Chapter XIV

# Improvisational Change Management: New Work Forms with Groupware

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## INTRODUCTION

In Sweden, an increasing number of the municipal administrations are introducing groupware for case and document management. During 1996, the municipal administration in this study began the introduction of a platform for case and document management based on Lotus Notes Domino. This system supports planning and collaboration of common work tasks based on an integrated system for e-mail and shared databases with information. It is obvious that this platform has a potential to change the work and work situations for the employees. More specifically, this platform provides a possibility to introduce more process- and collaborative-oriented work forms. In this chapter, we present experiences from this process of groupware introduction. In the organizational plan, one of the formulated objectives of this change process is to achieve new process and collaborative ways of work (ADB-kontoret, 1997). Therefore, a first focus in this chapter is on to what extent the introduction and use of the information technology has resulted in new work forms.

Our discussion takes its point of departure in an improvisational model of change management introduced by Orlikowski and Hofman (1997). This model describes different types of changes occurring in the organization when groupware is introduced. The model distinguishes between planned changes on the one hand and changes that emerge over time as people gain more experience of the technology and its potential on the other hand. It is important to provide people in the organization with knowledge about the potential of the technology as well as time to experience the technology in order to shape it according to their own needs (Mambrey & Pipek, 1999). We are interested in how to obtain desired changes in the change process both in terms of planned changes and in terms of changes that emerge through experience of the technology. This chapter will discuss how to manage a change process of groupware introduction in order to result in process and collaborative ways

of work. Therefore, a further focus is on how new ideas and experiences, which are gained from the introduction of groupware, are handled in order to make use of the potential of the technology.

One important point of departure for the change process is the previously mentioned organizational plan with the intentions and objectives of the introduction. However, groupware is flexible, which means that people must get the possibility to gain experiences in order to see its potential (Orlikowski & Hofman, 1997). In their improvisational model they argue for the value of a flexible plan and enabling conditions. Ciborra's (2000) theory about technological and organizational change advises against any form of control. The tension between the organizational plan and the necessity of an improvisational perspective in the change process creates the background to our last question: what is the role of the organizational plan in an improvisational process of change management?

Our research contribution is an indepth analysis of groupware introduction in the public sector using an improvisational perspective. Previous studies of such processes have mainly been conducted in the private sector (e.g., Orlikowski, 1993; 1996). Our contribution is also to focus on the role of the organizational plan in an improvisational change process. We mean that previous studies have not sufficiently dealt with this. Therefore, it is our hope that these experiences can be of value in other processes of groupware introduction in public sector environments.

We will in the following chapter mainly deal with the change process from the perspective of the municipal administration. Naturally, both citizens and politicians will indirectly be affected by the introduction of groupware, since the introduction may change the work at the municipal administration. They might also be affected more directly in their interactions with the administration. This raises new and interesting questions about the consequences of the introduction for citizens and politicians, which we bring forward at the end of this chapter.

The specific contribution of this chapter is the indepth analysis of change management of groupware introduction in the public sector. Therefore, the chapter will continue with a thorough description of the case in the study followed by a section describing the method used in the empirical study. Next there is a section introducing the research field to which our research pertains, namely computer support cooperative work. This is followed by a more detailed description of the theoretical model used in this study, the improvisational model of change management (Orlikowski & Hofman, 1997). Subsequently the empirical results are discussed in terms of the theoretical model. The chapter continues with a discussion based on our experiences in light of theories concerning improvisational change management. The aim is to contribute in the development of theories for improvisational change management within the public sector. The chapter is closed with our conclusions and future issues.

# BACKGROUND

## The Public Sector

A typical feature of the public sector is the fact that it has to handle goals like the proper functioning of legislation and jurisdiction (Wimmer et al., 2001), but also in a very concrete way handle goals and associated activities related to providing services. As a consequence, in many cases work is being performed which cannot be conducted directly using computer

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