Improvisational Change Management in the Public Sector

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Abstract
This paper deals with the issue of how the use of a plan can improve change management when introducing groupware in the public sector, using an improvisational perspective. The research is based on an empirical study at a municipal administration investigating changes in the work situation after the implementation of groupware. When an improvisational model of change management was applied certain development possibilities of the model and its use appeared. Firstly, the model does not acknowledge anticipated changes that do not occur in practice. Secondly, we argue that a more active utilization of a plan enables guidance of the process. Finally, we emphasize the necessity of translating a plan into a local context.

1. Introduction

Successful introduction and use of information technology in organizations has a potential to generate several kinds of change processes. Introducing groupware, if managed adequately, can result in organizational changes towards collaborative work. According to Macredie and Sandom [12], this potential makes change management a core issue for studies in the field of information systems. "The unstable environmental conditions in which modern organizations operate mean that the ability to successfully manage organizational change has become a key competitive asset" [12: 247].

There are several studies of groupware introductions where the achieved changes, for various reasons, do not coincide with the expected results concerning collaboration e.g. [17, 21]. Therefore, in line with Macredie and Sandom [12] we argue the need for a critical discussion about models for groupware introduction in the light of practical experiences from organizations of today.

1.1. Previous research

The following piece of research pertains to the research field of Computer Supported Cooperative Work, which has a focus on how groupware is used for collaborative work; see for example [3]. The majority of the conducted studies concerning the introduction of groupware and groupware-enabled change processes were carried out in the private sector [2, 10, 17, 18, 21]. However, the use of groupware involves an increasing number of public as well as private sector environments. Each of these environments has their specific characteristics. The public sector can be characterized as a nonprofit organizational environment with a high level of restraint through laws, regulations, limited budgets, and hierarchic organizational structures. These conditions are reflected in the organizational culture formed by a bureaucratic inheritance. The public sector organization is also obligated to manage the demands from both the citizens and politicians in society. Researchers such as Macredie and Sandom [12] have studied the introduction of groupware in the public sector. In this work, they study a military organization with a special focus on the adoption and use of a workflow system. Pipek and Wulf have focused on the lifecycle of a groupware system, from its introduction to its removal in a government organization [20]. In the work by Josefsson and Nilsson the evolving use and utilization of groupware in a municipal setting is discussed from the perspective of the specific driving forces identified that supported the process [9]. The main focus of these studies within the private and the public sector alike, deals with how cultural and other features have affected the results of the processes of introduction, albeit at a rather general level. For example, one can find discussions on what extent the organizational culture in a particular organization supports the use of groupware. Another common feature is the persistence of an evolutionary perspective on the processes of introduction as such, as well as on the emergence of groupware enabled changes. This means that the focus in previous