



1. A modern Socrates discourse in a local e-government setting

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Abstract:

This paper aims to outline the role of e-governance within the setting of a local government in a modern democratic state. It is agreed that a local governmental organization needs to be fit for the purpose of serving its citizens. Fits can be tested both through universally acknowledged principles, and drivers that suit modern on-demand organizations. This has been demonstrated in this paper.

Keywords:

Public sector; e-government; UNNYSID

Special issue on E-Government:

'Future of E-government: learning from the Past'

Vol. 4 No. 3 (2016) Issue- September

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

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1. Introduction:

In general, discourses focus on language (Hacking, 1996: 27) and concentrate on the ways people frame problems, make proposals, debate issues and communicate decisions (Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Angwin, Regnér, 2014: 181-183). A discourse in a local e-government setting does not vary from the general course. But, if Socrates was the leader of this process, the start would have been with the question about the possible utility of local e-government.

The agenda would have recorded Socrates’ favorite universally acknowledged virtues. Benevolence, wisdom, courage, righteousness, and belief had to be the guiding principles of behavior (Gottlieb, 2000, chapter 10). Then, these guiding principles should be tested to find the possible answer on the question whether the organization design has the wright quality or not.

Today, local governments are on-demand organizations. The e- revolution transforms society and business. Cultures began to move more rapidly. Drivers of the local and modern e-governments are adaptiveness, predictability, collaboration, awareness, and agility (Canton, 2007: 65)¹. The challenge is to design an organization that fits these five drivers.

Thus the discourse question of this article is about the viability of an effective local e-government organization, applying the five Socrates’ principles and five drivers (see figure 1).



Figure 1: Ten factors to test the viability of an effective local e-government organization.

¹ Canton mention six parameters – including the real time responsiveness. I apply this parameter within the context of predictability.

The constraint of this article is the focus on a modern public administration within the settings of both the *Rechtsstaat* model and the e-governance in the making (Lane, 2009: 21-22). It is indeed in the making, because bureaucracy is still widely employed by local governments to get their jobs done.

The final conclusion of this article is in line with Socrates' wisdom. The discourse participants will not come to full terms.

2. The context:

The local government consists of two main organizations with different responsibilities: the political body and the administrative organization. Implementations of electronic media change the way the government employees as well as the politicians, and its citizens go about their interactions. Access to the decision making centers and the processes of influencing these centers are critical factors in the final outcome and results of the servicing function of the local government.

In this human-machine system, it might be a false dream that e-governance will make the local government more open and accessible for citizens. The Hekscher and Donellon model (1994) is an ideal type and far from the daily practice. The emphasis on social capital, openness, dialogue and decisions based on consensus is growing. Thus, different concepts were developed. The New Public Management urges the managers to use businesslike methods to improve the consumer responsivity (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993). The Neo-Weberian State gave recommendations to make bureaucracies more efficient and citizen oriented (Drechsler and Kattel, 2008). A third attempt was the concept of the New Public Governance with its claim that the today societies could only be governed through complicated systems of networks of actors representing the civil society, the profit sector as well as the not for profit sector (Bellamy and Palumbo, 2010). What have been the results of these managerialist models of reforming public management? They are undertaken as matters of faith rather than proven 'science', and this is a feature that has not changed noticeably (Pollitt and Brouckaert, 2011: 215). The public servants respond to clients, constituents and customers, meanwhile playing the role of 'rowing and steering the boat'. What we need is serving the citizens, and that is why the concept of New Public Service had been launched (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015).

This NPS concept gives priority to democracy, citizenship, and service in the public interest. Socrates seems to be reborn. But again the question rises whether this citizen friendly concept will work. The organizational context is still an arena of power and developing forces shaped by discourse. The used language is the essential weapon to manipulate the environment and to hide assumptions and

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interests. An e-governed environment might become a strong tool for exploiting these required 'languages'.

3. The principles:

3.1 Benevolence

The highest level of organizational health is attained when its behavior can be characterized by being benevolent². A benevolent local government will be highly valued by its citizens. It implies that the governmental as well as the political body respect its citizens and even unite them. To become benevolent the local government needs the required resources and competences, both tangibles and intangibles.

This set of resources and competences have to be useful for the development of the human capital within the setting of the local government. And trust³ is such an intangible resource and plays such an essential role in gaining access to the benefits of social networks (Lewicki and Brinsfield, 2009: 277- 278). John Field shares the view that the best role for the government is probably to function as an enabler (Field, 2008: 155). It has the capacity to mobilize social contacts that affect the productivity of its citizens. The test of the use of this principle of benevolence is the way the local government applies the information technology and networking in this process of organizing and coordinating the value of social capital.

3.2 Wisdom

Wisdom is a state of the mind, to put the first priority on the well-being of the citizens by acquiring the necessary resources and competences. The way this state of the mind has to be made clear is through decision making that preclude negative impacts of the local government actions. Listen widely and select from what you hear in order to generate information flows that enlighten your wisdom. Become a hub and surround yourself with wise people who are the spokes and let the spokes make plans. The result is reputation and reputation creates commitment.

As soon as officials form cliques or even parties, it will harm wisdom. Because cliques and parties are potential victims of the mother of all misconceptions: the confirmation bias (Dobelli, 2014: 23).

² A principle that was well known in antique China as the foundation for the behavior of rulers and generals. See for example in Sawyer (1993) in his excellent contribution to the study of traditional Chinese sociopolitical thought

³ Some researchers prefer the word 'recognition' (Lin, 2006: 131)

Thus, seeing the world through their own, limited experiences, we may expect a mind of being myopic.

The final outcome of the influence of IT and Networking is uncertain. It depends on who are served through the IT and Networking structures. Is it the clique of a power elite, or the community of citizens? The dangers of IT and Networking are lurking immediately and are fertile grounds for the confirmation bias. To stay informed, people forget that favorites are mirrors of our own values.

3.3 *Courage*

To make wisdom operational, courage is required. Courage represents the execution of the wisdom state of mind. But not like an autonomous operating mechanism. Thus, courage could become a dangerous quality for failure if you do not control the temptation of showing a courageous behavior. Wise people do not want to be forced into turmoil. Thus, serving the citizens properly implies that you cannot be of two different minds. Both wisdom and courage must be integrated in one system of mind.

This means that courage implies all actions to get away from those digital platforms that do not serve the citizen's well-being. And do not fall into the confidence trap of those elites that try to impose their claims of being the representatives of the citizens. And, do not forget that managers, whether civic or politic, are selected once and adapt to the existing decision making 'arena' with its own laws of the game. The real trend is that elites try to monopolize the digital scene. Courage seems to be indeed an absolute scarce intangible resource and the messages of Machiavelli and Hobbes are still alive, even in democracies. The unresolved dilemma of democracies is the unequal participation (Lijphart, 2008: 201-231), and the central question is whether IT and Networking, if institutionalized, have the capability of being a remedy tool.

3.4 *Righteousness*

Righteousness is a capability of sharing hardships and pleasures with the citizens you have to serve. This capability must always dominate personal emotions and desires. Through righteousness the whole social system will be bound and the citizens will guarantee their allegiance to the local government, because the profits touch everybody.

It seems, local governments have at best some notion of the profits of righteousness. For, the trend is a growing distance between politics and the citizens, and meanwhile the administration seems to become an annexe to the politicians. There is no sharing of hardships and pleasure, rather a compelling call on the citizens to show their responsibilities towards the community. This is what

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we call in The Netherlands the participation society. Unfortunately, the participants in sharing hardships and pleasures are the ordinary citizens.

IT and Networking mean hardly nothing to this principle of righteousness, except the production of statistics.

3.5 Belief

Your belief system must be based on a social constructivist view. Thus, you focus on the specific contexts in which the citizens live and work. Your meanings are always social, arising in and out of interactions with human beings. You visit these contexts and gather information, if possible personally. The result must be that you fully understand the multiple citizens meanings, as well as their social and historical 'constructions'.

This is an important message for the local government in the continued process of innovation. Apply the concept of *bricolage* (Samuels, 2004: 50-51): assemble new 'worlds' from fragments of the old. That is exactly what the leadership of a local government must generate. An identity for the local society with benevolence as the building brick.

IT and Networking have supportive significance as long as they build their innovations not on the past, but with the past.

4. The drivers:

4.1 Adaptiveness

An adaptive organization has the ability to solve three intricately interwoven problems: entrepreneurial, engineering and administrative (Miles and Snow, 2003: 21-30). These problems occur almost simultaneously. Thus, adaptation requires a sequential move through the three interrelated processes.

The way to adapt is through four possible approaches:

- A narrow focus by defending what you have.
- A behavior of formalizing structures and processes to create stability.
- A reactive behavior, because the management cannot respond effectively.
- A continual search for opportunities to enhance the citizens' environment.

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The approach that fits is the search for opportunities to deliver a quality service to its citizens that balances the citizens' perceptions and expectations. That is the responsibility of the 'politicians'. Their choices must be based on what the 'administrators' have selected as areas of importance. The politicians control the 'IT and Networking' experts in their choices of the technologies, and the experts give feedback on the administrators, in order to align the structures and processes with the new technologies.

4.2 Predictability

In systems of trust, predictability of behavior is an essential quality (Coleman, 1990: 175-196). A theory of the local government serves three major purposes for its citizens (Cyert & March, 1992):

- It specifies the rules for decision making on resource allocations and output / results.
- It specifies the behavior of the employees in their interactions with citizens how to resolve conflicts.
- It avoids uncertainty in feedback procedures as well as in the environment of negotiations between the employees and the citizens.

A theory lays the foundation to closing the gaps (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990) between the expectations and perceptions of the citizens. Like:

- Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, money, and communication materials. For example the want of a 24 hours opening service of the administration.
- Reliability of the service, which has to be 'lean, Six Sigma'.
- Responsiveness of the service, which has to be prompt as well as complete.
- Possession of knowledge and skills to reach the standards of reliability, responsiveness, and also courtesy (respectful and polite) and communication competencies (use of clear language, listening capability and understanding the citizen)
- Honesty and trustworthiness of the politicians, the administrators and the IT and Network experts.
- Access to the local government bodies (politicians as well as administrators).
- Guaranteed security (the citizen must know the risks).

The critical role of IT and Networking in realizing such a theory is obvious. The complicated structure of these processes requires real time information about the potential gaps. Do you know what the citizens expect? Does the local government set the correct service specifications? Does the actual

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service delivery reach the level of the service specifications? What has to be done if promises do not match deliveries?

4.3 Collaboration

Collaboration (Johnson, e.o., 2014: 469) is a hyper dynamic process that affects people who become active in setting the agendas of change. Collaboration must benefit the whole society, and should include the concerned local government. Collaboration is also a process of involvement of both employees and citizens about the what and the how to change. The results are spreads of support and ownerships of change. This driver is time consuming and makes decision making very complicated. It requires a rather high level of capability and readiness of change leadership (see Kotter, 2012).

The very reason to collaborate is the knowledge that has to coalesce. To make this requirement operational, employees, including its managers, need to develop a mind of synthesizing as well as creating (Gardner, 2008: 45-102). We know that the amount of knowledge in this wireless society accumulate almost exponential. You must collaborate with a variety of sources to knit together all the information.

Thus, this is the field where IT and Network experts can find their paradise in order to give support to the enhancement of the citizens' well-being. These experts can create as well as synthesize new knowledge in the domains of artificial intelligence and computer simulations of human intellect to improve the dynamic performance management within the local government.

4.4 Awareness

The way we think, governs the way we act. So, what and how do we think about the 21st century building blocks of change? Are we aware of the influence of nanotechnology, neurons technology, biotechnology, and the information technology (including the networking)⁴. Do we really understand, for example, the impact of the Internet awakening, the personal robots living among us within a few years, and the self-evolving chips with the capacity to learn, to analyze and even to identify persons on this planet in real time? Charles Handy's brilliant book *Understanding Organizations* will have to be rewritten (Handy, 1999). The psychological contract people have with the organization meets the confrontation with advanced robots, the androids. Human beings' natural capabilities can be enhanced through the offerings of robotic implants. What does it all mean for the society that will encounter serious ethical, social, and also security issues? Will it end the higher immoralities (Mills,

⁴ IT and Networking are the most mature in the field of these building blocks of innovation

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2000: 343-361) which is a present day systematic feature of the elites, either living in democratic environments or not?

4.5 Agility

Translated to the local government, agility is the capability of both the politicians and the administrators to respond to changes in the environment of the local government in a way that does not harm the well-being of the citizens (see Higsmit, 2004: 16). To be agile means that the local government is responsive. It has the capability to balance between flexibility and stability. The employees are talented improvisers.

The struggling of local governments with agility has its roots in the leadership that does not really understand what agile is. Thus, although methods like scrum or lean development are 'implemented', managers continue to employ conventional practices (Rigby, Sutherland and Takeuchi, 2016: 41-50). Also, the conditions are not very favorable. The 'market' of governmental organizations is fairly stable and predictable, citizens are not in a position to constantly collaborate, and formulated plans should be adhered to.

Destroying the barriers to agility, starts with changing roles, not structures, and clearing the whole field of responsibilities. And manage your own emotional agility by controlling your inner stream of thoughts and feelings (David and Congleton, 2013: 125-128).

5. Discussion and conclusions:

Since the NPM was launched in the 1990s, governments, in modern democratic states, constantly changed. Even at the lowest level of the cities. But what are these changes? Structures, yes. Lower-level employees participated in management roles, and policies and procedures became more efficient. Also systems changed, including the culture. The focus was on the improvement of performance, and employees turned their orientation towards the external environment and became more empowered. However, the culture of 'rowing and steering' has not been changed. The new concept of NPS might be an instrument to focus on serving. But then arises the question of the sense of urgency to change. Both the ordinary citizens and the lower-level employees are satellites of a power system.

Today, the expectation is that e-governance is the generator of innovation within the context of a democratic framework and will create prosperity. But the additional value of the world of 'bits' is a mere new possibility of interaction. The outcome and results of all interactions still depend on the

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individual competence to use the language⁵. Moreover, the world of 'bits' has not changed the principles and drivers for an effective organization on the level of the local government. Although, it can give boosts to the predictability and the collaboration drivers. The role of e-governance in securing these principles and drivers remains surrounded by doubts.

Is there room for a new science of citizen emotions⁶? Emotions drive behavior. Minimum standards of desired behavior can be defined. The question is how to connect in ways that motivate the citizens to these minimum standards. What are the critical factors that make a citizen to be inspired by desires like having confidence in the policy of the local government, or feeling a sense of belonging to the community, or feeling secure, et cetera? The links between the local government and its citizens must not be based on e-governance, rather on emotional connections. Indeed, therefore, we need information about our citizens' touch points. To gather this information is a critical function of IT and Networking.

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⁵ See McNay (2007) on Foucault.

⁶ Magids, Zorfas and Leemon (2015) suggested a better way to drive growth and profitability through creating a lexicon of emotional motivators which give companies levers to improve competitive advantage.

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Cite this article:

A modern Socrates discourse in a local e-government setting

Citation Format: APA

Dr. Maarten, H. (2016). *A modern Socrates discourse in a local e-government setting*. S O C R A T E S, 4(3), 1-12. Retrieved from <http://socratesjournal.com/index.php/socrates/article/view/215>

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