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Leading and Communicating ICT-Based Change in the Public Sector
Approaching an E-Government-Project in a Swiss Federal Department from a
Communicaional Perspective

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Abstract: Throughout various E-Government-projects ICT (Information and Communication
Technology) is being implemented in the public sector in order to enable public administrations to fulfill
their tasks more efficiently and in an increasingly citizen-oriented manner. However, if implementation
is to be achieved efficiently and to lead to the expected improvement in workflow and services, issues
in leading change have to be taken into account, for, implementing ICT within an organization usually
means changing the organization.
The present paper focuses on the managerial and social perspective of ICT-based change. The
authors suggest that factors for succeeding in change processes can best be identified by taking on
an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on insights from the fields of management and communication.
The ability to change nowadays is widely considered as vital for any organization and planning
communication is increasingly perceived as a core task. Even though literature in the field of change
communication is growing, research on internal organizational communication so far has not stressed
the support of change processes as a basic function of internal communication. Similarly, in the fields
of change and project management, approaches on how to communicate change systematically are
rather scarce.
The discussion in this article is linked to a larger research project, the aim of which is to point out the
role of communication as a managerial tool for leading ICT-based change projects, to develop a
framework for communication and to validate specific communication instruments. The research
project entails a case study, whereby an ICT-project, aimed at implementing a Document
Management System (DMS), is scientifically attended and analysed.
The aim of the present article is to provide a selective review of relevant literature in the field of
change communication, to point out basic elements of a communicative approach towards change
and to hint at controversial findings that give rise to further research questions. Based on this, a first
draft of a framework for the communicative leading of ICT-based change that shall be applicable for
organizational leaders and project managers will be outlined. First findings of the empirical part of the
research project are presented and discussed with regard to implications derived from the theoretical
discussion.

Keywords: Public Management, Change Management, Communication, E-Government

1. Governmental Processes and Services in the Information Society
In the government’s strategy for the “Information Society Switzerland” (BR 2006), the Swiss Federal
Council stresses that ICT are an important means for increasing prosperity and assuring
sustainability. In January 2007 the Swiss government has adopted a new E-Government-strategy,
which pursues three goals: (1) the interaction between the economy and the public administration is
handled electronically, (2) the public administration modernises its business processes whereby
different administrative units interact electronically, and (3) people can handle important affairs with
the public administration electronically (EFD 2007:1). Especially with regard to the second goal of the
strategy, several ICT-projects are planned or implemented by the public administration in order to
optimize processes. In this respect, administrative units are confronted with handling change. It
therefore seems useful to build up competence for leading ICT-based change in a systematic way,
drawing on an interdisciplinary scientific approach. Besides organising change, we claim that the way
in which a change process is communicated plays a crucial role with regard to successful
implementation. Considering the wide range of challenges to be met when implementing E-
Government-projects – ranging from legal, technological, political, managerial to social ones – we are
thus focusing on the last two in particular (cf. Scott et al. 2004).

We are currently carrying out a research project that aims at clarifying the role of communication as
managerial instrument for leading change processes in the public sector. The empirical part of this
project includes a case study that allows for attending the implementation of a Document
Management System in a Directorate of a Swiss Federal Department. The utility of a DMS in public
administration is that business relevant documents consistently can be recorded, thereby guaranteeing traceability of administrative action. Our research project, which has started at the beginning of 2008, aims at examining the leading of change through communication by supporting the process of implementing an E-Government-program at the federal level. The aim of the research project is to establish an integrative model of communication for leadership in the public sector.

In this paper, we present a first sketch of an analytical framework based on a selective review of literature relevant to the field. The framework thus entails theoretical assumptions that facilitate the reflection and planning of communication during change processes. In a second part, we will set out the context and methodology of our case study, present first results and verify first findings by comparing it to the implications derived from the theoretical discussion.

2. A Communicative Approach towards Change

2.1. The Significance of Communication during Change

Implementing ICT in the public administration means changing the workflow of the administrative units concerned and depending on the impact can be understood as a change in organizational culture. According to Kieser/Hegele (1998: 2) the organisation of change primarily takes place in organizational members' heads: The ones affected need to understand the goal and the principles of the new organization, they must be convinced of these aims and in their own working context need to share responsibility in alignment to the new organisation. From this perspective, communication is the core instrument of organizational change or as Lewis puts it, "communication process and organizational change are inextricably linked processes" (1999: 45, quoted in Jones et al. 2004: 735). This claim is further underlined by literature on the success and failure of change projects. Pfetzing/Rohde (2001: 23, quoted in Bühler et al. 2003: 697) point out that in around 50% of all ICT-projects estimations with regard to time and costs are exceeded and that 30% of all projects are discontinued. Research suggests that one of the reasons for failure is inadequate communication (cf. Buehrer et al. 2003, Bernecker/Reiss 2002). Lechler (1997) for example concludes that the two most important success factors of projects are the efficiency and effectiveness of communication (19%) and the quality of the target definition (17%). Enabling change could therefore be regarded as a specific function of organizational communication.

Generally speaking, internal organizational communication means any kind of verbal and non-verbal communication between members of an organization that is aimed at optimizing organizational procedures, spreading and exchanging information and interacting with one another (cf. e.g. Theis-Bergmeier 2003). Since communication takes place both at the cognitive and at the emotional level, internal communication contributes to the successful performance of an organization not only by spreading information, but also by communicatively involving its members. By differentiating the perspectives of the meso- and the micro-level, the functions of internal communication can be summarised as follows: From an organizational perspective, the exchange of information is significant with regard to the realisation of organizational goals. It may have a positive impact on the work climate, diminishes the sensitivity to rumours and contributes to increasing employees' productivity by fostering knowledge and understanding. Correspondingly, from the perspective of employees, the exchange of information can be considered a basic need in the realm of work, may have an impact on employees' self-esteem, allows for sharing responsibility and grants orientation (cf. e.g. Winterstein 1996 and Mast et al. 2006: 264). In the context of change, internal communication can be assumed to have a considerable impact on employees' willingness to actively participate in and support change processes – on the basis of shared understanding and participation – and hence to reduce costs for implementation (cf. Meier 2000: 19). However, change communication rarely is a central issue in the literature on internal organizational communication (cf. Meier 2000).

Similarly, Buehrer et al. (2003: 687) point out that research on project management does not provide any detailed method that adequately deals with the communication of change. In a review, discussing theory and research on organizational change from 1999, Armenakis/Bedeian discussed only one empirical study dealing with the impact of communication strategies on the success of change processes and pointed to the necessity of further research in the field. In a more recent review of empirical work on organizational change (Stock-Homburg 2007), the issue of change communication still is only marginally discussed even though the number of contributions to communicative questions has been growing within the last few years. Before drawing on specific approaches in the field of change communication, we would like to give an outline of the major research themes with regard to
organizational change since we argue that the way in which communication during change is developed should make use of insights gained in all research fields.

2.2 General overview to Research on Organizational Change Management
Within the vast body of literature on organizational change, the different approaches can be categorised along three lines: the first set of approaches focuses on the development of concepts for organizational change, the second on theoretical explanations for change and the third one on empirical analyses of various phenomena accompanying organizational change. The ways in which organizational change is understood can be differentiated as three specific perspectives (cf. Stock-Homburg 2007: 796-798): Adopting the first perspective, research focuses on the causes for change, distinguishing between changes that are actively sought for by the organisation and changes that primarily must be considered as a reaction to context factors. This kind of research can also be conceptualised as focusing on external contextual issues in contrast to research on internal contextual issues that focuses on influential factors such as the degree of specialization or experiences with previous change (cf. Armenakis/Bedeian 1999: 295). The second perspective deals with the intensity of change, be it on a temporal level where continuous change is differentiated from radical change or with regard to its impact within the organization. According to the classification of Armenakis/Bedeian, this kind of research deals with criterion issues, i.e. the outcomes of change. The third perspective focuses different levels of change: On a macro-level change literature deals with questions such as an organization’s changes concerning strategy, organizational culture or processes. On the micro-level, research focuses on the impact of change on teams and individuals. In this research field, the focus is mainly on organizational members’ ability and willingness to change (Stock-Homburg 2007). Similarly, Armenakis/Bedeian (1999: 295) distinguish process research that addresses the actions undertaken during change, e.g. proposing models for planning and enacting change and process research that contributes to the understanding of how change is experienced by organizational members. From a communicational perspective, the latter approaches are of special interest.

2.3 Approaches and Findings in the Field of Change Communication
Concerning the recommendations entailed in implementation models, communication can be considered an integral part. Communicative considerations often are discussed on a rather general level. Kotter (1999) for example suggests that the process of creating major change follows eight stages: (1) "Establishing a sense of urgency", (2) "creating the guiding coalition", (3) "developing a vision and strategy", (4) "communicating the change vision", (5) "empowering broad-based action", (6) "generating short-term wins", (7) "consolidating gains and producing more change" and (8) "anchoring new approaches in the culture" (1996: 21). The way in which a change vision should be communicated is outlined in the form of general recommendations rather than providing a systematic approach. Within the field of management, Kotter’s approach is one of the most influential. Krüger adapts Kotter’s model by distinguishing five phases of a change: initialization, conceptualisation, mobilization, implementation and sustainability (cf. Krüger 2006: 308 et al.). Having a stronger focus on communicational issues, Krüger proposes distinct communicative goals and instruments for each phase. Table 1 shows effects of communication that are typically intended in these different phases.

Table 1: Communicative goals during different phases of change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Communicative Goal</th>
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<tr>
<td>Initialization</td>
<td>Establishing understanding for the need of change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualization</td>
<td>Communicating the strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilization</td>
<td>Encouraging the willingness of change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Imparting knowledge and abilities and supporting problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Maintaining the exchange of experiences</td>
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</table>

Change management literature explicitly dealing with goals and instruments of communication usually draw on general communication models as developed in communication studies. One of these models is the so-called Lasswell-formula (Lasswell 1948) that points to crucial questions to be asked, when planning communicative action: „who says what in what channel to whom with what effect?“.
Assuming that internal communication can be shaped towards specific requirements during change processes, we claim that basic modes and means of communication need to be adapted to a specific change situation. Communication may take on the mode of face-to-face interaction between coworkers, executives and employees or be mediated by means of a whole range of electronic and non-
electronic media (direct vs. indirect communication). Communication may be reciprocal (dialogue) or one-sided (monologue). Furthermore, it is essential to note that internal communication may be formal as well as informal (Maletzke 1963). Especially with regard to interpersonal communication, the questions raised in the Lasswell-formula should be complemented. Adopting a constructivist perspective, effective communication affords dealing with the specific context of the situation and people’s backgrounds as well as with different modes of communication. In addition, effective communication needs to meet the criterion of timeliness. For our purposes, the named aspects are integrated as distinct questions of the communication formula.

**Table 2: Extension of the Lasswell-formula**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sender/ communicator</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td>Organization/ participants</td>
<td>Mode of interaction</td>
<td>Channel/ medium</td>
<td>Receiver/ audience</td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The so-called communication wheel by Goodman/Truss (2004: 225) partially integrates the named aspects and offers a useful model for conceptualizing communication during change. They characterise change communication by distinguishing different messages along priorities (must know, should know or could know), media or in our terms modes of communication (verbal, written or electronic), channels or rather communicators (senior managers, managers, team leaders and groups) and different approaches with regard to how change can be communicated (directive/ coercive, participative or consultative). Apart from that, the authors point out four external factors that influence the characteristics of communication as outlined above: the organizational context, the purpose of the communication, the change programme characteristics and employee response. Especially, the organizational context and the characteristics of a given change programme are important constituents for developing a communication framework.

In order to assess the organizational context in particular, it is useful to examine an organization’s structures, hierarchies and its members’ response to change (cf. Goodman/Truss 2004: 225). With regard to the latter, the following three dimensions are of interest: The need for change in the organization, i.e. the degree to which the reason for change is comprehensible to the stakeholders involved. The willingness to change, i.e. to what extent one can expect that innovation is supported by the stakeholders and the ability to change, i.e. what preconditions for implementing change must be provided, be it on a personal level (knowledge, competence), on the business level (structures, processes) or on a technical level (cf. Krüger 2006: 29 pp). Gaining an overview of these fields allows for organising change efficiently and effectively and enables leadership to focus the role of communication in the operative phase.

The contextual factors inherent in a change programme can first of all be characterised according to the oppositional terms intended vs. emergent, revolutionary vs. evolutionary and proactive vs. reactive (cf. Krüger 2006). With regard to communication, a change process that affords a dismissal of employees for example, will be communicated in another way than a change that affects people in the way that they are obliged to record their working hours electronically. As pointed out above, change programmes may differ with regard to intensity, temporality or impact.

In what situation a respective communication style is adopted can be considered as partly relying on a communicators’ background knowledge. Furthermore, it will differ according to the aim of communication and the medium used. With regard to internal organizational communication, Meier (2000) distinguishes between media that are primarily used to spread information and such that are likely to foster dialogue between the organization and its employees. With regard to change processes participative communication that fosters dialogue seems crucial as well as the full and timely information on change that is aimed at direction or – taking on the employees’ perspective – grants orientation (cf. e.g. Goodman/Truss 2004: 219; Allen et al. 2007). Concerning the question of which medium to use in what change situation, research still lacks a comprehensive overview. Krüger for instance suggests different instruments for communication strategies during specific phases of change without providing any further discussion of specific change situations, preferred communication styles or the effectiveness of the recommended tools (cf. Krüger 2006: 308). This may partly be due to „the fact that, as Harkness (2000) has indicated, we lack appropriate and rigorous tools to measure the effectiveness of communication during change programmes" (Goodman/Truss...
2004: 220). In their comparison of two organizations in change, Goodman/Truss (2004) evaluated preferred communication channels/media from an employee perspective. Their findings show that preferences may differ from one organization to the other and that in their cases face-to-face communication in staff meetings was preferred over individual face-to-face communication. With regard to the choice of appropriate channels and media for change communication, there is clearly a need for further research. When designing communication strategies, it therefore seems useful to rely on the method of the stakeholder analysis on a more general level (cf. Buehrer 2004; Lewis 2007). The main assumption here is that "studying the attitudes and expectations of multiple stakeholders will increase the rate of acceptance and improve the quality of collaboration by removing or accounting for areas of conflict", as Scott et al. (2004: n.p.) point out with regard to implementation strategies for E-Government-projects. A stakeholder analysis should lead to the identification of communicators and recipients of a message. With regard to communicators, a study of Allen et al. (2007) underlines that, from a recipient perspective, appointing adequate communicators may have an impact on the acceptance of change. They suggest that communication from the top-management is especially important at the beginning of change while supervisors are preferred communicators in the proceeding of change. Klein who suggests seven key principles for communication based on selected empirical work also integrates this differentiation. He states that "[t]he line hierarchy is the most effective organizationally sanctioned communication channel [and that direct] supervision is the expected and most effective source of organizationally sanctioned information (Klein 1996: 34). Apart from this, a stakeholder analysis should also integrate the identification of potential multipliers and opponents to change (cf. Klein 1996: 34).

To sum up: Within the broader field of literature on organizational change management, change communication continually seems to gain importance as a distinct area of interest. This assumption is based on the observation that empirical research in the field has been growing in the last few years. In addition, approaches that are more recent seek to frame communication in change processes theoretically (e.g. Lewis 2007). Within the area of project management, there are first initiatives to discuss methodological implications in a concise way (e.g. Buehrer et al. 2004). However, the discussion of selected approaches and empirical findings, as presented above, leads us to the conclusion, that there is still a need for an integrative view on theoretical approaches, empirical findings and methodological implications. Similarly. Lewis (2007: 177) points out that "we still lack a comprehensive perspective on how implementation communication practices and processes are interrelated and how they ultimately give rise to important change process outcomes".

3. Outlining an Analytical Framework for Communicating Change

Based on the discussion of major considerations in the field of organizational change management as well as on the model proposed by Goodman/Truss, we conclude that communication managers should take contextual and content factors of change into consideration when developing communication strategies for enabling change. As for differing organizational contexts in which change processes take place, change-relevant factors that are specific for public organizations need to be clarified more precisely (cf. Fernandez/Rainey 2006). Concerning the characteristics of ICT-based change programmes, it would be useful to first delineate genuine change projects from IT-projests that cannot be classified as organizational projects. With regard to this, the boundaries between "normal" project communication and specific change communication are of special interest, especially in relation to prototypical models of internal organizational communication. Second, one needs to assess the temporality, diffusion and impact of a given ICT-change project. Assuming a context in which specific communicative action for realising a change process is essential, we suggest that the following dimensions should be integrated when conceptualising strategic change communication: The proceeding of change through time, evolving along several phases; the differing perceptions of and interests in change by the organizational members involved and the goals and necessities of communication along different levels.

Following the argumentation put forward in the literature focussing on implementation models of change, we argue that ICT-project leading to organizational change should be conceptualised as a process. Splitting this process into distinct phases helps conceptualising a communicative strategy that grants appropriate and timely information and communication with relevant organizational members. The main consideration is that communication does not have the same function and does not take place between the same agents in all the phases. As a starting point, it might be useful to envisage the communicative goals according to Krüger (cf. table 1).
Leaders require an overview over existing constellations, so that they can use communication as an instrument to support innovation and an ICT-project in particular. Designing goal-oriented communication requires the identification of target audiences on different hierarchical levels (organizational leaders, managers, end-users, etc.), along organizational positions and by identifying opinion leaders of the change project. Depending on the type of change processes, stakeholders outside the organization are highly relevant as well and need to be addressed accordingly through external organizational communication. For our purposes however, the participants within the organization – taking on either the role of communicators or receivers of a message – are of special interest. In order for a communication manager to plan specific communicative measures, s/he has to identify who communicates to whom. According to the development of the change process through time, specific target audiences will require more attention than others and also the level of communication will shift over time. As is the case for any project, the success of ICT-based change projects is dependent on the support of the top-level. However, one needs to pay attention to especially the end-users of an application, since this target-audience is most likely to be struggling with uncertainties that need to be addressed. Hence, the change message needs to be adapted to the different groups of addressees. It can be more strategy, implementation or job-related for example (Allen et al. 2007).

It has been pointed out that communication takes place on a cognitive as well as on an emotional level – this also holds true for communicating change. The distinction between organizational (cognitive) and social (emotional) processes is an artificial one, however it helps to differentiate between prototypical contents of a message in ICT-based change processes. Organizational communication focuses on the exchange of fact-based and job-related information in order to increase employees’ performance, whereas social communication is considered to contribute to increasing employees’ motivation. Leadership should integrate both perspectives when communicating change to organizational members. Focussing on the organizational level, information on change can further be categorized according to an intended communicative goal. Communication on the strategic level reflects the intent to establish an understanding for the need of change, whereas on the operative level, organizational members might be mobilized to support change by showing in what way they are actually affected by the change process (similarly cf. Allen et al. 2007).

Table 3: Typology of communicative activities: Level of communication and their subdivision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Communication</th>
<th>Subdivision</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Strategic/Political</td>
<td>What is the vision, what are the aims?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Why are we doing it? What are the milestones?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational level</td>
<td>How are the milestones achieved? Who is involved in what way?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical level</td>
<td>How does the application work? What is new?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Why do we need a (cultural) change?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the job-related benefits of change?</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

The differentiation of levels of communication can be used to shape messages that are addressed at a specific target audience at a certain time. As will be shown however, it also helps to understand differing positions in the constellation of organizational members.

4. Case Study: Implementing a DMS in a Directorate of a Swiss Federal Department

4.1 Goals and Methodology

The aim of the research project on which this paper is based, is to point out the role of communication as a management tool for leading ICT-based change-projects, to develop a framework for communication and to validate selected communication instruments. Apart from an in-depth review of empirical literature relevant to change communication, the focus is on deriving empirical findings from our case study on the project "implementation of DMS in the federal administration". Our preoccupation with the case is twofold: On the one hand, we examine the project with regard to communicational activities and needs on a descriptive level. On the other hand, we scientifically attend the project by proposing communicative action if required. In cooperation with the Bern University of the Arts, the aim is to design a communication instrument as a consultative intervention based on a situation analysis.
Methodologically, our examination of the case is based on a qualitative content analysis of prevalent documents (approx. 30 papers, e.g. project-plan, project-handbook, presentations, newsletters) and qualitative guided interviews with different stakeholders (approx. 15 interviews, around 2 hours each). The analysis of the interviews is aimed at providing an overview of the stakeholder-constellation and its dynamics. The empirical part of our study is still in the initial phase, and will last until September 2008. Preliminary results from the content analysis as well as examples of stakeholder perceptions encountered in the first interviews will be presented and reflected in the next sub-chapters.

4.2 Implementing a DMS in a Federal Department: A contextual Analysis

We regard the implementation of a DMS in a Department not only as a technical project but also as an organizational project, since in the case it requires a considerable change in working procedures; staff members need to gain the ability of adequately filing the documents and they must be willing to do so. In the future, the process might also lead to a reduction or reallocation of staff. The Federal Department under discussion consists of several Directorates that can be characterised as partly living different organizational cultures. Another feature is that knowledge management and decision-making pose specific challenges, since there is a high degree of job-rotation. Hierarchical structures and thinking are dominant, even though there may be gradual differences among the Directorates. With regard to change relevant aspects, we draw on Krüger (2006) to set out the assumed need, willingness and ability to change.

The need of change in the organization can be seen as given, since from 2011 the federal administration will have to carry out all business processes electronically on a compulsory basis. In early 2008, the Federal Council adopted a package of measures for an area-wide implementation of electronic business processes as precondition for Good Governance within E-Government. Introducing a DMS in a Directorate can be seen as a first step in this direction; as formulated in the E-Government-strategy, the public administration modernizes its business processes whereby different administrative units interact electronically. At the same time, DMS is a measure for ensuring knowledge management that poses specific challenges for the organization and can be regarded as prerequisite for the traceability of administrative action as required by the Federal Act on Freedom of Information in the Administration (2006): DMS is a computer system used to track and store electronic documents and/or images of paper documents. It enables systematic recording by demanding the structured filing of business relevant dossiers. Vice versa, the storage of data in a DMS grants access to the electronic files by providing an advanced search by catchwords or full-text search. However, the actual need of change does not necessarily have to match with the need perceived by the different organizational members. On the organizational level, an assessment of the willingness to change is difficult at the current stage of our case study. Regarding the project in particular, the interviews show that there is some resistance to change. It remains to be examined whether this is due to the proceeding of the project or symptomatic for a general state of the organization. Regarding the ability to change, we refer to Krüger (2006) and assume that the main challenge in the case can be found on the business level (structures and processes). Since we are dealing with the implementation of a technical solution this precondition (ability on a technical level) should be given, however, on a personal level (knowledge, competence) organizational members need trainings for managing the tool. From this we conclude that the implications for communication are the heterogeneity of the audience and the variety of communicators on the different hierarchical levels.

On the level of the change programme’s characteristics, we consider the project as being intended, having a high impact and working proactively in the sense of supporting the E-Government-strategy. But we also consider it as being reactive by envisaging a solution to the documentation problem. Furthermore, it seems difficult to separate the project from other initiatives in the federal administration. One Directorate introduced a DMS-solution about five years ago; an update of this tool was completed in September 2007. Since the end of 2007, another project was launched with the aim of introducing a new version of the software in the same Directorate by summer 2008. Based on this "precursor", the given solution shall be implemented in other Directorates by the end of 2008. In that sense, the process is evolutionary. In our case study, we are following up the entire implementation process, considering several Directorates. Insofar the change process (filing documents electronically) can be considered a long-term one. From a communicative point of view, it is important to note that differing information has been circulating for a considerable time, partly leading to unnecessary uncertainties. Furthermore, transparent information is hard to achieve, since decisions made do not necessarily seem to be stable. With regard to job-related aspects, it partly seems to open, in what way which units will be affected by DMS. The project leader expresses similar
assumptions. He already introduced a DMS-project successfully in his Directorate. In the final project report, he sums up the outcomes of the project and points to lessons learned. From a communicational perspective he observes the following: (1) the end-users didn’t receive enough information at the beginning of the project, (2) communication was too emotional when recapitulating the outcomes, (3) approved findings were unnecessarily put into question at a late stage and (4) it was difficult to give an overview to all scopes of the project due to the scarce resources.

4.3 First Findings of the Interviews with a Focus on Communication

In the first round of the interviews, it became visible that the need for change as outlined above is not prominent in organizational members’ perceptions of the change process. Even though they realize that the organization is about to change and do not consider the project as an IT-project solely, they seem to pursue individual agendas in this context. Whereas one person stated that some organizational members fear to be controlled, others are resistant to a potential increase in workload, while a third party was afraid of losing autonomy with regard to the use of already existing IT-solutions, developed with regard to their working necessities. Overall, resistance from organizational members seems to be probable.

When trying to point out different positions within a broader constellation of agents, it seems interesting to focus on the different levels of communication as stressed by the interviewees. Even though we have only interviewed organizational members that belong to the directing management, they took on strikingly different views: One of them stressed the importance of communication on the strategic level and thereby the relevance of a clear support by the top-management. Another considered himself primarily as an end-user and poignantly pointed to the importance of job-related communication. As a potential communicator within his unit, he stressed that he would only diffuse information as soon as it became relevant on the operative level. Other organizational members argued almost entirely on the technical level. They were not so much interested in how the suggested tool actually works than rather in the question whether its implementation might jeopardize their own solutions. This line of argumentation rather hints at questions of participation in decision-making.

With regard to communication of the change process, the interviewees took on different points of view: While one person was arguing in favour of a coercive style of communication, another was pleading for the need of consultative ways of implementing change. Especially concerning the latter viewpoint, the critique was that end users’ requirements were not included. These findings suggest that the organizational culture is perceived and lived heterogeneously. Interestingly, exponents of differing positions nevertheless presented similar views on how change communication should proceed: in a strategic phase, the leading board should communicate the vision, then in a participative phase, users should be able to formulate their IT-needs and after having chosen a solution, clear-cut information on the solution should accompany implementation. However, they diametrically differed with regard to the perception of whether a participative phase had taken place or not. Controversial is also the evaluation of communication tools encountered by the interviewees in the change process so far. The project leader focuses on the use of new media when communicating with the end-users. Some find this innovative and adequate, while others simply ignore this communicative activity due to an information overflow. Instead, they would prefer condensed and job-related information. In addition, one person clearly preferred dialogue to mono-directional communication (newsletters). These first findings suggest that a mixed media-approach indeed should be favoured.

5. Summary and Outlook

In the context of the research project we have derived key elements relevant to the communication of change from selected literature on organizational change management. Namely, we claim that it is essential to take into account a temporal dimension, different levels of communication and potentially diverging needs for communication with regard to the stakeholders involved. The description of the case study and preliminary findings from the interviews are supposed to provide empirical evidence for the validation of the theoretical assumptions.

Referring to the example outlined above, the following characteristics can be pointed out: The time horizon of the planned DMS-implementation is longer than could be assumed for such an endeavour. Implementation is to be carried out in different units; however, the organisation of change rather follows the logic of independent sub-projects than pursuing the overarching aim of digitalising documentation in the whole organization. The process of decision-making appears to contain circular steps, decisions are taken at a rather late stage in the process and support from the top-management
could be stronger. Hence, our research takes place in a context, in which the question of what communicative measures can be taken in order to achieve the formulated aims is prevailing. Still, first findings from the case study allow for drawing conclusions with regard to the question of how communication should be conceptualised. Our preliminary findings show that in the given setting, we are not dealing with a communication strategy as suggested from a theoretical viewpoint. Accordingly, when presenting the case study in this article, the focus rather was to give an outline of the communicational needs of several stakeholders involved in the change process. Their demands support the assumptions outlined in the proposed analytical framework.

Based on the case study and the review of approaches in the field of change communication, further research in the following areas seems desirable: First, the characteristics of ICT-projects that are apt to cause organizational change should be gradually categorised with regard to their potential impact. Second, the public sector as a specific organizational context for communicating ICT-based change deserves more consideration. Third, there is a need for broad-based empirical research e.g. with regard to the effectiveness of different communicative instruments in varying change situations. The scientific community can contribute to the specific debate by developing categorizations and frameworks for communicating change that are validated with regard to their applicability and so have a share in the growth of E-Government.

6. References