

Chapter 56

Internal Digital Divide in Organizations

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, internal digital divide problems in organizations are identified and discussed. A longitudinal case study focusing on the implementation of e-Government at a public organization in Sweden is used as a starting-point for the discussion. Although the general use of information and communication technology is very high in Sweden there are still problems with digital divide. Such problems could hamper the implementation process of e-Government. In the case study the older employees were especially stressed and had problems to renewing their competencies and adapting to new working situations due to the implementation of e-Government. Internal digital divide is, however, a complex phenomenon, and involves aspects of learning, motivation, professionalization, management strategies, and organizational culture. Some ways of bridging internal digital divide problems are discussed. Soft systems methodology could be used for analysis and change of internal digital divide aspects involving a discussion with the concerned communities.

INTRODUCTION

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is high in Sweden and e-Government is also very established in public organizations, compared with other countries. According to a ranking study of e-government maturity made by the United Nations (2008), Sweden was in

fact ranked as the leading country in 2008 for the first time. However, there are still problems with aspects of the digital divide in Sweden. The implementation of e-Government puts demands on increased IT use of the citizens and the development of ICT related competencies. Digital divide problems are not limited to external problems with access to computers or limited ICT literacy in the every-day life for some groups of citizens. There are also internal problems of digital divide

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in the workplace, for example for organizations implementing e-Government. Examples of such problems are the lack of ICT literacy and/or motivation to change established work routines and the development of ICT related competencies, especially among older employees.

Implementation of e-government means change of the organizational culture. Cultural changes involve changes of human habits and attitudes, social aspects that could take long time to change. In this chapter we will focus especially on social aspects. Implementation of eGovernment has earlier been criticised for focussing too much on technical aspects (Grönlund, 2001; Schedler & Summermatter, 2003), thereby ignoring the importance of social aspects. Indeed, the technical challenges seem to be relatively simple compared with the cultural changes (Castells & Cardoso, 2006).

The goal of this chapter is to identify, analyze and discuss internal digital divide problems and solutions related to the implementation of e-Government. A longitudinal interview study focusing especially on social aspects of the implementation of e-Government in a public organization in Sweden is used as a starting-point for the discussion.

BACKGROUND

The Traditional Definitions of Digital Divide

The origin of the concept “digital divide” is unclear, but in the United States it became popular after the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) used the phrase to describe disparities in access in its 1998 report (Mossberger, Tolberg & Stansbury, 2003). In 1995 the development of the National Information Infrastructure (“the information superhighway”) started as a priority of the Clinton administration. The concept “digital divide” generally refers to the socio-economic gap between communities

that have access to computers and the Internet and those who do not. The term could also refer to aspects affecting availability to quality, useful digital content such as ICT literacy and technical skills e.g. OECD (2001) defines the term “digital divide” as the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard to both their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities.

Mossberger et. al. (2003) also identifies information literacy as the ability to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the needed information. Servon (2002) states that the content dimension is clearly related to the training dimension; IT skills are needed in order to access and create content. There are however methodological problem of studying the use of the Internet as a technology and user habits are rapidly changing (Norris, 2001). Most existing studies are made in the US concerning the use of the Internet, and it is not possible to generalize for other cultural contexts (ibid.). There is also a lack of empirical studies.

Norris (2001) differentiates among three different levels of the digital divide; the first cleavage is found on a global level, this cleavage is also explored by Castells (2001) for example between those regions and countries that have a developed ICT structure and those who do not. The next level can be found within a country and has to do with socio-economic status. The third level is a democratic cleavage according to Norris; some groups use the Internet to reinforce a political and societal engagement (e-Democracy aspects). Kirschenbaum and Kunamneni (2002) also identify the organizational divide as the lack of technology capacity among local community-based organizations (CBOs).

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