations that can be applied efficiently to predefined situations. One of the most important factors of ideal bureaucracy was the depersonalization of clients and case handlers, and the effect that this had in

making the organization more independent on irrationality, emotionality, and personality. In order for the laws, state, and authority to be legitimate, the exercise of authority needs to be based on core values such as predictability, accountability, and efficiency. The core of bureaucracy has in later research been described as an ethos of public office that is based on impersonal and impartial treatment of clients [Newman, 2005]. Another pivotal part of bureaucracy besides efficiency and effectiveness is the ability to create a responsible government [du Gay, 2005]. According to Olsen [2005], the core elements of bureaucracy are formalization, hierarchy, rule-based application, and impartiality.

According to Weber [1968], there are five characteristics of modern bureaucracy. First, bureaucracy is based on competence areas regulated by rules and predefined procedures. Bureaucratic activities needed for the functioning of the bureaucracy are organized as official duties. The power-allocating resources of these duties are strictly guided by formal procedures and rules. Second, bureaucracy functions through a well-defined hierarchy where higher-level officials control and monitor the lower-level officials, thus keeping accountability through hierarchy. Third, the bureaucratic organization is based on written documents that are preserved as originals for increased transparency. The decisions and processes are formally documented and archived for traceability [Weber, 1968]. The documentation of lapsed cases is to be gathered in permanent files and archives in order to strengthen accountability, transparency, and possibilities for ex post evaluation [Jain, 2004]. Fourth [Ibid.], the specialized staff dealing with citizens need formal training. Furthermore, the civil servants are occupied full time by work in the bureaucracy; leaving no time for being part-time civil servants. The last characteristic is that bureaucracy follows explicit and formal rules and regulations. Another very important factor (to Weber) for bureaucracies is the separation of the property of the bureaucrat and the official property of the state. Therefore, the bureaucrat needs to be appointed by merit and compensated by a salary. According to Weber, the most important goal of ideal bureaucracy is to promote efficiency, and, therefore, optimizing the functioning of case-handling is utterly important. In order to gain such high traceability, predictability, and efficiency the rules need to be as detailed as possible. Other core values of the traditional bureaucratic paradigm are equality [Homburg, 2005] and impartiality [Cordella, 2007]. Snijkers [2005] presents values such as legality, legal equity, neutrality, transparency, and accountability. More recently weberian bureaucracy and decision-making have focused on values like efficiency and predictability [Jain, 2004]. In traditional bureaucracy the citizen is regarded as a subordinate community member [Bekkers, 1998]. In sum, the core values and elements of traditional bureaucracy are:

- *Legitimacy*
- *Rule of Law*
- *Application of detailed rules*
- *Efficiency*
- *Effectiveness*
- *Equality*
- *Legality*
- *Impartiality*
- *Objectivity*
- *Transparency*
- *Accountability*
- *High specialization*
- *Citizen as subordinate to the administration*

### Strategy in Action

Few true bureaucracies have ever existed in public services and most organizations have combined bureaucracy as a set of principles with managerialism, professionalism, and even entrepreneurship [Newman, 2005]. The formalization of bureaucracy and the structuring of public administration have led to some of the problems with stove-piped and fragmented public services [Homburg and Bekkers, 2005]. Sub-optimization is another dysfunction associated with bureaucracy in action. Merton [1976] has addressed the problem of rigid adaptation of the law in cases that lead to rules becoming ends in themselves. The resistance to change is another key dysfunction associated with traditional bureaucracy.

Bureaucracy has been associated with waste and inefficiency, rigid rules, and red tape [Newman, 2005]. Since no legislator can prepare legislation for all possible eventualities, there is always a need for taking the actual circumstances into consideration. This is why the concept of legitimacy is important. Civil servants wield political power, since there is in most instances room for discretion in decisions [Rothstein, 2003]. Street-level bureaucracies are the agencies that mainly consist of employees in direct contact with citizens. They interact on a daily basis with citizens, either in mediation or in person, and have a substantial discretion in approving or denying applications for benefits or permits [Lipsky, 1980]. Their role is to act as a filter between rule-application and the conditions in the particular case and to judge and interpret whether or not the rules apply or should be applied to this particular case. Lipsky [1980] states that the most important possible problem with the discretion of street-level bureaucrats is that the bureaucrat is the only person with information of both client and internal rules and the procedures of the agency. The street-level bureaucrat can also filter information from the agency to the client, providing only partial understanding of his/her rights to the client [Ibid.]. Although Weber knew that rules could be made to fit all instances, ideal bureaucracy would have to address the dysfunctions of extensive discretion or the dysfunction of rigid rule application and goal displacement [Merton, 1976].



Other commonly described dysfunctions of bureaucracies are inflexibility, rule-boundedness, and departmentalism [Newman, 2005]. According to Thompson and Alvesson [2005], the side-effects of bureaucracy are inefficiency, dehumanization, and ritualism. According to Jain [2004], this view is based on the core dysfunctions of bureaucracies being hierarchy, rigidity, and inflexibility leading to stove-piped organizations. These dysfunctions are seen as the origin where bureaucratic organizations started to become increasingly inflexible and unwilling to adapt to the needs of the citizens [Ibid.]. As stated above, the core dysfunctions of bureaucracy become visible when the need for situational adjustment due to low predictability and instability are central to the policy to be implemented [Thompson and Alvesson, 2005]

#### IV. NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

In this section, New Public Management (NPM) is discussed and summarized. The structure differentiates between strategy as idea and strategy in action. NPM is not a well-defined concept of how governments are subjected to change, and it is frequently described as an umbrella term of management ideas from the business sector implemented in a public sector context. Despite this, different incarnations of NPM can be described as having some core values and concepts in common. Some researchers do not address NPM but use terms like managerialism to capture all the management trends that were launched in the wake of reinvention and NPM.

##### Strategy as Idea

As stated earlier, and as can be seen below, NPM is neither a homogeneous movement nor a well-defined theoretical body. However, some key features of NPM can be distinguished and others are influences from modern management ideas. This is also how NPM is treated in this paper and we focus on the merger of ideas rather than what is common. A frequent notion is that NPM focuses on copying business models for public management, and in doing so strongly focuses on extreme customer centricity from a public administration point of view [Politt, 1993]. Dunleavy and Margetts [2005] outline NPM as being composed of three themes: (1) Disaggregation and decentralisation of public agencies; (2) Competition; (3) Incentivization. The first theme is predominantly about splitting up hierarchies and agencies and internally flattening the hierarchies and control-mechanisms. The second theme is about diversifying suppliers and splitting the supplier role from the purchaser role. The third theme is predominantly about performance measures and incentivization and center on economic measures of public sector performance. Homburg [2005] outlines the following key features of NPM: customer- rather than citizen-orientated, performance orientated, improved quality of service, empowered street-level servants, tight cost control, decentralization, and focused inter-organizational relations. Thus NPM involves a shift in accountability focus from rule-based processes to accountability by high performance. An important work in the domain of government practice as well as in the research community is Osborne and Gaebler's [1992] frequently referenced book *Reinventing Government*. In this book ten principles of reinvention that summarize much of the NPM agenda are put forward. The properties of entrepreneurial government are:

1. *Catalytic*—to steer rather than row and to introduce flexibility to a higher degree
2. *Competitive*—replacing monopolies with completion of service delivery and incentives to better productivity
3. *Mission-driven*—replacing steering through budgets and rules with steering through missions and goals
4. *Result-oriented*—altering accountability through hierarchy and inputs to accountability for results and output
5. *Customer-driven*—improving responsibility to citizens by empowering them as customers with power of choice
6. *Community-owned*—pushing power and control from bureaucracies to communities
7. *Enterprising*—shifting from idea of spending to idea of earning
8. *Anticipatory*—prevention rather than cure
9. *Decentralized*—empowering employees and shifting power downward toward the citizens
10. *Market-oriented*—the idea of using markets rather than public programs to solve problems

[Osborne, 1993]

Osborne [1993] focuses the reinvention of public administration on avoiding the core dysfunctions of the bureaucratic government that is resistant to the change pressures of technology and a society in change. The standardized delivery of one-size-fits-all service to mass markets was the core of bureaucratic activity and when society changed the government bureaucracies did not. People became dependant on the bureaucracies that were in control. Osborne and Plastrik [1997] have presented a somewhat altered agenda, adding benchmarking and performance measuring, deregulation as a reform strategy, downsizing and privatization, user fees, and a focus on cost-efficiency. Kettl [2000] has identified six core elements of the NPM marketisation of public administration. The first element is *service orientation* through a more responsive customer orientation of service output. Second, there is a focus on higher *productivity* in public administration service provision. Third, market-like incentives are introduced. Fourth, decentralization of command and control structures is presented. Furthermore, the separation of policy functions from service delivery and finally the shift to accountability for results complete the list of core elements of NPM. According to Kickert [1997, p. 733] the characteristics of NPM are the following eight aspects:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| (1) strengthening steering functions at the center | (5) optimizing information technology   |
| (2) devolving authority, providing flexibility     | (6) developing competition and choice   |
| (3) ensuring performance, control, accountability  | (7) improving the quality of regulation |
| (4) improving the management of human resources    | (8) providing responsive service        |

One difference between the above taxonomies of NPM is how ICT is perceived. The view of technology and ICT in NPM is a strictly pragmatic notion of using it when applicable or found useful [Bovens and Zouridis, 2002]. This is probably because of the fact that when NPM emerged ICT was mainly a tool for strengthening bureaucracy [Hood, 1994; Homburg, 2005; Kraemer and King, 1977], which the management paradigm NPM primarily was opposing. Kickert's taxonomy [1997] above is one of few public administration sources that mentions ICT and NPM. One aspect of this is that public administration to a large extent has avoided ICT as a research focus and thus has neglected the impact of ICT on government [Margetts, 2003].

Andersen [2004] states that modern management ideas have resulted in a more corporate style of management in government agencies and a trend toward debureaucratization through privatization, reductions of rules and norms. Through the more extensive use of framework laws the politicians of today have given up much power in favor of street-level bureaucrats [Lipsky, 1980]. To summarize, the core values of New Public Management the following set can be extracted from the literature.

- *Customer orientation*
- *Decentralization*
- *Mission and goal orientation*
- *Improved accountability for results*
- *Improved responsibility to address client needs*
- *Focus on cost-efficiency*
- *Focus on productivity*
- *Shift from idea of spending to earning*
- *Introducing market mechanisms*
  - *competition*
  - *incentivization*
- *Introducing a higher degree of flexibility and discretion*
- *Empowerment of street-level bureaucrats*
- *Deregulation as reform strategy*
- *Pushing control from hierarchy of bureaucracies to community*
- *Preventive and proactive approach rather than reactive and curing*
- *Separating policy formulation from implementation*

### Strategy in Action

The last decade has seen a debate in the political science community about the middle-age, death, or irrelevance of NPM in public administration. A large body of literature has been criticized parts of the NPM agenda. The resulting fragmentation from decentralization has been addressed through the focus on joined-up government (JUG). JUG has to some extent focused on a different set of values than NPM. Large parts of the NPM agenda has stalled or died in the water [Dunleavy and Margetts, 2005]. The decentralization aspect of NPM has led to fragmentation and other dysfunctions that were unexpected by the advocates of NPM [ibid.]. Another dysfunction of NPM in practice is that NPM has created conflicting and diversified organizational identities within government agencies [Skálén, 2004]. This dysfunction concern the different perceived and ascribed organizational identities among managers in public organizations undergoing change. The last decade has seen frequent critique against NPM as a phenomenon.

As a response to the negative aspects and disappointments of NPM other suggestions have followed. Bouckaert, [2004] and Pollitt and Bouckaert [2004] have suggested a neo-weberian state. Just like New Public Management has been seen as the movement from the dysfunctions of traditional weberian bureaucracy, the neo-weberian model can be seen as a movement from the dysfunctions of NPM to meet the values of the traditional bureaucratic model [Pollitt, van Thiel and Homburg, 2007]. One core element preserved from NPM is citizen rather than customer focus. Thus, the transformed representative focus of NPM is now strengthening the bureaucracies. The conclusion is that NPM is nowhere near a holistic and common reform movement. It blends with the local context and takes new appearances in different countries. Another suggested replacement or gradual shift from NPM is the digital-era governance (DEG) coined by Dunleavy and Margetts [2005]. The latter shift (DEG) is described as an ICT-mediated roll-back of the core features of NPM. Hierarchies, regarded as leading to the core dysfunctions of public administration, have been refocused. Peters and Pierre [2003] state that the intent of government was never to maximize customer friendliness and flexibility, but rather to provide equal and fair treatment according to the laws.

Pierre and Peters [2000] state that Weberian bureaucracy has more to offer as instrument of governance. Concerning the dysfunctions of NPM in practice the following quote summarize these issues:

*NPM can have very negative effects when injected into situations where the civil service is highly politicized, the 'public service ethic' is unknown, budgets are unstable and accountability is weak. The paradox, then, is that the NPM needs its enemy—traditional bureaucracy—in order to succeed [Pollitt, van Thiel and Homburg, 2007, s 6].*

Dunleavy and Margetts [2005] at first focus the discussion on dysfunctions of NPM on reintegration of the decentralized parts of government. Decentralization created a mess of small agencies and other actors that became an unmanageable integration task for citizens and businesses to handle. Second, they believe that governments are taking the joined-up governance theme further by creating parts of public administration focusing on the client needs in the larger scheme. Third, the NPM wave neglected ICT as a strategic component in public administration.

## V. CASE DESCRIPTION

This section covers the case description that is used to discuss e-government as a practical phenomenon. The case study covers an inter-organizational e-government project that implemented an e-service aiding the process of applying for a provisional driver's license as well as the back office systems that automate case-handling of simple cases and aid the investigation that takes place in more complex discretionary cases. The section serves as the basis for the analysis in the following section.

The case study that we use was briefly introduced in Section II above. The background to the project is that everyone in Sweden who wants to obtain a driving license first has to apply for a provisional driving license to start taking driving lessons. The application is made to the county administrative board in the region where the applicant lives. The provisional driving license is approved if the applicant is considered to be able to drive a vehicle in a safe way; hence, the permit is an important aspect of traffic security. The main aim of this regulation, therefore, is to find those who are not suitable to receive a permit. At present the permit application is a paper form that is filled in, signed, and sent by postal mail to the agency. The application has to be complemented with a health declaration, a certificate of acceptable eyesight from an optician, and maybe also an application for a parent to be allowed to serve as a private instructor. These documents are received and reviewed by a case officer at the agency, who then decides whether the application is complete or not, and if there is any medical information that must be examined further. The case officer also checks whether the applicant can be found in the records of criminal offences (for instance, for being drunk in public places, drug possession, or any traffic misdemeanor). This information is registered in a special database operated by the police force and the case officer has access to this information through SRoA's IT system (the Road Traffic Register). After the provisional driving license has been granted, the county administrative board reports this to SRoA through the inter-organizational IT system. When the applicant has completed the final driving test and the theoretical test successfully, he or she receives the driving license from the SRoA. This indicates that the administration of driving license issues is a true inter-organizational task that involves several Swedish agencies. In 2004, Sweden's twenty-one county administrative boards together handled over 210,000 applications for provisional driving licenses. In as many as 80 percent of these cases, the decision was very easy to make—the permit was approved without any further examination. These are called "green cases" by the agency. Handling the green cases is an uncomplicated task, but, since there are so many of these cases, the review process is time-consuming. This is the background of the present development project. By developing an e-service that will make an automated decision in all green cases, resources will be saved at the agency. These resources can instead be used for administration of more complex cases. There are other positive effects of the e-service, such as a higher degree of completed applications, since the e-service will check for missing information before they are sent electronically to the agency. Concerning the more complicated 20 percent of "red cases," the benefit, as described by interviewees and in project documentation, is higher efficiency when case handlers start with needed documentation rather than with posting requests of paper documents from other agencies. The twenty-one agencies will also be able to handle these issues in a standardized way and, hence, avoid any regional differences in assessment. The county administrative boards are regional agencies with the same responsibilities over their respective geographical areas of Sweden. Although the same regulations apply to all boards, the study has identified several aspects in which the case-handling differs. The time dimension is the most obvious aspect, which includes the time frame for receiving a denial or acceptance of the application. Another aspect that differs is the time waiting for requested complementary information from the client before the application is denied. Other possibly more important factors are the differences in what data that are gathered in the more complex "red cases." In some county administrations standardized information is routinely ordered from providers like the police, the courts, etc. In other county administrations the case-handling officer himself orders the information that he or she believes is important in this particular case.

## VI. CASE ANALYSIS

This section covers the analysis of the case study, using the lenses reconstructed in the previous section. The aim of this analysis is to relate the practical incarnation of e-government in relation to the reconstructed lenses of bureaucracy and NPM as management strategies in order to understand how e-government can be discussed in relation to public administration management paradigms. We argue that this is an important and crucial step in order to further understand how e-government on the management paradigm level can alter public administration. The reconstructed values from the previous sections are used as a lens through which the implemented e-government project is viewed.

At first we need to define the study object from a public management perspective. As for traditional bureaucracy- or NPM-influenced management strategies, the studied organizations are large bureaucracies with influences from NPM and related management ideas, as is the picture in government agencies of today. As Fountain [2001] states, public management must have a clear understanding of the bureaucratic aspects of the studied government entities. As stated above, the legal framework implicitly divides case-handling into separate categories: The so-called *red cases* and the so-called *green cases*. The legal framework is highly rule-based with large components of street-level discretion [Lipsky, 1980] concerning the red cases. The green cases are manually handled in a machine-like fashion that is strictly rule-bound and close to the weberian ideal situation. The red cases, on the other hand, are ultimate discretionary case-handling where the applicant's history is reviewed and a conclusion drawn whether this applicant could be trusted in road traffic or not. Of course, there are rules and regulations, but ultimately it is the duty of the street-level bureaucrats to evaluate the client. As stated in Section I, this is a comprehensive project covering both ICT mediated service-delivery and internal process-efficiency. Thus, this project addresses both the internal process-based aspect of e-government and the external service-delivery aspect. Another conclusion is that this can be seen as shortterm adoption of e-government. By that we mean that this project does not contain any major changes in legislation in order to adapt the area of provisional driver's licenses to more purposeful implementations of e-government. Thus, this project is on a managerial or agency level implementing an e-government strategy that the central government has not tried to simplify or in any other way promote by giving the legislation a more thorough overhaul. Therefore, we argue that we can capture the practical strategy of the implementation level of the e-government project, but also the effects from the project in terms of the passive changes that occur in the role of the agency and the relations to the clients. In this project we can see a hierarchy of values, ranging from core-project values to implicit effects that are unknown or at least not discussed in the agency beforehand. Other values than core values are less focused but well known to the staff.

The project as a whole is to a large extent, especially rhetorically, organized along the lines of an NPM agenda. By this we mean that the initiating core values originate in the NPM agenda. Economic values such as *cost effectiveness* and *higher productivity* are focused. *Citizen centrality* is also focused but treated more implicitly. Values such as *deregulation*, *empowerment of employees* and *decentralization*, are not explicitly addressed in the project. Thus, this project is guided by and initiated focusing on core NPM values, but vital parts of the NPM package are left out and the bureaucratic core elements are preserved and even strengthened. *Internal performance* and *cost reductions* were the dominant values frequently addressed as motives for the project. Client benefits in terms of a shorter time span for completed and approved applications, easier access to the agencies' services were presented but not focused to the same extent. Other core NPM values are explicit in the management of the studied agency. The ministry responsible for these agencies guide and steer the SCoA with goals and missions and the high-level regulations and laws could not be altered although needed. This project is entirely bound by the existing regulation because of the time span for altering laws. In the project there existed value conflicts between NPM advocates of *customer centrality* and case-handling officers who relied on more traditional weberian values. Peters and Pierre [2003] make a reminder that government agencies were never designed to maximize customer friendliness and flexibility alongside the customer centric NPM agenda. This discrepancy initiated a recurrent discussion signaling the need to establish what the case-process subjected to change is about and why it is important. During the entire project the customer friendliness versus legality and legal equity debate recurred several times. This tension between legality and customer friendliness can be summarized by the often implicitly asked question of what the core of operations really are.



As stated above, the *client as beneficiary* is a known issue but treated as a subordinated theme. Therefore, there was no attempt at explicitly articulating the client perspective regarding the e-government solution. This is naturally a misleading conclusion resulting in less positive impacts for the clients, as their needs are hard to guess beforehand by case-handling officers. However, there are effects that could be labeled as client benefits, at the same time promoting bureaucratic values. These are absolute *objectivity*, *equality*, and *impartiality* in the automated green cases. Automation is possible because of highly detailed laws and regulations that limit discretion and allow computerized automation of permits. The level of discretion in the green cases will be nonexistent, as will the possibility of treating clients differently based on income, gender, celebrity, or ethnicity, as the computer program simply cannot see the difference. Compared to the weberian bureaucracy, these are clearly matching the core values. The *rule of law*, *equality before the law*, *objective treatment from agencies*, and *absolute impartiality* are in these cases enforced core values of weberian ideal bureaucracy. As Rothstein [2003] states, legislators cannot foresee all instances the legislation will have to handle, and, therefore, the red cases still exist. In fact, these are growing in numbers as limitations exist regarding what the programmed rules can securely be applied to. In terms of bureaucratic values and dysfunctions the *automated* green cases match the predictions by Snellen [1998] and Bovens and Zouridis [2002]. Automation limits the possible negative impact of street-level discretion. However, these cases were handled in a *machine-like fashion* beforehand, which made this kind of effects less predominant. The automated case-process is very close to the *perfect bureaucrat* as described in weberian bureaucracy, something which is even more explicit with the red cases handled by street-level bureaucrats with a high degree of discretion.

The *documentation procedures* and what information that was gathered differed substantially between the case-handling officers. With the new IS implemented internally as the back office parts of this e-government case, *related documentation* and *information gathering* became standardized and *properly documented*. For the first time, the *legal demands* on documentation procedures will be the same among the twenty-one boards and in terms with the legislation. This is the intended legal transparency behind the weberian ideal of written documentation. These are two of the core dysfunctions of street-level bureaucracy that deal with the needs of situational adjustment due to legal limitations. The automated process of granting the permits also pinpoint other weberian core values. As one of the cornerstones of the weberian bureaucratic ideal model *legality* is highly promoted, particularly in the green cases. The computer system implements digitalized legislation as programmed rules make all cases being treated in absolute accordance with the legislation. It should also be pointed out that the twenty-one county administrative boards did not use the same established practice in all these cases. Slight differences occurred in the treatment of cases, ending in slightly different results. As this project incorporated *centralization* from twenty-one boards with hundreds of case-handling officers in one system, there was absolute need for a standard practice to be implemented to the digitalized legislation and to the case-handling process. Hence, both the green and the red cases were substantially centralized as opposed to the NPM agenda which emphasized *decentralization*, *empowerment of street-level bureaucrats* and *situational adjustments*. Another important aspect is that the applicant as well as the case-handling officer are depersonalized to a high degree, especially in the green cases. This is also true for the red cases, especially with information gathering.

When discussing accountability, both the NPM agenda and the bureaucratic notion of this are pivotal. Superficially, there is a clear focus on *accountability for results* as a primary target. *Efficiency* and *productivity* are the core-focused values in the project, as is the measurement of project results in terms of *cost savings* and *less time consumed per application*. There are also signals from government ministries higher up in the hierarchy that this case is a perfect example of the Swedish government implementing a higher degree of automation to achieve more cost-efficient case-handling. The weberian aspect of accountability and legitimacy through hierarchy and equal and legal treatment of all subjects of the state alike is just as important, however, it is less focused. *Standardized documentation procedures* and *standardized information gathering* are both examples of weberian views of accountability. Particularly with red cases both increase transparency and, therefore, make it easier to promote internal control and evaluation of earlier cases. In cases of appeal, transparent documentation, process transparency, and complete documentation make it easier to pursue an evaluation of the grounds on which the decision was made.

On the surface, this project could easily be mistaken for following a rather NPM-influenced agenda, but, when examined more thoroughly, it is easy to realize that NPM and Bureaucracy both influence it heavily but in the case of Bureaucracy not intentionally and not as core focuses. This means that superficially the project and the ideas of the higher management officials in the agency follow an NPM agenda. However, the decentralization and situational adjustment parts of NPM are inverted. In automating the green cases and building ICT support for the red cases the agency becomes increasingly centralized and moves in the direction of weberian ideal bureaucracy.



Table 1: Realization of Core Values		
<i>Focused Value</i>	<i>Bureaucracy</i>	<i>New Public Management</i>
Accountability for results		X
Accountability through hierarchy	X	
Rule of law	X	
Equality before the law	X	
Productivity		X
Efficiency		X
Objectivity	X	
Impartiality	X	
Customer/citizen orientation		X
Mission and goal orientation		X
Cost-efficiency		X
High specialization	X	
Transparency	X	

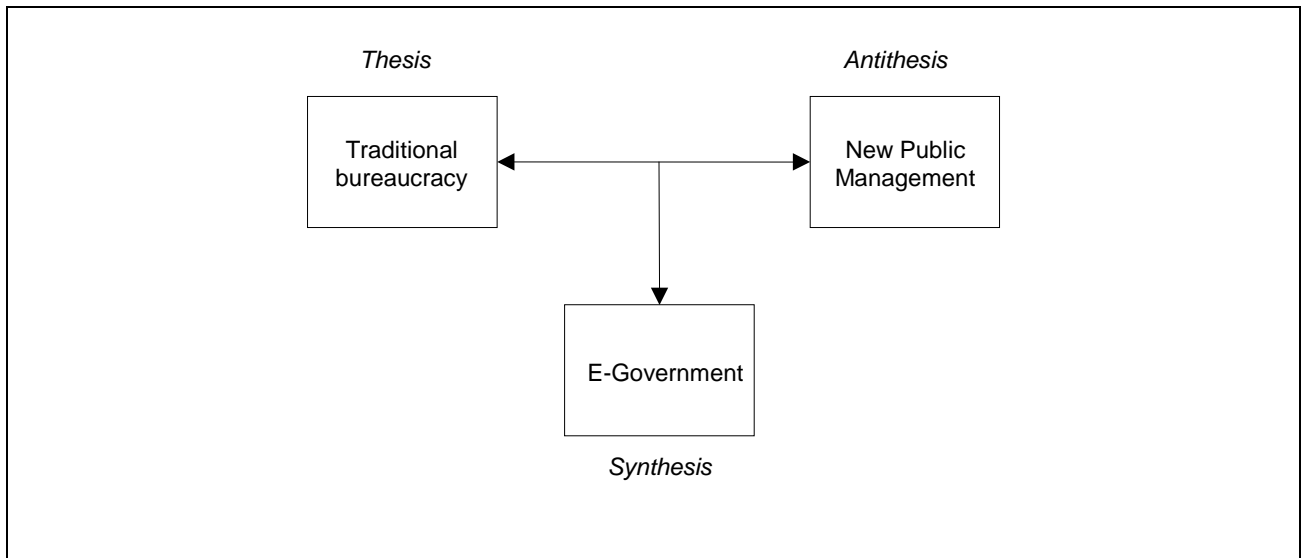
The table above describes the identified core values of the project and how they are related to the studied management strategies. As we can see, the different strategies of weberian traditional bureaucracy and new public management both contribute with core values to the project. Therefore, the project can be seen as a practical synthesis of the two studied management strategies, and thus the practical implementation of e-government in this project can be seen as a synthesis as well. There are also core dysfunctions addressed or handled in the project by both these management strategies. The dysfunctions of a high degree of street-level discretion is one of the core dysfunctions addressed; weberian inefficiency is another. NPM also emphasizes the empowerment of street-level bureaucrats in order for decisions to be more adjusted to the specific situations. However, this is also seen as a dysfunction of weberian traditional bureaucracy. Hence, this is at the same time a neglected core function and an avoided core dysfunction.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

In this section the conclusions from the analysis are drawn and the reconstructed value fulfillment in the previous section is further elaborated into how e-government in practice can be seen based on this project. Even though this is a single case study, we are able to indicate that e-government in practice can be seen as a synthesis in practice of Bureaucracy and NPM. This conclusion is based on the fact that the increased value fulfillment introduced through this project has foundations in both NPM and Bureaucracy.

Although this is a single case study, we believe that some cautiously expressed claims can be made. As seen above, in terms of reconstructed values e-government neither acts as a strict fulfillment of NPM nor of Bureaucracy. E-Government can instead be seen as a merger of several core values from previous management paradigms. In Section I above, we identified a spectrum of diverse interpretations of e-government in relation to core values and in relation to the management strategies of Bureaucracy and NPM. These interpretations were *a means to decrease the impacts of the dysfunctions of bureaucracy*, *a means of strengthening bureaucratic values*, *a way of building on NPM and taking it a step further* and *a step back from NPM and replacing it*. Seeing Bureaucracy and NPM as opposing strategies, it is hard to accept the four different interpretations of e-government clarified in Section I above. It is rhetorically hard to see that e-government is a means of increasing the bureaucratic values and at the same time **is** a way of building on NPM, taking it a step further. It is also difficult to combine the interpretations that e-government is both a way to strengthen bureaucratic values *and* a means to decrease the dysfunctions of bureaucracy. However, the results from our empirical analyses (using values from bureaucracy and NPM as a lens) give some evidence of the seemingly contradictory interpretations. Some parts of the studied e-government project show clear NPM values (e.g., *accountability for results*, *cost-efficiency*, *productivity*, *customer/citizen orientation*, and *efficiency*), and some parts show clear bureaucratic values (e.g., *accountability through hierarchy*, *rule of law*, *equality before the law*, *objectivity*, *impartiality*, *specialization*, and *transparency*). It is also possible to interpret parts of the e-government project as ways to avoid bureaucratic and NPM dysfunctions, respectively. Examples of this limit the possible negative impacts from discretion and limit the negative effects from stove-piped fragmented bureaucracy. Hence, none of these four interpretations of e-government can be used to fully grasp the nature of the e-government incarnation in the studied project. All these interpretations include founding components of the practical incarnation of e-government within the studied context. This makes e-government much more complicated than an enforced Bureaucracy or NPM management strategy.

Then, how shall we make sense of these seemingly contradictory empirical findings? The way to conceptualize this is through the use of a dialectical framework [e.g., Popper, 1940]. Traditional bureaucracy and new public management are seen as antagonists, where Bureaucracy is the thesis and NPM is the antithesis. E-government is, as shown above, related to these two management strategies. E-government can be seen as a synthesis of the two opposing strategies (Figure 1). A synthesis is a special combination of the thesis and the antithesis. It does not include all properties from the thesis and the antithesis. This would not be possible since there are obvious contradictions. The synthesis aims at (through its particular perspective) selecting good properties and avoiding bad properties from the thesis and the antithesis. It repeals the contradictions of the thesis and the antithesis through these selections and avoidances. The synthesis tries to preserve the merits of both and avoid the limitations of both. As a synthesis it also adds more to it than the thesis and the antithesis can do, which means that the synthesis adds particular properties not inherent in the thesis or the antithesis.



**Figure 1. E-Government as a Synthesis of Traditional Bureaucracy and New Public Management**

We claim, then, that this dialectical way of conceiving Bureaucracy, New Public Management, and e-government is plausible. As stated above, there are clear contradictions between bureaucracy and NPM. In practice e-government can incorporate values from both bureaucracy and NPM, but it also avoids some dysfunctions. This means that e-government as a practical implementation tries to capture important values from the other two management strategies and avoids their negative parts. E-government, as a synthesis, adds more than is to be found in its thesis and antithesis. ICT is a leverage that may give e-government advantages beyond bureaucracy and NPM.

The main conclusion of our investigation is that e-government can be an ideal-typical and practical synthesis of traditional bureaucracy and new public management. Further research will investigate other value aspects of these management strategies, something which could not be covered this case study.

In the studied project the focused values have been shifted toward a few intentionally focused values, resulting in the unintentional downgrading of other values. It is our conclusion that a deeper and more complete value analysis could lead to better value realization in e-government projects. There are two sides to the coin and in e-government and public administration the actions taken and changes made concern the legitimacy of the established order and what are, often by legal demands, forced relations between subject or client and the state. Thus it is important to enforce changes while clearly taking in negative side-effects and unfocused positive outcomes.

Another important issue that this paper has discussed is e-government in relation to previously focused management paradigms in public administration. There are also probably other core values supported or specific dysfunctions that are related to e-government and not discovered in this paper. It is important to understand that this study addresses e-government in relation to the other paradigms studied and the claim of fully grasping the nature of e-government is somewhat closer but not complete with this study.

This study and the resulting conclusions need to be looked upon as multidisciplinary. E-government is in its nature a multidisciplinary context or field of study. As stated in the introduction, there are some issues within the research community that are needed for further maturity of e-government research. The public administration research community as a whole does not focus on ICT in government enough to match the efforts invested in ICT mediated change in governments. The opposite critique has been made concerning the technocentric nature of information

systems research in e-government. As we see it, e-government needs to be a mature extended union of public administration and information systems research. The contributions concerning the study of what e-government can be in terms of core values and previous management strategies aim at this developing multidisciplinary field of research.

### Future Research Directions

As a single case study there are some limitations that call for future work. This case study did not reflect a change in the law, thus being evolutionary rather than innovational in terms of policy changes for e-government. There are very few studies with such a longitudinal approach to ICT in government. This will, however, be needed in order to fully explore the long-term effects of e-government on public administration as implementation of policies as well as the policy process as a whole. Furthermore, there are some distinctive features of the case that call for important areas of further study. The simplicity of the green cases described mean that the strict implementation of the law can be done without introducing the dysfunction of bureaucratic rigidity. The same conclusion can be made concerning core aspects of the more complex red cases. An important extension of this study will be to examine case processes that benefit from street-level bureaucrats exercising a discretionary handling of cases such as social welfare benefits and other more complex contexts. It would be important to have the polarities of the discretionary handling of complex cases and the more strict legal implementation in this case study as an empirical foundation for further conclusions. Widening the study on values in different contexts will also be a prerequisite to suggest a core values framework for e-government. Such a framework would risk being a premature suggestion with the foundation in this single case study only.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research has been financially supported by the Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems (VINNOVA).

### REFERENCES

*Editor's Note:* The following reference list contains hyperlinks to World Wide Web pages. Readers who have the ability to access the Web directly from their word processor or are reading the paper on the Web, can gain direct access to these linked references. Readers are warned, however, that:

1. These links existed as of the date of publication but are not guaranteed to be working thereafter.
2. The contents of Web pages may change over time. Where version information is provided in the References, different versions may not contain the information or the conclusions referenced.
3. The author(s) of the Web pages, not AIS, is (are) responsible for the accuracy of their content.
4. The author(s) of this article, not AIS, is (are) responsible for the accuracy of the URL and version information.

- Bannister, F. (2001) "Dismantling the Silos: Extracting New Value from IT Investments in Public Administration", *Information Systems Journal* (11), pp. 65–84.
- Bannister, F. (2002) "Citizen Centricity: A Model of IS Value in Public Administration", *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems Evaluation* (5)2.
- Baskerville, R. and A.T. Wood-Harper (1996) "A Critical Perspective on Action Research as a Method for Information Systems Research", *Journal of Information Technology* (11)3, pp. 235–246.
- Bekkers, V. (1998) "Wiring Public Organizations and Changing Organizational Jurisdictions" in Snellen, I. and W. Van De Donk (eds) *Public Administration in an Information Age—A Handbook*, Amsterdam: IOS Press, pp. 57–77.
- Bellamy, C. and J.A. Taylor (1998) *Governing in the Information Age*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bogdanor, V. (2005) *Joined-Up Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bouwman, et al. (2005) *Information and Communication Technology in Organization*, London: Sage.
- Bovens, M. and S. Zouridis (2002) "From Street-Level to System-Level Bureaucracies: How Information and Communication Technology Is Transforming Administrative Discretion and Constitutional Control", *Public Administration Review* (62)2, pp. 174–184.
- Checkland, P. (1991) "From Framework through Experience to Learning: The Essential Nature of Action Research" in Nissen, H.E., et al. (eds.). *Information Systems Research: Contemporary Approaches and Emergent Traditions*, Amsterdam: Elsevier.



- Cordella, A. (2007) "E-Government: Towards the e-Bureaucratic Form?" *Journal of Information Technology* (22), pp. 265–274.
- du Gay, P. (2005) *Values of Bureaucracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dunleavy, P. and H. Margetts (2005) "The New Public Management Is Dead; Long Live Digital Era Governance", *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (16), pp. 467–494.
- Esteves, J. and R. Joseph (2008) "A Comprehensive Framework for the Assessment of e-Government Projects", *Government Information Quarterly* (25)1, pp.118–132.
- Fountain, J. (2001) *Building the Virtual State, Information Technology and Institutional Change*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institutions Press.
- Gouscos, D., et al. (2007) "A General Model of Performance and Quality for One-Stop Government Service Offerings", *Government Information Quarterly* (24)4, pp. 860–885.
- Grönlund, Å. (2002) *Electronic Government: Design, Applications and Management*, Hershey, PA, and London: Idea Group Publishing.
- Grönlund, Å. (2004) "State of the Art in e-Gov Research—A Survey" in Tranmüller, R. (ed.) *Electronic Government: Third International Conference, EGOV 2004*.
- Heeks, R. (2006) *Implementing and Managing e-Government: An International Text*, New York: SAGE Publications.
- Ho, A.T. (2002) "Reinvention Local Governments and the e-Government Initiative," *Public Administration Review* (62)44, pp. 434–444.
- Homburg, V. and V. Bekkers (2005) "E-Government and NPM: A Perfect Marriage?" in Bekkers, V. and V. Homburg (eds.) *The Information Ecology of e-Government*, Amsterdam: IOS Press.
- Hood, C. (1994) *Economic Rationalism in Public Management*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Jain, A. (2004) "Using the Lens of Max Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy to Examine e-Government Research" in *Proceedings from the 37th Hawaii International Conference on Systems Sciences 2004*, Hawaii.
- Kickert, W. (1997) "Public Governance in the Netherlands: An Alternative to Anglo-American Managerialism", *Public Administration* (75)4, pp. 731–753.
- Kraemer, K. and J L. King (2003) *Information Technology and Administrative Reform: Will the Time after e-Government Be Different?* paper prepared for the Heinrich Reinermann Schrift Fest, Speyer.
- Kraemer, K.L. and J.L. King (1977) *Computers and Local Governments—A Review of Research*, New York: Praeger.
- Kubicek, H. and M. Hagen (2000) *One-Stop Government in Europe: An Overview*, Bremen: University of Bremen.
- Kumar, V. et al. (2007) "Factors for Successful e-Government Adoption: A Conceptual Framework", *The Electronic Journal of e-Government* (5)1, pp. 63–76.
- Landsbergen, D. and G. Wolken (2001) "Realizing the Promise: Government Information Systems and the Fourth Generation of Information Technology", *Public Administration Review* (61)2, pp. 206–220.
- Layne, K. and J. Lee (2001) "Developing Fully Functional e-Government: A Four Stage Model", *Government Information Quarterly* (18)2, pp. 122–136.
- Lipsky, M. (1980) *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Margetts, H. (2003) "Electronic Government: A Revolution in Public Administration" in Peters, G. and J. Pierre (eds.) *The Handbook of Public Administration*, London: SAGE.
- Merton, R.K. (1976) *Sociological Ambivalence and Other Essays*, New York: Free Press.
- Newman, J. (2005) "Bending Bureaucracy: Leadership and Multi-Level Governance" in du Gay, P. (ed.) *The Values of Bureaucracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Olsen, J. (2005) "Maybe It Is Time to Rediscover Bureaucracy", *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (16)1, pp.1–24.
- Osborne, D. (1993) "Reinventing Government", *Public Productivity & Management Review* (16)4, pp. 349–356.
- Osborne, D. and T. Gaebler (1992) *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming the Public Sector*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

- Osborne, D. and P. Plastrik (1997) *Banishing Bureaucracy: The Five Strategies for Reinventing Government*, Reading, MA: Wesley Publishing Company.
- Pollitt, C. (2003) "Joined-Up Government: A Survey", *Political Studies Review* (1)1, pp. 34–49.
- Pollitt, C. and G. Bouckaert (2004) *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pollitt, C., S. van Thiel, and V. Homburg (2007) "New Public Management in Europe", *Management Online Review*.
- Popper, K. (1940) "What Is Dialectic?" *Mind* (49)196, pp. 403–426.
- Reddick, C. (2005) "Citizen Interaction with e-Government: From the Streets to Servers?" *Government Information Quarterly* (22)1, pp. 38–57.
- Rothstein, B. (2003) "Political Legitimacy for Public Administration" in Peters, G. and J. Pierre (eds.) *The Handbook of Public Administration*, London: SAGE.
- Schedler, K. and L. Summermatter (2007) "Customer Orientation in Electronic Government: Motives and Effects", *Government Information Quarterly* (24)2, pp. 291–311.
- Schelin, S.H. (2003) "E-Government: An Overview" in Garson, G.D. (ed.) *Public Information Technology: Policy and Management Issues*, Hershey, PA: Idea Group, pp. 120–137.
- Snellen, I. (1998) "Street-Level Bureaucracy in an Information Age" in Snellen, I. and W. van de Donk (eds.) *Public Administration in an Information Age: A Handbook*, Amsterdam: IOS Press.
- Snijkers, K. (2005) "E-Government: ICT from a Public Management Perspective", UNPAN, <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/NISPAcee/UNPAN023452.pdf> (current July 10,2010).
- STAKO (2003) *Samverkande 24-timmarsmyndigheter—Sammanhållen elektronisk förvaltning*, 2003:18, Stockholm: Statskontoret.
- Thompson, P. and Alvesson, M. (2005) "Bureaucracy at Work: Misunderstandings and Mixed Blessings" in du Gay, P. (ed.) *The Values of Bureaucracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tolbert, C. and K. Mossberger (2006) "The Effects of E-Government on Trust and Confidence in Government", *Public Administration Review* (66)3, pp. 354–369.
- Van Duivenboden, H. and M. Lips (2003) "Taking Citizens Seriously: Applying Hirschman's Model to Various Models Practices of Customer-Oriented e-Governance", in Salminen, A. (ed.) *Governing Networks/EGPA Yearbook*, Amsterdam: IOS Press.
- Van Duivenboden, H. and M. Lips (2005) "Responsive e-Government Services" in Bekkers, V. and V. Homburg (eds.) *The Information Ecology of E-Government*, Amsterdam: IOS Press.
- Walsham, G. (1995) "Interpretive Case Studies in IS Research: Nature and Method", *European Journal of Information Systems* (4), pp. 74–81.
- Weber, M. (1968) *Economy and Society*, New York: Bedminster Press.
- Welch, E., and S. Prandey (2006) "E-Government and Bureaucracy: Toward a Better Understanding of Intranet Implementation and Its Effect on Red Tape", *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (17)3, pp. 379–404.
- World Bank, The (2003) *E-Government Definition*, Washington: The World Bank, <http://go.worldbank.org/M1JHE0Z280> (current July 10, 2010).

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Anders Persson** is PhD Student at Linköping University in Sweden. Background is interdisciplinary with university degrees in information systems and political science. Member of the research group VITS ([www.vits.org](http://www.vits.org)). Active researcher published in various outlets within the field of e-government. Research interests covers e-government strategy, e-service design, organizational change and interoperability in public administration.

**Göran Goldkuhl**, PhD, is professor in information systems at Linköping University and guest professor at Stockholm University, Sweden. He is the director of the Swedish research group VITS ([www.vits.org](http://www.vits.org)), consisting of twenty-five researchers. He has published several books and more than 150 research papers at conferences, in journals, and as book chapters. He is currently developing a family of theories and methods which all are founded on socio-instrumental pragmatism; theories as Workpractice Theory, Business Action Theory, Information Systems Actability Theory; and methods for business process modelling, problem analysis, e-service design, user-interface design, information modelling and IS evaluation. He has a great interest in pragmatic and qualitative research methods and he has contributed to the development of Multi-Grounded Theory, (a modified version of Grounded Theory) and Practical Inquiry (integrating evaluation research, design research and action research).

Copyright © 2010 by the Association for Information Systems. Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and full citation on the first page. Copyright for components of this work owned by others than the Association for Information Systems must be honored. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, to republish, to post on servers, or to redistribute to lists requires prior specific permission and/or fee. Request permission to publish from: AIS Administrative Office, P.O. Box 2712 Atlanta, GA, 30301-2712, Attn: Reprints; or via e-mail from [ais@aisnet.org](mailto:ais@aisnet.org).



# Communications of the Association for Information Systems

ISSN: 1529-3181

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
Ilze Zigurs  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

## AIS SENIOR EDITORIAL BOARD

Guy Fitzgerald Vice President Publications Brunel University	Ilze Zigurs Editor, <i>CAIS</i> University of Nebraska at Omaha	Kalle Lyytinen Editor, <i>JAIS</i> Case Western Reserve University
Edward A. Stohr Editor-at-Large Stevens Institute of Technology	Blake Ives Editor, Electronic Publications University of Houston	Paul Gray Founding Editor, <i>CAIS</i> Claremont Graduate University

## CAIS ADVISORY BOARD

Gordon Davis University of Minnesota	Ken Kraemer University of California at Irvine	M. Lynne Markus Bentley University	Richard Mason Southern Methodist University
Jay Nunamaker University of Arizona	Henk Sol University of Groningen	Ralph Sprague University of Hawaii	Hugh J. Watson University of Georgia

## CAIS SENIOR EDITORS

Steve Alter University of San Francisco	Jane Fedorowicz Bentley University	Jerry Luftman Stevens Institute of Technology
--	---------------------------------------	--

## CAIS EDITORIAL BOARD

Monica Adya Marquette University	Michel Avital University of Amsterdam	Dinesh Batra Florida International University	Indranil Bose University of Hong Kong
Thomas Case Georgia Southern University	Evan Duggan University of the West Indies	Sy Goodman Georgia Institute of Technology	Mary Granger George Washington University
Ake Gronlund University of Umea	Douglas Havelka Miami University	K.D. Joshi Washington State University	Michel Kalika University of Paris Dauphine
Karlheinz Kautz Copenhagen Business School	Julie Kendall Rutgers University	Nancy Lankton Michigan State University	Claudia Loebbecke University of Cologne
Paul Benjamin Lowry Brigham Young University	Sal March Vanderbilt University	Don McCubbrey University of Denver	Fred Niederman St. Louis University
Shan Ling Pan National University of Singapore	Katia Passerini New Jersey Institute of Technology	Jackie Rees Purdue University	Thompson Teo National University of Singapore
Chelley Vician University of St. Thomas	Padmal Vitharana Syracuse University	Rolf Wigand University of Arkansas, Little Rock	A.B.J.M. (Fons) Wijnhoven University of Twente
Vance Wilson Arizona State University	Peter Wolcott University of Nebraska at Omaha	Yajiong Xue East Carolina University	

## DEPARTMENTS

Global Diffusion of the Internet Editors: Peter Wolcott and Sy Goodman	Information Technology and Systems Editors: Sal March and Dinesh Batra
Papers in French Editor: Michel Kalika	Information Systems and Healthcare Editor: Vance Wilson

## ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL

James P. Tinsley AIS Executive Director	Vipin Arora CAIS Managing Editor University of Nebraska at Omaha	Sheri Hronek CAIS Publications Editor Hronek Associates, Inc.	Copyediting by S4Carlisle Publishing Services
--	--	---	--

