

E-government harm: An assessment of the Danish coercive Digital Post strategy

PhD defense

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I will not go into a technical assessment, this is a matter for the IT-people
- Engelbrecht, Minister

The elderly are so law abiding, that if they are told that it is decided by law, they will do it
- Frelle, IT administrator



I did not use my new computer for 3 months, because I was afraid that I would ruin something on the internet, and do something illegal
- Karen, citizen



About the author...

- Jesper B. Berger (52), has been a PhD-student from 2012-2015, now PostDoc at University of Siegen, Germany
- M.Sc. in Engineering, holds a 25+ years industrial carrier in IT supported work processes within public sector, different types of government, different types of positions and different domains
- Was elected member of local government in Nuuk, Greenland due to ethnic unfairness, has been trade union representative in various positions

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My stance...

- Researchers should fight for a better world, especially emancipation of the suppressed
- Research should be grounded in practice and collaboration with practitioners
- Researchers should engage with the public to promote interventions and change
- Technology can lead to both improved efficiency and satisfied citizens/staff (I'm NOT against technology!)

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What is the problem?

- Expected positive effects from e-government has not been realized
- This may tempt governments to enforce digital services onto citizen (coercive e-government)
- (e-government = public services to the citizen through the Internet)

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Why is it a problem?

- When e-government is voluntary, citizens can avoid consequences from e-government
- We don't know the consequences of coercive e-government
 - to citizens
 - to civil servants
 - to the public organization
 - to the society

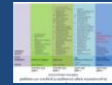
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The Danish e-government strategy, two paths



Digital Post (by law)

- Every company has a digital postbox, no exemption
- Every citizen (age 15+) will have a digital postbox, citizens can apply for exemption
- Public institutions can send digital mail
- By law, the recipient has the responsibility to 'empty' the digital mailbox
- The citizen cannot demand digital mail



The 'Wave plan' (by law)

Social security card, EU health card, enrolment in primary school, enrolment in daycare, passport, driver's license, new address, new GP, enrolment in high school and higher education, student loan, application for travel, name, handicap aid, rats, marriage, aid for daycare, art aid, tax, father declaration, environmental complaints, use of public buildings, arms permit, building permit, trash, divorce, adoption, children's aid, spouse aid, housing aid, parking, criminal record, retirement pension, social pension, house tax aid, heating aid, maternity aid – more to come, 70+

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Digital post kostede far dyrt
 Det kan have alvorlige konsekvenser, hvis borgerne begynder at bruge digital post til kommunikation med offentlige instanser, der ikke er parat til teknologien.

Jeg tænker, at det simpelthen ikke kan passe.
 En digital trykudgave af kommuner, stat og regioner viser, at mange slet ikke er parat. Falsk betragtes kun 40 procent af myndighederne en fremvisning via digital post i undersøgelsen. Læs mere om det her.

Pengene forsvandt
 De manglende eller forkert håndterede besvarelser betød helt konkret, at kasper Bull Berger, der er enig far, mistede en udstilling af barneopgaver, fordi kommunen ikke håndterede digital post korrekt.

Skats 7-9-13-kvaler
 Skattebetalt - 53 af borgerne

FORBRUG & LIV
 Bolig · Sundhed · Digitalt · Forbrug · Biler · Livsstil

BLIV MEDLEM NU. NYTEUROBONUS
 Med det nye Eurobonus bliver du selv medlem efter kun fem flyturer for retur. Resten er gratis.

Enlig mor har mistet 20.000 kroner, fordi hun overså breve i sin e-Boks
 Det er dyrt at overse elektroniske breve fra myndighederne, har Trine erfaret.

Jomma – trukket i kontanthjælp kendt ikke sin e-boks
 Kontanthjælpsmodtagere må lægge ryg til mange bebrejdelser end i den offentlige debat. Det lyder næsten som om kommunen er offer for disse borgers måde at håndtere deres liv på.

LES OGSÅ
 06. OKT 2013 Digitalisering må ikke gå forud for menneskelig kontakt
 27. SEP 2013 Har du også fået en falsk e-mail fra SKATT? Pas på! Den slags bliver der nu mere af
 24. SEP 2013 Det bliver kun værre: Mit liv som selvstændig med store postbrevser – de fire er digitale
 13. SEP 2013 Uhyggeligt perspektiv: Fremover bliver det svært for dig at få kontakt til myndighederne
 11. SEP 2013 Smart bliver alle offentlige

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What is new in my approach?

- E-government is normally perceived as
 - voluntary for citizens
 - only entailing positive effects
 - technology can be planned, designed and implemented to achieve the anticipated effects
- What is new in my approach
 - technology might not operate as planned
 - outcomes from technology cannot be anticipated, might be negative and might harm people
 - critical approach, employees, operations

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Case and Research question

- Case
 - Coercive e-government is explored in the case of the Danish Digital Post strategy
- Research question
 - Why is Digital Post perceived as harmful? How could this have been avoided and how is it mitigated in the future?

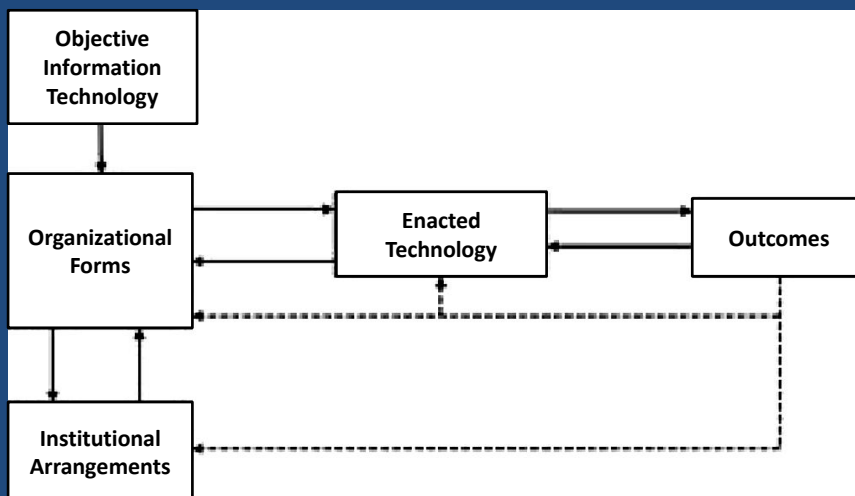
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What theories are my foundation?

- Institutional theory (Scott, 2008)
 - how rules, norms and beliefs shape the behavior of organizations, provides the significance of the “field” including the process of isomorphism
- Technology enactment framework (Fountain, 2001)
 - model that aims to explain how objective technology is shaped by organizational and institutional forces to become enacted technology, which may lead to different outcome than the anticipated

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Technology Enactment Framework (Fountain, 2001)



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Research approach

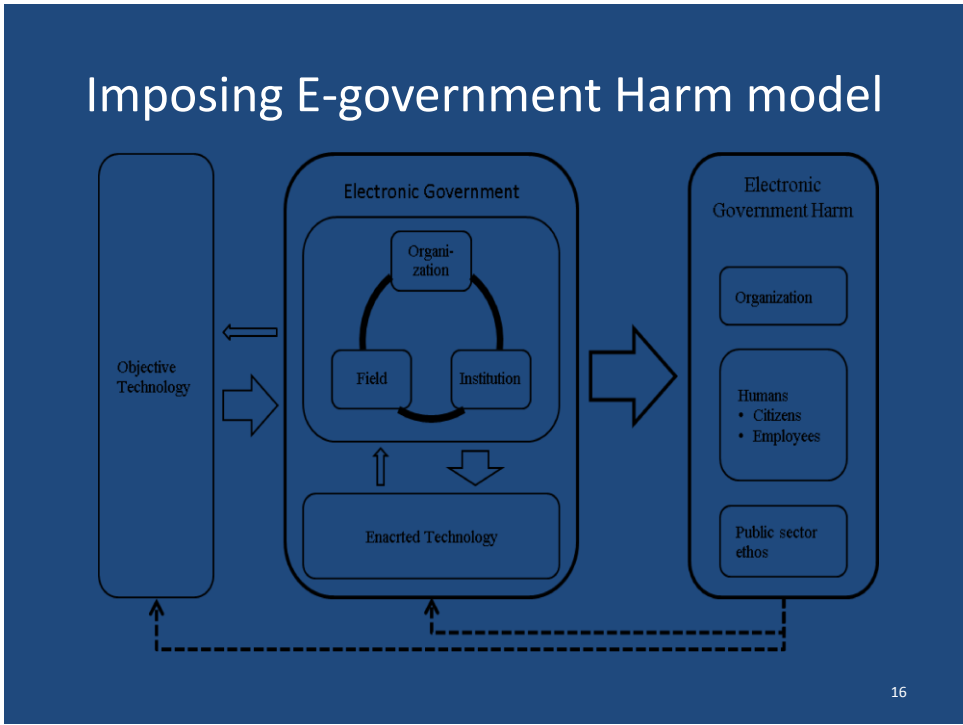
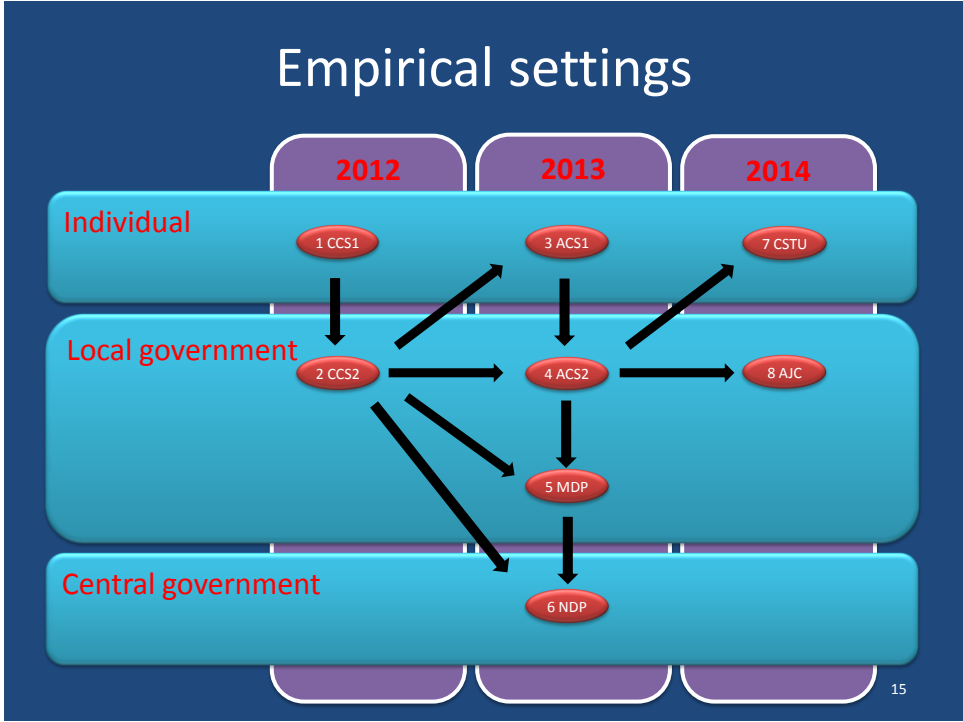
- Critical IS Research (CR)
 - criticizes tradition, technology determinism and pure performance intent, emancipation, reflexivity, transformational redefinition
- Participatory Design (PD)
 - genuine collaboration with practitioners, voice to the weak, practice knowledge, opposition to power, workers have a right to influence
- Engaged Scholarship (ES)
 - research should solve problems in the real world, engagement with practitioners, dissemination of research may affect change

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How did I gather data?

- Delphi study, focus groups in two local governments
- Action Research in two Citizen Service Centers
- Interpretive study in one Job Center
- Adoption study of 98 local governments
- Responsiveness study of 243 public institutions
- Survey of clerical staff (468) (collaboration with trade union)
- Different research purposes/perspectives (ES)

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Implications

Practice

- Digital Post harms
 - vulnerable citizens in some situations
 - staff (workload + work life)
 - organizations (economy)
 - public sector ethos (alienation, mistrust)
 - Imbalance
- Harm follows from enacted technology (flawed instantiation)

Research

- Clear case of enacted technology
- More research depth is needed into e-government constructs
- E-government research needs to be extended
 - harm
 - coercive e-government
 - responsible e-government ethics

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Why does harm occur?

- No joint responsibility for the overall solution. Public institutions have individual responsibility
- DP too flexible, a multitude of variations to support the entire communication chain
- Lack of control of the implementation process due to software market reliance
- No coordinating entity with power to ensure public sector compliance
- Poor design choices on crucial elements (EasyID, forwarding) together with harsh rhetoric
- Failure of adjusting due to lack of responsiveness and agility
- Complexity does not match time frame

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How could e-government harm have been avoided? Design choices

- Enabling forwarding of DPs
- Easier EaseID login (e.g. by single-level login)
- EasyID should not have been based on sensitive CPR, alternatively means should have been provided for staff to assist citizens directly
- Applying for exemption should have been more “worthy”
- Certain vulnerable citizens should never have been forced
- PDF forms should only have been allowed when they could have been signed digitally
- Standardization of digital postboxes and hierarchies
- External receipts to citizens when DP received by staff

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How could e-government harm have been avoided? Implementation choices

- Reduced project scope by only including digital post to citizens
- Incremental evolution from G2G, then G2B and then G2C
- Only one end-to-end solution from the 3 most important (volume) feeding systems should be provided to start with
- Project controls of public organizations concerning commitment, resource allocation and implementation to ensure synchronicity
- Involvement of and responsiveness towards operational staff and citizens to be able to redirect and adjust

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Ethical e-government questions...

Is it right for public institutions to mandate e-services, to force citizens to be users of the electronic media? And if it is right, should an exit analogue strategy for a particular e-service, likewise, be mandatory? May e-government create feelings of anxiety amongst citizens? Is it right to lay-off staff in the department that is struggling with new e-government services? May e-government impose economic loss on public institutions? May e-government create unequal access to welfare benefits? **Is it right to send digital forms to citizens to print**, fill out, scan or mail with the implied dependency of computer, Internet connection, printer etc.? Is it right for government to impose e-government initiatives to lower levels of government and reduce the funding according to estimated costs reductions? Is it right to do it without a transparent publicly accessible business case or without recurrent evaluation and regulation? Is it right to impose e-government on beneficiaries that may be considered weak in electronic communication capabilities? Is it right to impose e-government on citizens aged 70+? **Is it right that citizen must spend money on computers** and Internet access because public sector has decided to cut postal costs? Is it right that the citizen cannot get help operating the computer at the Citizen Service Centre?

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How can e-government harm be mitigated? Ethics

Concern for public ethos

1. A balance must be obtained between citizens' and public institutions' rights and obligations
2. E-government initiatives must always be assessed within the wider long-term impact on public sector ethos

Rights for individual citizens and staff

3. No one older than 70 must be forced to use e-government
4. No beneficiaries must be forced to use e-government
5. E-government must not harm citizens or staff
6. E-government must not entail increased taxation
7. Necessary receipts and a non-electronic emergency solution

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How can e-government harm be mitigated? Ethics

Power to staff

8. Public institutions that are subject to coercive e-government must receive a 10% increased funding for at least two years from operation
9. Staff have a veto towards coercive e-government

Assurance for control of economic consequences

10. The economy in every coercive e-government initiative must be transparent and accessible, and due to automatic regulation when deviating from business case

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How can e-government harm be mitigated? Institutional framework

The Council of E-government Ethics

- Interprets compliance of the principles for ethical coercive e-government in particular incidences from an expert and a public view

The Citizens' E-government Complaints Board

- Awards compensation for citizens, where public institutions have violated the principles for ethical coercive e-government

The State E-government Audit Department

- Performs control and consultancy towards public institutions of compliance of the principles for ethical coercive e-government

EU-convention

- Commits the government to comply to the principles for ethical coercive e-government and allocate appropriate funding

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Included papers

Paper 1	193
Madsen, Christian Østergaard, Berger, Jesper B., & Phythian, Mick. (2014). <i>The Development in Leading e-Government Articles 2001-2010: Definitions, Perspectives, Scope, Research Philosophies, Methods and Recommendations: An Update of Heeks and Bailur</i> . Paper presented at the 13th IFIP WG 8.5 International Conference, EGOV 2014, Dublin, Ireland, September 1-3, 2014. Proceedings.	
Paper 2	213
Berger, Jesper B., & Hertzum, Morten. (2014). Adoption patterns for the digital post system by Danish municipalities and citizens. Paper presented at the ECIS2014: Proceedings of the 22nd European Conference on Information Systems, Atlanta, GA.	
Paper 3	229
Berger, Jesper B. (2014). <i>Ethical dilemmas and PD as important steps towards critical e-government design</i> . Paper presented at the PDC '14 Proceedings of the 13th Participatory Design Conference, Windhoek, Namibia.	
Paper 4	235
Berger, Jesper B. (2014). <i>Formative evaluation: A model to ensure value from e-government</i> . Paper presented at the The 11th Scandinavian Workshop on E-government (SWEG 2014), Linköping, Sweden.	
Paper 5	253
Berger, Jesper B. (2014). Mandatory e-government has arrived: The silent protest from staff calls for the committed scholar – resistance must never be futile! Paper presented at the The 25th Australasian Conference on Information Systems, Auckland, New Zealand.	
Paper 6	265
Berger, Jesper B., Hertzum, Morten, & Schreiber, Trine. (2014). Does local government staff perceive digital communication with citizens as improved service? <i>Submitted for publication</i> .	
Paper 7	287
Berger, Jesper B. (2015). <i>E-government harm? Never heard of it!</i> Paper presented at the 12th Scandinavian Workshop on E-government (SWEG 2015), Copenhagen, Denmark.	

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Limitations and future research

Limitations

- It may not be possible to generalize from Digital Post to e-government
- It may not be possible to generalize from a coercive setting, thus the study is of limited use to other countries
- Impacts on citizens are only weakly founded

Future research

- E-government harm, ontology and epistemology
- Coercive e-government, ontology and epistemology
- The balance between citizens and government
- Ethical responsible e-government
- Critical e-government research principles

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What have I been doing since hand-in?

- EGOV 2015 (August 2015)
 - Formative evaluation, paper 4, further elaboration, accepted as research in progress
- IJEGR (July 2015)
 - Nine challenges for e-government action researchers
- HICSS 2016 (submitted)
 - Coercive E-government Policy Imposing Harm: The Need for a Responsible E-government Ethics, paper 7 split into 2
- H2020, EURO-6-2015
 - Meeting new societal needs by using emerging technologies in the public sector: Responsible E-government, U of Siegen, Skövde, Agder, CBS, 8 local governments in Germany, Norway, Sweden, Denmark

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Acknowledgements...

- My mature-male-e-government PhD-student network
- My PhD-roomie at RUC and other RUC PhDs
- All the practitioners in CCS, ASC, AJC, KMD, DIGST... and other institutions
- Senior scholars that have assisted me into this world of academia at PhD-courses and collaboration
- My two daughters and my mother...

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Summing up...

- Exploratory, critical study of a Danish coercive e-government initiative, Digital Post from 8 empirical settings on individual, organizational and national level
- Digital Post might harm public institutions, citizens, staff and public sector ethos due to enacted technology and the e-government field
- The study suggests a responsible e-government ethics and an institutional framework
- Responsible e-government must be grounded in the public
- Research is needed into critical e-government, e-government harm and coercive e-government

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Questions for the committee...

- How do we convince the public and politicians to engage in the process of establishing responsible e-government?
- How do we convince scholars of the necessity of conducting research in harm and ethics?
- What further contribution might emerge from the study?

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Thanks for listening...

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