

E-government Policy Formation – Understanding the roles of change drivers, veto players and advocacy coalitions

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Abstract: Despite its promise of increasing public authorities' effectiveness, improving decision making and service delivery, e-government initiatives too often fail. So far, reasons for this have largely been sought in technological aspects of e-government. However, e-government is much more complex than that; e-government also encompasses aspects related to the "inner workings" of organizations, policy formation processes and change management. Based on an in-depth case study of an e-government policy formation process in the municipality of Vasteras, Sweden, this paper sets out to develop the understanding of e-government policy failure by elucidating how individuals' actions, behaviors and decision affect endeavors to improve e-government policy agendas. Applying theoretical concepts from political science and the change management literature, this paper describes how a change driver attempted to accomplish fundamental changes in the policy area of e-government, through involving as many stakeholders as possible in the policy formation process, and how this enabled for the emergence of a new advocacy coalition. This advocacy coalition consisted of the actors involved in the policy formation process, and these actors espoused the policy belief advocated by the change driver. However, as time went by, it became apparent that there also existed several veto players, which the change driver failed to engage, and who actively blocked the attempt to get the new policy documents on e-government adopted. As a consequence, the policy formation process failed, despite that the municipality of Vasteras had exceptionally good conditions for improving the e-government policy agenda. This case study highlights the need for e-government-research to look beyond theoretical areas of technological science, and it illustrates the usefulness of theories from political science and change management when furthering the knowledge of e-government. It also points to the need for more processual studies on policy formation processes.

Keywords: e-government, policy formation process, the municipality of Vasteras, veto players, advocacy coalitions, change processes, change drivers

1 Introduction

"E-government", i.e. the utilization of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in public authorities, is often viewed as the ideal vehicle for energizing and modernizing public authorities' activities and operations. E-government is, for example, perceived to carry the promise of increasing public authorities' effectiveness, improving their decision making and service delivery, and it has therefore been implemented by authorities on various levels, also on the local level (Fountain, 2007, Olsson and Åström, 2004).

Research shows, however, that decision makers usually fail with exploiting the opportunities offered by e-government in their particular organizational contexts (Olsson and Åström, 2004, West, 2005). It has been argued that failures related to implementation and use of e-government can be judged as results of decision makers' simplistic assumption that using ICTs in government structures *automatically* facilitate for improved effectiveness, better decision making and service delivery (Ilshammar, 2006, Ngafeeson and Merhi, 2013). It has therefore been pointed out that decision makers should treat e-government as something that requires organizational change and adjustments, not only rigorous technological solutions (Heinze et al., 2000, Mayer-Schönberger and Lazer 2007).

Such a perspective on e-government stresses the importance of improving the "inner workings" of public organizations – involving building a more efficient organization, deepening the organization's process-orientation as well as upgrading staff members' skills to perform necessary steps in the policy formation process– in order to enhance the *capacity* to carry out successful and satisfactory e-government programs (Rossel and Finger, 2007). Moreover, this perspective on e-government points to the need for a different – or at least additional – focus in research: a focus that may open the "black box" of e-government policy formation and take into consideration the actions and decisions of the involved actors.

In research on organizations, change processes such as policy formation processes, have been studied for a long time. Most researchers agree that organizations today face great challenges due to, for instance, globalization and rapid technological development; and e-government is just one type of policy agenda that can be understood as connected to this development (Norris, 2001). Within the area of change management practice, it is generally argued that managers must learn to master the complexities that change management processes comprise (see Cummings and Worley, 2014), but researchers however argue that change does not unfold in a linear and predictable manner (Collins, 1998; Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000). The roles of individuals' actions and decisions in these unpredictable processes also need to be investigated further.

With this paper, we aim at developing the understanding of e-government by elucidating how individuals' actions, behaviors and decision affect a policy formation process, which is thus understood as a change process in the organization. We do so by performing a case study of the municipality of Vasteras, Sweden. The municipality of Vasteras has for a long time been prominent as one of the Swedish municipalities that has invested a lot of resources in e-government initiatives. In 2011, the CIO of the strategic IT unit of the municipality's Executive Office began forming new policy documents on e-government, which intended to facilitate the spreading of a new perspective on e-government, namely that e-government is something larger than the mere utilization of technology in public authorities' structures, operations and processes; that e-government is an activity that all departments and units of the municipality must understand, accept and continuously reinforce; and that e-government no longer can be viewed as a peripheral and esoteric, or IT specific activity. The purpose of bringing the new policy documents on e-government into existence was, with other words, to enable for remodeling the perception of e-government among the municipality's staff members. Despite a profound consensus among the involved actors in the policy formation process – regarding that e-government should not be simplified into a technological matter – the attempt to getting the new policy documents on e-government approved on a broader scale as well as formally adopted turned out incredibly difficult. From the CIO's point of view, this was considered a great failure, and this failure consisted of two parts: i) more than a year was to pass before the new policy documents on e-government had been approved and formally adopted by the decision makers, and ii) only a watered-down form of these new policy documents on e-government was approved and adopted. This makes the case of Vasteras especially interesting. By investigating the policy formation process regarding the new policy documents on e-government and the failure to reach enough agreement for adopting the new policy documents in their entirety, this paper provides well needed insight on how individuals' actions and decisions affect policy formation processes and thereby on how public authorities' capacity to carry out e-government policy formation could be enhanced.

We would like to point out here that the concept *policy formation process* is a concept that has been used by the different actors in the empirical context, and that we are aware that this concept is rather common in political science. However, given that we have been working inductively with this case study, we have tried as much as possible to show sensitivity to the empirical context. Nonetheless, in this case we view the concept of *policy formation process* as the path from idea to analysis, from policy formulation to authorization and the decision to adopt the new policy. There are indeed other concepts for such a process and its different steps, but we have chosen, with respect to the empirical context, to simply call it the *policy formation process* in this paper. *Policy* is, in turn, thought of as the basic principles by which a public authority is guided, as well as of a temporary opportunity for changing a larger matrix of organizational conditions.

2 Research on e-government

The concept of e-government has been around since the 1990s, when the use of ICTs began to be seen as a policy strategy appropriate for improving the effectiveness of public authorities' operations and service delivery (Bretschneider, 2003, Fountain, 2007). The need for such improvements have been particularly profound at the local level of government: local governments have – as a result of the process of decentralization that has taken place during the last couple of decades – been provided with a broader scope of responsibilities and increased independency (Kjær, 2004, Montin, 2000). Consequently, local authorities' affairs have become increasingly complex: they face new demands to coordinate and manage new types of processes and increasing amounts of information, while still having to cope with a compartmental structure and rather slow decision making processes (Heintze et al., 2000). Many local authorities have therefore greeted the phenomenon of e-government with a particularly warm welcome (Ilshammar, 2006).

It seems however as if the failure rate among e-government initiatives is rather high, leading to a situation where the possibilities of e-government initiatives are not realized (Olsson and Åström, 2004, West, 2005). The reasons for the failures have mainly been sought in the technology of e-government initiatives (Ngafeeson and Merhi, 2013). However, it has been argued that the significant focus on technological aspects delimits explanations of why e-government initiatives fail (Agre, 2002, Yildiz, 2007). Therefore, it has been stressed that research on e-government should not place undue emphasis on studying the outcomes or implications of the mere technological solutions that e-government initiatives introduces in public authorities; modern e-government research must, simply put, have a much broader approach (Agre, 2002, Dawes et al., 2004). In addition, researchers have, in fact, asserted that e-government initiatives, unequivocally, require organizational changes and adjustments as well as increased e-government policy making capacity, not only rigorous technological solutions (Mayer-Schönberger and Lazer 2007, Rossel and Finger, 2007). Taking this into account, it is remarkable that research on e-government, on the one hand, still lacks sophisticated examinations and explanations of the complex environments in which e-government initiatives are initiated and decided upon, and, on the other hand, keeps avoiding questions that have to do with policy formation processes (cf. Yildiz, 2007). Intelligibly, the lack of attention given to such dimensions of the phenomena of e-government has been considered one of the main limitations of this field of research (ibid).

By strengthening the focus on: i) *behavioral aspects* such as individuals' actions, decisions, intentions and strategies, ii) *policy formation processes* (e-government is just as much about policy formation as any other policy area) and iii) the *complex environments* in which these policy processes take place, when studying the phenomena of e-government, it will be possible to add necessary new dimensions to the e-government research agenda. These added dimensions will, in turn, lead to an improved basis for carrying out more sophisticated analyses of, for instance, why change attempts or e-government initiatives succeed or fail. In other words, these important dimensions of e-government cannot be overlooked if we are to fully understand why e-government initiatives fail to reach their full potential. This is, thus, one of the principal reasons for why there is a need for further and broadened research on e-government.

3 Understanding policy formation failure

In order to open the "black box" of e-Government policy formation, the actions of individuals involved in these processes need to be taken into consideration. In research on policy formation failure so far, three different theoretical frameworks and concepts have been used: *the veto player framework*, *the advocacy coalition framework* and the concept of *change driver*. Below we will briefly describe these theoretical orientations, as they will help us understand the empirical case.

3.1 Veto player framework

The veto player framework has been developed in order to describe how individuals (veto players) – who possess enough power to block certain decisions; and whose agreement therefore is necessary for being able to change current policies – might decide to block or hamper policy formation processes and attempts to reach formal decisions to adopt new policies. Basically, the veto player framework stresses that if veto players cannot approve or agree with a new policy agenda, then they will undertake any actions required for blocking the policy formation process, and this will, undoubtedly, lead to a failure for the endeavor to get the new policy adopted. The reason why veto players might decide to block policy formation processes is that they have preferences that are not in line with the new policy agenda. Such incongruence (i.e. difference among preferences and views) is, thus, the reason for why veto players become obstacles for policy formation processes (Tsebelis, 1995). Hence, the veto player framework suggests, in general, that policy stability (i.e. the maintaining of the status quo) increases with the number of veto players and the proneness of the veto players to stick to their traditional preferences and views.

The veto player framework is useful for addressing the consensus, or lack thereof, in policy formation processes. However, so far, the framework has mainly been used in empirical setting different from e-government (e.g. Steunenberg, 2006). Furthermore, this framework does not account for the dynamics of in/consensus.

3.2 Advocacy coalition framework

In order to account for the dynamic aspects of policy formation processes, the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) can be utilized. This framework focuses on groups of individuals (i.e. advocacy coalitions), who are

actively concerned with, and who share the same belief system regarding a particular policy problem. The ACF stresses that individuals are driven by different sets of policy beliefs and policy oriented goals (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 2007). It is such policy beliefs that provide the principal glue that holds together advocacy coalitions. When individuals within advocacy coalitions share the same policy beliefs their trust in each other increases and this makes them inclined to become engaged in coordinated actions to pursue policy changes. Obviously, all individuals do not share the same policy beliefs and this implies that organizations consist of several different advocacy coalitions, which compete against each other, as part of their efforts to realize their particular policy beliefs (ibid). Accordingly, this framework views policy formation processes as characterized by conflict and competition and describe the outcome of such processes as results of the relationships and power relations between different advocacy coalitions and particularly powerful actors. These power relations are, in general, understood as rather unequal: some coalitions are more dominant than others and some actors are more powerful than others. The ACF highlights that dominant coalitions and particularly powerful actors are difficult, but necessary to overcome, in order to bring about changes in a particular policy area (ibid). The ACF stresses that advocacy coalitions are more likely to realize their desired policy changes if they interact repeatedly and if someone act strategically in order to ensure compliance with the policy beliefs of the advocacy coalition in question (Schlager, 1995).

Even though the advocacy coalition framework has been widely used, the implications of advocacy coalitions for policy formation processes have not been particularly well explained (see Sabatier and Jenkins, 2007). How individuals strategically may act in order to steer policy formation processes towards a desired outcome is for example not taken into consideration.

3.3 Change driver

In order to understand the strategic actions that individuals may deploy in order to steer policy formation processes, the concepts of change driver can be used. A change driver can be defined as anyone involved in initiating, influencing, or implementing change, whether they have an official title recognizing that responsibility or not (see Buchanan and Badham, 1999a). When driving change, the change driver may deploy various strategies: i) the deliberate attempt to infect others with their enthusiasm and stimulate their desire for change; ii) inter-personal skills in negotiating, persuading and influencing other individuals; iii) meeting with the opponents of change, in order to keep the debate alive and to maintain a challenge to the change agenda; iv) collaboration across departmental barriers; v) the building of networks with useful individuals. If change drivers ignore the importance of these abilities and strategies, then policy formation processes run the risk to fail (ibid).

The advantage with the concept of change driver is that it highlights also the role of actors who do not necessarily have a formal power position in an organization. This, then, is a useful concept to use in order to shed light on change processes that develop in unexpected ways.

4 Method

In order to develop the understanding of e-government by elucidating how individuals' actions and decision affect the policy formation process, this paper draws from an in-depth case study (Yin, 1981) of the attempted adoption of new policy documents on e-government, in the municipality of Vasteras, Sweden. This case study was carried out as part of one of the author's Master thesis in political science. The case study has taken an interest in what happened in the policy area of e-government in the municipality of Vasteras, since 2011, when the CIO of Vasteras first realized the insufficiency of the assumption that the technological rigidity of ICTs determines the successfulness of e-government initiatives, and began the work towards changing the way e-government was treated in the municipality's strategic reasoning. Despite good conditions – Vasteras have an impressive track record of implementing and utilizing ICTs in its daily operations – the policy formation process failed, at least if seen from the CIO's point of view. This makes the case of the municipality of Vasteras especially interesting as an intrinsic case (cf. Berg, 2001). If the municipality of Vasteras failed, much less well-equipped municipalities could perhaps not be expected to succeed either.

Access to the empirical material was generously granted and the data collection included 10 qualitative, semi-structured interviews – with informants who were involved in the policy formation process– as well as various official policy documents (including *the action plan on e-strategy 2012-2015*, *the guidelines on strategic IT-development 2007-2010*). The informants were chosen according to a snowball sampling procedure, but all

informants had been involved in the policy formation process in various ways. The duration of the interviews varied from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes, during which time notes were taken and recordings were made. The interviews were fully transcribed and summarizing texts based on the notes taken were written subsequently. The transcriptions were sent to the interviewees to check for accuracy. All interviews were conducted in Swedish but quotes have been translated for the purpose of this paper. Since a couple of the informants did not want their names to appear in this paper their names have been kept anonymous. In addition to the interviews, documents related to the policy formation process were collected and analyzed.

Based on the rich empirical data collected, a thematic analysis was undertaken by the authors of this paper. This meant that the material was structured thematically – i.e. condensed into a limited number of themes that underline particular characteristics – and this reduced the complexity of the empirical material and eased the process of making theoretical and generalized inferences (cf. Halkier, 2011).

The authors of this paper have had different roles in the research process. Whereas the first author was responsible for collecting the empirical material and doing a first analysis, the second author has been more involved in the analytical phase of developing the paper. The third author has had specific insight into the empirical case, and has validated the sequence of events as well as contributed with contacts in the phase of collecting empirical material.

As the study progressed it became apparent that the narratives of what had happened during the development of the e-government-policy in the municipality differed. This is not strange – accounts of change processes in organizations are oftentimes disperse and polyphonic (Buchanan, 2003). When holding an interpretive epistemology it is suggested that one should not aim at validating case narratives, but embrace the ambiguity and take on the role as exposing organizational tensions, disputes and contradictions. (ibid) This is the approach chosen in this paper.

Even though one of the authors does have an interest in the case, given the role he has in the organization, his accounts of what happened in the policy formation process has thus not been given any privilege in the analytical phase of developing the paper.

5 E-government policy formation: the case of the municipality of Vasteras

The empirical focus of this study is the policy formation process regarding the new policy documents on e-government in the municipality of Vasteras. Before delving into the case, a few words about the empirical context seem necessary.

5.1 The municipality of Vasteras

The municipality of Vasteras' is a politically governed organization that employs about 10 000 people. Its highest decision making body is the City Council, which makes decisions regarding finances, overall planning and organizational structure, as well as electing members for the City Executive Committee. The City Executive Committee is, in turn, responsible for management and coordination of the municipality and this body receives assistance from a number of politically appointed committees.

Something that makes the municipality of Vasteras special compared to many other Swedish municipalities is its *client-contractor model*, which means that each committee has an administrative unit – comprising civil servants that prepares items of operation and supervise that political decisions are implemented – that either order or deliver services in order to make sure that its operations are conducted in line with the committee's area of responsibility. The IT organization of the city of Vasteras is organized in accordance with this client-contractor model, meaning that the process owner (i.e. the *client*) of the municipality's IT services – which is a small strategic IT unit (led by the municipality's Chief Information Officer [CIO]) that resides in the City Executive Office – has, since 2012, ordered IT services from a contractor outside of the municipality.

5.2 The change driver and the desire for a new perception of e-government

The decision to outsource IT operations was only a small part of the CIO's more encompassing endeavor to fundamentally change the comprehension and perception of IT and e-government in the municipality of Vasteras. In order to facilitate for such a radical change, the CIO acknowledged the need for forming new and

better policy documents on e-government. Old and outdated policies and action plans on e-government namely neglected, fundamentally, technological aspects' connection to the organization and its citizens' needs. The CIO simply believed that the municipality's work on e-government would benefit from forming new policy documents on e-government. The CIO indeed took this initiative solely by himself; thus, he relied on and took advantage of his role as a process-owner, but he was, in fact, also authorized to proceed with developing the new policy documents on e-government by the head director of the City Executive Office.

The new policy documents on e-government intended to change the traditional perception of e-government as being all about the mere utilization of technology in the municipality's activities and operations, and to further the notion that e-government has evolved into something that encompasses more aspects than just the application of hardware and software in the municipality's structures. More specifically, the new policy documents on e-government purported to describe genuinely successful e-government initiatives as something that require pervasive organizational changes, such as an improved process orientation throughout the organization, a more widespread agreement that citizens and their needs must be given a much higher priority in all of the organization's operations, as well as a much more committed reliance on holistic approaches when developing and innovating the organization's core business through e-government. Consequently, embedded in this new perspective on e-government is the idea that it is important to discard the traditional view that value is something that is created in the different silos of the organization (and not its processes); to change the view that the organization's main customers are the organization and its different internal functions (and not its citizens); and to relinquish those work procedures that allow technology to dictate the rules for how the organization's operations are conducted.

In order to produce these new policy documents on e-government a wide array of civil servants, from different departments, were invited to workshops, in which the participants were assigned to identify and define, for instance, the municipality of Vasteras's prerequisites and challenges regarding e-government. The civil servants who were invited to the workshop were not, initially, particularly prone to agree with the CIO's ideas concerning, on the one hand, how one should think of and define the phenomena of e-government, and on the other hand, what e-government requires, in terms of organizational changes, in order to become successful. However, during the workshops, a profound consensus emerged among the participants. Skepticism and divergence, thus, converted into consent and consensus. For instance, one of the concluding remarks of the workshops was that e-government initiatives must emerge in a bottom-up process, i.e. stem from the civil servants who identify citizens' needs in their everyday work. In general, the new policy documents on e-government focused on citizens' needs, and downgraded technological aspects.

Moreover, by including representatives, i.e. civil servants, from different departments in the workshops, the new policy documents were able to address the issues of, and shape a strategic direction for the entire municipality regarding e-government. Accordingly, the new policy documents on e-government laid out guiding principles and areas of activities that were of relevance for all departments in the municipality. This made the new policy documents diverge even more from the previous technology-centered and IT department specific documents.

5.3 Bypassing key actors in the policy formation process

By inviting as many civil servants from as many different departments as possible to the workshops – which played a crucial role in policy formation process – the CIO intended to increase the representativeness of the policy formation process, to spur for collaboration between different departments and to, quite simply, facilitate for forming better policy documents on e-government. However, the CIO decided to exclude certain actors from the workshops, in particular those that he believed would oppose the idea that the municipality of Vasteras's perspective on and way of handling e-government were in need of radical changes. In the CIO's own words: "I purposively locked everyone, who I believed had a technology-centered mindset, out of the workshops, so that the organization and its citizens could get the attention it deserved [...] I did not want a discussion on technological issues" (interview with the CIO, 2/10-2013). Furthermore, the CIO overlooked the importance of including his "closest colleagues" from the City Executive Office's management team in the workshops. The CIO simply presupposed that his closest colleagues would stand firm behind his idea to change things having to do with the e-government policy agenda, irrespective of how small or big role they would play in the initial stages of the policy formation process. Moreover, with regards to the high levels of agreement, on the necessity of creating completely different and amended policy documents on e-government, between the

different actors who took part in the workshops, everyone thought the scene was set for reaching – quickly and easily – a formal decision to adopt the policy documents. Despite this, the attempt to get the new policy documents on e-government adopted did not progress as smoothly as the CIO and other involved actors had assumed.

After the new policy documents on e-government had been developed, the CIO introduced and described them to his closest colleagues in the City Executive Office's management team, at one of their meetings. In practice, the CIO's colleagues at the management team need to approve and accept new policy documents, before they can be handed over to the politicians so that they, in turn, can make a formal decision to adopt the new policy documents. But, the key actors at the City Executive Office's management team had neither been informed about the intention to bring about the new policy documents on e-government nor included in the workshops. As a consequence, these actors turned out to be both negative and dismissive towards the new policy agenda and unwilling to listen more than just transiently to the CIO's explanations of why these documents had been brought into existence. For instance, a reflection from one of the actors within the management team, the administrative director, was: "generally, as I remember it, all of us in the management team began to question why we had not been included in the workshops, why all of us in the management team did not work together with creating the new policy documents on e-government" (interview 17/11-2013).

5.4 Resistance from veto players

A strategist from the Childcare and Education Department, who was part of the workshops, stressed that: "when the workshops were completed and the new policy documents were formulated... nothing really happened – I heard nothing for a very long time" (interview 4/11-2013). The reason for this was that the formal decision to adopt the new policy document became severely delayed. The CIO highlighted that the attempt to get the new policy documents on e-government adopted had to be put on hold because "a deep clash between me and the others in the City Executive Committee's management team arose" (interview 2/10-2013). From the CIO's point of view, the clash arose because the other actors of the management team did not share his vision, and because they had difficulties to accept how the new policy documents on e-government had been formed and formulated. The management team therefore ended up in time consuming discussions concerning whether or not to hand the new policy documents on e-government over to the politicians for a formal decision to adopt the policy documents.

In short, the CIO as well as his intentions became questioned during the management meetings, and this skepticism centered on an unwillingness to accept the fact that the CIO had organized workshops in which a strategic orientation on e-government, for the entire municipality, had been developed. Another reason for why the key actors within the management team became reluctant towards the idea of approving the new policy documents on e-government was – according to several of the key actors – that the approach of the policy documents was too broad and too comprehensive, and not enough connected to technology. The key actors of the management team, indeed, turned out to have different perspectives on the notion of e-government and on the role of ICT in the municipality.

Moreover, the critique of the new policy documents on e-government that, which was directed towards the CIO, generated a general sense of mistrust of the CIO and his strategic IT unit. The actors involved in City Executive Office's management team argued further that they could have helped the CIO to formulate the new policy documents in a much more adequate way, given that the CIO would have involved them earlier in the policy formation process. But, as the human resources director stressed: "we were not involved, and therefore did the CIO not receive any kind of assistance; instead, he had to experience how we [the key actors of the management team] »killed his darling«" (interview 13/11-2013¹).

5.5 Radical change and lack of consensus activated conflict

Going from rather limited and technology-centered documents to wider and more comprehensive policy documents – which advanced a broad definition of e-government, i.e. that IT and ICT should be seen as ineluctably intertwined with the organization, its citizens' needs as well as the need for organizational changes; and which accounted for the entire municipality's challenges and needs regarding e-government – was described, by the section director at Culture, Sports and Leisure Department, as: "a giant leap [...] the new policy documents, indeed, attempted to lay a foundation for fundamental changes in the area of e-

government” (interview, 5/11-2013). The ambition with the new policy documents on e-government was, indisputably, very high; the new policy documents’ main purpose was to set the scene for an entirely new way of dealing with e-government. However, the CIO’s closest colleagues at the City Executive Office’s management team misunderstood the central ideas of the new policy documents. For example, the CIO accentuated that: “they argued that we should have constructed a much more concrete document, in which we should have described, for example, what type of hardware and software the municipality of Vasteras should be using and why” (interview, 22/10-2013).

One of the central features of the new policy documents on e-government was the idea that initiatives regarding e-government should emanate from civil servants – since they identify the needs of citizens in their everyday work practices – and not from IT-technicians. After all, actual problems and needs must exist and be identified, before it can be justified to look for or develop any technological solutions. However, the actors within the City Executive Office’s management team did not understand this idea. For instance, the human resources director stated that: “IT is very, very complicated – civil servants cannot alone identify what is needed when it comes to IT and technology; we cannot expect no one but the IT-technicians to come up with reasonable initiatives and solutions in the area of e-government” (interview 13/11-2013). Hence, it is clear that the human resources director misunderstood the situation: no one had ever stated that civil servants should come up with *reasonable initiatives* or *technological solutions*, just that all e-government initiatives should be *driven* by the needs that civil servants identify in their everyday work. Moreover, the key actors of the management team believed that the CIO, with his high ambitions and comprehensive policy documents on e-government, had “intruded” into others’ areas of responsibility, which caused some actors within the management team to feel both offended and irritated.

In summary, different actors within the municipality of Vasteras had different views on e-government. For instance, the CIO and the other key actors within the City Executive Office’s management team did not share the same beliefs on e-government.

6 The policy formation process as an obstacle for e-government

The empirical story above points to and illustrates, in particular, three important things: i) the crucial role that change drivers’ actions and decisions play for policy formation processes, and, hence, for effectuating e-government policy, ii) the significance of the power that veto players possess, in the sense that they have the capacity to hinder the progression of policy formation processes and to thwart the adoption of new policies, and iii) the necessity of *not* viewing veto players and advocacy coalitions as static, with predetermined roles and functions of power, but rather as dynamic, in the sense that they emerge in an evolutionary fashion – in the life cycles of policy formation processes.

This study highlights that the change driver is an important actor, just as Buchanan and Badham (1999) argues, since his or her actions and decisions affect the probability of succeeding with adopting new policies. In our empirical case, the change driver (i.e. the CIO) made use of several of the key strategies stressed by Buchanan and Badham, as part of the formation of the new policy documents on e-government as well as of his endeavor to facilitate for reaching an agreement concerning the adoption of the new policy documents. For instance, the change driver included as many civil servants, from as many different departments as possible, in the workshops, which were a fundamental part of the policy formation process, and this did not only facilitate for forming better and more comprehensive policy documents, but also spurred for alignment and coordination between the involved actors. During the initial stages of the policy formation process, the change driver also successfully enabled for breaking down departmental barriers, mobilizing and uniting the involved diverse and heterogeneous actors (who, initially, disagreed with the change driver’s policy belief) as well as stimulating their desire for policy change. As a consequence of the change driver’s success with the above mentioned strategies, an entirely new *advocacy coalition* emerged. This new advocacy coalition consisted of the actors who, during the workshops, began espousing the policy belief advocated by the change driver (i.e. that e-government, in essence, is all about citizens’ needs – and that it requires amendments to the “inner workings” of the organization, not only the utilization of hardware and software). The emergence of the new advocacy coalition was indeed a positive effect of the change driver’s actions and decisions. Hence, since the new policy documents on e-government were supported by the new advocacy coalition, the prerequisites became much more favorable for getting the new policy documents approved and adopted.

However, despite that the change driver made use of several key strategies – which, for instance, contributed to the emergence of the new advocacy coalition – the attempt to get the new policy documents on e-government adopted failed. This implies that there are other aspects that impact upon and explain why e-government policy formation fails. In our study we identified some actors who resembled veto players, including the key actors from the City Executive Office's management team. None of these key actors (and potential veto players) were included in the workshops, during which the new policy documents on e-government were developed. By excluding these key actors from this crucial part of the policy formation process, the change driver missed out on the opportunity to influence their desire for policy change. As a consequence, the key actors turned into veto players, and decided to dismiss the new policy documents on e-government as well as to make sure that the documents would not get adopted. This proves how important it is to include key actors in all parts of policy formation processes. Hence, only by doing so will it be possible for change drivers to ensure that key actors will approve a new policy agenda or policy change, and conversely that they will not turn into veto players and thwart attempts to get new policies adopted.

This case shows that adopting and effectuating new e-government policy documents is difficult, even in contexts where stakeholders usually agree upon the opportunities of technology and ICTs to increase effectiveness and provide more value for citizens. One reason for this is that veto players might emerge in any situation, as a direct consequence of e.g. change drivers' actions and decisions – and such veto players, thus, pose a serious threat to any desire to achieve policy change. Moreover, our study demonstrates that policy formation processes are intricate and that they do not necessarily follow a linear step-by-step kind of procedure, meaning that the aspect of *timing* is crucial for the strategies that change drivers deploy when attempting to steer policy formation processes. . The above mentioned points to that key actors should not be excluded at any point in the policy formation process; rather, they should take part throughout the entire process. This is important since veto players (as well as advocacy coalitions) can emerge and take shape, as results of change drivers' actions and decisions, in an unforeseen and sudden fashion, anytime in policy formation processes. In general, including key actors in the policy formation process might result in a better opportunity for the change driver to understand each and every actor in a better way. With an improved understanding of the key actors (i.e. the potential veto players) it will, in turn, be possible to avert these key actors from dismissing new policy documents as well as from opposing the desired policy change.

As the discussion above indicates, we should neither conceive of veto players nor advocacy coalitions as phenomena that carry *a priori* ontological statuses; rather, they are dynamic and emerge within the life cycles of policy formation processes. For instance, an entirely new advocacy coalition emerged during the workshops (which were a crucial part of the policy formation process), and some of the key actors in the City Executive management team – who were circumvented in these workshops – turned into veto players, and decided to make sure that the new policy document on e-government would not get adopted. And, the new advocacy coalition did not comprise any of the key actors, which is why the change driver was not able to push the new policy documents on e-government through the entire policy formation process.

This then supports the idea that policy formation processes should be studied from a processual-contextual perspective (Buchanan, 2003), where dimensions like change and becoming are in focus, rather than static conditions and being (cf. Langley et.al., 2013). This perspective could help develop an understanding of how, for example, advocacy coalitions emerge and develop, and in which directions policy formation processes take across time.

This paper also shows that policy formation processes inherit extensive interactions between a vast number of actors, and that such processes are heavily conditioned by the involved actors' actions, decisions and strategies. If this fact is not taken enough into account when planning and developing a new e-government policy agenda, there is a risk that the policy formation process becomes an obstacle for the endeavor to improve e-government.

7 Concluding remarks and contributions

The case of the attempted adoption of new policy documents on e-government in the municipality of Vasteras, Sweden, sheds light on the fact that individuals' actions and decisions affect policy formation processes and, hence, the effectuation of e-government policy. Moreover, the study demonstrates that *e-government* and *policy formation* are two ineluctably intertwined phenomena; and that one needs to pay attention to aspects

like individuals' *political behavior* and *resistance* when conducting research on e-government. If only highlighting the technological aspects of e-government there is a risk that we fail to understand that e-government, just like any other policy area, is essentially about policy formation and policy formation processes.

Thus, this study shows that there is need for a more comprehensive interdisciplinary research agenda in the research field of e-government, and that research on e-government will benefit – in terms of an increased ability to assess and describe *all* dimensions of e-government – from taking inspiration from, for instance, political science, psychology, sociology, organizational theory.

In addition, this study highlights that policy makers could tackle e-government policy formation processes better, if they pay attention to the fact that such processes are highly intricate and invariably astir, and, with this backdrop, that it is sometimes required to deploy strategies that are associated with the repertoire of the change driver and to make use of conscious political behavior. The actor who is to undertake such actions (e.g. the change driver) must, for instance, identify the key actors (and potential veto players) and include them throughout the entire policy formation process.

Furthermore, the study also highlights the emerging nature of the stakes that veto players, change drivers and other stakeholders will come to have in change processes like e-government policy formation. A managerial implication of this study is that stakeholder analysis should not only be carried out during an initial stage, but at regular intervals during a change process like e-government policy formation. Only by doing it is possible to build stronger advocacy coalitions and to identify and influence potential veto players. This could in turn increase the possibilities of managing the policy formation process successfully on behalf of the change driver.

Theoretically, it is suggested that future studies should purport to explain how stakes emerge, preferably by embracing a processual perspective, as described above. By doing so, further light could be shed on the interplay between the ideas that veto players, change drivers and other stakeholders carry in change processes, and, more precisely, how stakes develop as well as why and under circumstances advocacy coalitions and veto players emerge.

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