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# STAKEHOLDER THEORY FOR THE E-GOVERNMENT

## CONTEXT: FRAMING A VALUE-ORIENTED NORMATIVE CORE

### Abstract

Despite substantial investments in ICT in the public sector over the past decades, it has been hard to achieve consistent benefits. One reason for the difficulties is the gap between the expectations of key stakeholders (such as governments, businesses and citizens) and project outcomes. Though normative, descriptive and instrumental aspects of stakeholder theory have been influential in explaining stakeholder interests and relationships in the management field, e-Government researchers have rather neglected the normative core of the theory. We show how value theory can improve normative foundations in this area to provide a focused analysis of four e-Government projects. We use a multiple case study approach to study the values of salient stakeholders, demonstrating how the combination of value theory and stakeholder theory provides greater explanatory power than either of the theories in isolation. Our work shows how stakeholders' interests are bound to generic value positions and allow us to formulate implications for research and practice.

*Keywords: e-Government, value, stakeholder theory, public values, multiple case study, normative core*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

E-Government projects often fail to address the legitimate but diverse interests of many stakeholders (Pardo and Scholl, 2002, Anthopoulos et al., 2015). Stakeholders may be internal (including managers and civil servants), or external (for example citizens and businesses) (Sarkar and De, 2010) and their objectives are often poorly understood (Pawłowska, 2004). Conflicts of interest between stakeholders can arise (Snider, 2005), projects may lack buy-in from stakeholders, and stakeholders may lack influence on requirements (Sarkar and De, 2010). Thus, it is important to locate the management of these initiatives within a discourse between communities of interests with various demands (Davenport and Horton, 2004). Researchers and practitioners need to understand stakeholders' potentially contradictory normative values (Sarkar and De, 2010), to learn how to accommodate them and act on them appropriately (Kim and Kim, 2003). An obvious candidate theory for investigating these issues is Stakeholder Theory (ST) (Freeman, 1984). ST, originating in management theory, is understood to have three primary aspects (Donaldson and Preston, 1995):

- a normative core positing a moral imperative for managers to attend to the legitimate interests of a variety of stakeholders, rather than acting solely as the agents of company shareholders
- a descriptive aspect concerned with the identification of stakeholders and the understanding of their interests and relationships
- an instrumental element investigating the connection between stakeholder management and organisational outcomes

ST's three aspects can provide a useful breakdown of the analytic task for researchers investigating stakeholder effects in e-Government projects. They imply that we should understand:

- the values, goals and objectives of e-Government which are considered inherently worthwhile by stakeholders and underpin their legitimate interests - the normative aspect
- who the stakeholders in a given project are, what their interests are, and which stakeholders are salient (legitimate, powerful, urgent) – the descriptive element
- how the involvement of stakeholders with different interests affects the outcomes of the project – the instrumental aspect.

We argue that the e-Government field has primarily focused on the descriptive aspects of ST (e.g. Sæbø et al, 2011), neglecting the normative core and, to some extent, the instrumental aspect (e.g. Balta et al., 2015). This is perhaps because a moral imperative for public sector institutions to act in the public interest (to represent multiple stakeholder groups), which is enshrined in the theory of public value (Moore, 1995), is taken for granted. However, the public interest is notoriously contentious and difficult to articulate. The normative core of the public sector - what it ought to do and how it ought to achieve it – cannot be taken for granted. It follows that it is an important, but complex task to identify normative perspectives within E-Government projects with a wide variety of stakeholder intentions, purposes and interests (Persson and Goldkuhl, 2010, Castelnovo and Simonetta, 2007, Bonina and Cordella, 2009, Scott et al., 2009, Bannister, 2002, Rose et al., 2015a, Rose et al., 2015b). However, despite the substantial contextual difference between the private and public sectors, the question of what would represent the normative core of ST in the e-Government field has not been addressed. This theoretical gap risks leaving us with a superficial understanding of *what* is happening, without understanding *why* it happens.

Although discussions about the nature of the normative core for stakeholder theory in the eGovernment context is missing, many normative aspects of e-Government are expressed in

recent discussions about public values (e.g. Klievink et al, 2016, Pang et al, 2014 and Bannister and Cordella, 2015)). In the public administration literature, value theory was originally used to distinguish the normative core of public sector organisations from profit-seeking companies in the private sector. Value represents the 'worth, utility, or importance of an entity' - that which is normative and therefore 'considered a good (worthy of striving after) without further justification or rational argument' (Sikula, 1973). Value in the e-Government context is not purely economic, but can refer to the 'importance citizens attach to the outcome of government policies and their experience of public services' (Scott et al., 2009), or 'government's ability to deliver social and economic outcomes that correspond to citizens' expectations' (Bonina and Cordella, 2009). Bannister and Connolly (2015) argue that stakeholder values underpin all forms of e-Government transformation; however, the value discussion has been primarily normative, with some descriptive elements (see for example Rose et al. (2015a)).

The value theory chosen for this research, derived from Rose et al. (2015b), establishes broad categories of value positions commonly held by stakeholders in e-Government, rather than exhaustive lists of values, and has the advantage of explicitly associating those positions with technology frames. Value theory therefore complements stakeholder theory with an account of expected stakeholder interests in the e-Government field.

The e-Government field has sometimes been criticized for its lack of theoretical rigour and weak theoretical foundations (Bannister and Connolly, 2015). Our research objective is therefore to strengthen stakeholder theory in this area by developing its normative aspect - primarily by incorporating value theory in the analysis of e-Government cases. The value theory framing offers a promising avenue for this development. Our empirical base is a series of case studies that we have been involved in over the last ten years in Scandinavia. The research strategy is consequently multiple case studies (Yin, 2009, Benbasat et al., 1987), using a theoretical replication logic (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, Yin, 2009). We investigate the relationships between stakeholders, their various interests and their underlying normative value positions. In particular, we study the saliency of the principle stakeholders together with their underpinning values to offer a richer account of the cases.

The paper is structured in the following way. First, the use of stakeholder theory in the context of e-Government is outlined followed by an account of the value position model and the connections between the theory bases are explored. Then the research strategy is outlined and the cases are briefly summarised, leading to stakeholder value and saliency analyses - salient stakeholders and their value positions are identified. Finally, implications for theory and practice are derived.

## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Stakeholder theory consists of three interrelated, mutually supportive elements: normative aspects, descriptive and instrumental elements. However, the normative aspects - the core of the theory - have not been explained in detail in the public-sector context. In this section, we present stakeholder theory and illustrate why we consider value position theory to be a promising candidate theory for adding richness to the normative core.

### *Stakeholder Theory in e-Government Initiatives*

Stakeholder theory (ST) (Freeman, 1984, Freeman and Phillips, 2002, Freeman et al., 2004) theorises relationships between different social groups engaged in a common enterprise with a basis in social philosophy including values. Although developed as an alternative to shareholder logics for the corporate governance arena, it is not intrinsically bound to private sector profit-seeking rationales. ST has spread to different disciplines including information systems (Pouloudi and Whitley, 1997, Vidgen, 1997) and health care management (Blair and Whitehead, 1988). Here ST offers ways of combining normative issues with complex operational environments, and of combining detail with overview. Apart from the original profit focus, no serious conceptual mismatch has been identified between ST and government's objective of providing policy and services for citizens and organizations – society's stakeholders (Scholl, 2001) - and it may safely be used for public sector analysis. Sæbø et al. (2011) conclude that an adapted version of ST can provide a promising theoretical contribution to the e-Government field, and assist in the development of prescriptive guidelines. For example, Scholl (2004) reports the usefulness of applying elements of ST for investigating IT-driven change projects in the public sector.

ST is composed of three interrelated and mutually supportive elements. (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). The normative assumptions comprise ethically and philosophically based principles for how the managers of firms should, or ought to act. Every organization has a variety of stakeholders, and its managers have a moral duty to recognise and respect the interests of their stakeholders, rather than solely acting as the profit-maximising agents of owner shareholders. Governmental organizations therefore have a duty to know and respect the interests of their stakeholders (also beyond the political process (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2007)). A review of the normative strand of ST suggests three categories of stakeholder involvement (Hendry, 2001): moderate (treating stakeholders with respect), intermediate, (incorporating some stakeholder interests in governance), and demanding (participation for all stakeholders in decision processes).

The normative statements constitute the core of stakeholder theory and, according to Donaldson and Preston (1995), are the basis for the other two elements: instrumental aspects and descriptive elements. The normative core thus shapes instrumental aspects and descriptive elements. ST was originally developed for private sector corporations, where the normative core represented a new framing not previously typical for the management literature. This framing can be seen as less controversial in the public sector, where organizations are normally neither primarily profit-maximising, nor privately owned. However, the original normative core of stakeholder theory was never intended to incorporate the underlying values of public organizations. Since the normative values of public organizations are known to be substantially different from those of private companies, there is an obvious need to further develop stakeholder theory to fit public organizations.

The descriptive elements of ST are concerned with how to represent and describe organizations and organizational behaviour. Key aspects of descriptive ST involve definition of stakeholders as well as tools to identify these (e.g. stakeholder analysis), and concepts that represent stakeholder salience towards managers. For instance, Sæbø et al. (2011) identify the stakeholders in an e-participation project as politicians, administrators and service providers (from the government side), citizen consumers and activists, and software vendors (on the business side). A key element in the analysis of stakeholder relationships is salience, composed of power, legitimacy and urgency. Power is the ability to bring about desired outcomes; legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of a stakeholder are proper and appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms, beliefs and values; whereas urgency is the degree to which stakeholder claims calls for immediate attention. Stakeholders possessing all three attributes are more salient than stakeholders that only possess one or two of the attributes and are termed definitive stakeholders. For example, it is possible to imagine that a politician could be more interested in exercising his or her legitimate powers to influence political decisions shortly before an election because of an increased sense of urgency (to be re-elected).

Both stakeholders and salience represent dynamic phenomena, which should be analysed over time. Stakeholders with more potent combinations of power, legitimacy and urgency can expect that their normative value positions will win through in E-government initiatives, though these may vary through the life of the project. E-government initiatives are initiated, implemented and operated by combinations of stakeholder groups with potentially different complementary or competing values, possibly evolving over time. Salient stakeholders with particular value positions are assumed to be influential in governing the direction and outcomes of the initiatives they engage in. By implication, the absence, lack of influence, or lack of commitment of an important stakeholder may have a negative effect upon the project.

The instrumental aspects of stakeholder theory primarily refer to efforts to investigate the effectiveness of ST. Within this stream of ST, researchers study the actual impact of practical stakeholder management on traditional corporate objectives, in the same way that we study the consequences of value beliefs and choices on e-Government initiatives.

Stakeholder theory has been applied to e-Government problems relatively frequently. The e-Government Reference Library (EGRL, <http://faculty.washington.edu/jscholl/egrl/>) contains more than 600 studies with explicit focus on stakeholders. We searched for stakeholder studies published in GIQ and eGovernment studies with explicit use of stakeholder theory. These selection criteria returned 63 studies. When investigating these contributions, we found that the descriptive, instrumental and normative aspects have not been given equal attention. There is no shortage of studies applying stakeholder theory for descriptive purposes; for instance, Esichaikul (2016) use it to identify e-Government stakeholders. Silva and Fernandez (2016) show how ST can be used to investigate contextual tensions between heterogeneous stakeholders, and a well-cited literature review illustrates the use of ST to guide analysis of eParticipation stakeholders, offering a typology of common stakeholders (Sæbø et al., 2011). Their typology suggests that the most elemental eGovernment stakeholders are Government, Citizen and Business, and that these can be broken down into various sub-categories.

The instrumental aspects of stakeholder theory have also been in focus for e-Government scholars, though to a lesser degree. Examples include Reinwald and Kremmergard (2012) who used stakeholder theory to guide the management of stakeholders in a transformational government case in Denmark. ST also proved useful for guiding stakeholder involvement in public eService development in Sweden (Lindgren, 2014), and for exploring mutual influence between stakeholders in e-Government projects (Balta et al., 2015).

While there are a variety of examples of both descriptive and instrumental use of ST in the e-Government domain, we had difficulty identifying studies investigating the normative core of stakeholder theory. A notable exception is Fedorowicz et. al. (2010)'s discussion on developing the public good in the context of competing concerns of various constituent groups. The study demonstrates a normative perspective, but without drawing theoretical implications for ST in the e-Government field. Despite the lack of normative focus in stakeholder-oriented studies, normative issues such as the importance of citizen engagement (Bonsón et al, 2015) and transparency (Bekkers and Moody, 2011) are frequently central in eGovernment studies (as in the values discussion described later). However, a theoretical basis for linking descriptive and instrumental aspects to normative issues is generally missing in these studies. The absence of attention to the normative core of ST is problematic since the normative core defines underlying values that should shape other aspects of stakeholder theory. This implies that existing descriptive and instrumental applications of the theory in the e-Government domain may be

unfocused or compromised. There is clearly a need to develop the normative core of stakeholder theory for the public-sector context. We argue that the value positions framework for e-Government can be a framing for a normative core for stakeholder theory in this context.

#### *Normative value positions for E-Government*

Since public sector institutions are not normally owned by shareholders, but funded by taxpayers, stakeholder theory's normative imperative to know and respect the interests of a variety of stakeholders (as shown by e.g. Sæbø et al., 2011) should be regarded as non-contentious. In fact, the normative core of the public sector – what it ought to do and how it ought to achieve it – is hotly contested and variously expressed as the case for bureaucracy (Goodsell, 2004), new public management (Boston, 1991), public value management (Moore, 1994), the new public service (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2007), or the new public governance (Osborne, 2010). Though the public value perspective has been influential in e-Government studies in re-asserting value for the citizens as the primary purpose of government, a more precise formulation of normative elements in the public administration literature is targeted in the values literature (Jørgensen and Bozeman, 2007, Rutgers, 2008). Values are associated with what is wanted (desires and intentions), with what is intended for the future (aims and purposes), and with how choices about ends and means are prioritised (prizing and appraisal) (Dewey, 1939). Public sector values thus define a unified ethos for public service, as distinct from the private sector – for example the profit motive of business is usually replaced in the public sector by considerations of serving the public interest, and efficient use of taxpayers' resources.

Most of these discussions find echoes in the e-Government literature; e-Government is a specialised form of public administration in at least one respect: it is always dependent on an information technology implementation. There are several attempts to define representative sets of normative values for e-Government (Persson and Goldkuhl, 2010, Bannister and Connolly, 2014, Bannister, 2002). Rose et al. (Rose et al., 2015b) develop an account of value positions: dominant ideals, located in a public administration tradition and expressed through a set of representative values. Value positions carry associated assumptions about the purposes of e-Government, based on a technological frame (Orlikowski and Gash, 1994) – a cognitive framing of what IT is for, what it can do, how it can be integrated into administrative practice and what consequences it may produce. One common value among administrators for example, is that cases should be handled according to the relevant laws and regulations, irrespective of the status or wealth of the client, and that records of cases should be kept securely in the appropriate database.

In this study we use the term value position to signal normative direction: the overall purpose, motivation and shared goals for a stakeholder group taking part in an e-Government project, which may also represent the principle criterion for their perception of its success or failure. Table 1 summarises four e-Government value positions.

	<b>Professionalism ideal</b>	<b>Efficiency ideal</b>	<b>Service ideal</b>	<b>Engagement ideal</b>
<b>Public administration tradition</b>	providing an independent, robust and consistent administration, governed by a rule system based on law, resulting in the public record, which is the basis for accountability	providing lean and efficient administration which minimises waste of public resources gathered from taxpayers	maximising the utility of government to civil society by providing services directed towards the public good	engaging with civil society to facilitate service and policy development in accordance with liberal democratic principles; articulating the public good
<b>Representative values</b>	durability, equity, legality, accountability	value for money, cost reduction, productivity, performance	public service, citizen-centricity, service level and quality	democracy, deliberation, participation
<b>e-Government purpose</b>	provide a flexible and secure digital public record and support standardised administrative procedure	streamline, rationalise and transform public administration around digital technologies	improve the availability, accessibility and usability of government services by providing them online	support deliberative interactions with the public and the co-production of policy and services
<b>Technological frame for IT</b>	infrastructural: IT securely carries the bureaucratic record in accordance with the law and allows its faithful reproduction; encourages or enforces compliance with the rules	automation: IT increases performance and reduces costs through automation of administrative tasks	service enabling: IT extends the range, availability and quality of services for citizens	networking facilitation: IT underpins communicative interaction between governments and citizens

**Table 1. Four value positions for e-government adapted from Rose et al. (2015b)**

The *professionalism ideal* focuses on providing an independent, robust and consistent administration, governed by a rule system based on law, resulting in the public record that is the basis for accountability. Key representative values are durability, equity, legality and accountability. The role of e-Government is to provide a flexible and secure digital public record, and to support standardised administrative procedure. The technological frame accompanying this understanding is IT as infrastructure (Ciborra, 2000), which can also be related to Orlikowski and Iacono's (2001) conceptualisation of IT as structure. Computerised information systems carry the modern public record, and support, sometimes enforce, due administrative process. They constitute an information infrastructure of computerised databases and document management systems that faithfully enact the regulatory system in silicon and magnetic charges, and encourage its standardisation.

The *efficiency ideal* concerns the provision of lean and efficient administration that minimises waste of public resources gathered from taxpayers. Key representative values are value for money, cost reduction, productivity, and performance. Efficiency has been the central e-Government ideal in attempts to rationalise, streamline, and transform government; Snellen (2005) argues that IT's original role in e-Government was 'the enhancement of the internal effectiveness, efficiency, and economy of the executive functions of public administration.' This is associated with a technological frame where IT provides automation (Zuboff, 1985) as a labour substitution or productivity tool (Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001). For instance, modern tax systems automate the majority of tax calculations, freeing civil servants to deal with exceptions and difficulties.

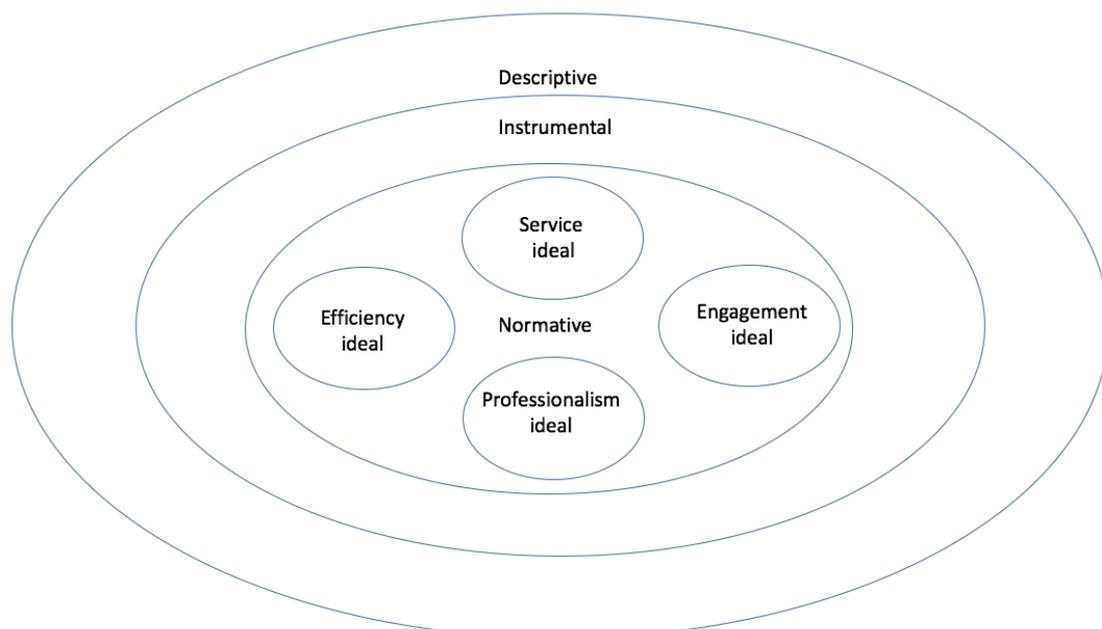
A *service ideal* involves maximising the utility of government to civil society by providing services directed towards the public good. Key representative values are public service, citizen-orientation and service level and quality. E-Government's role has been to improve the availability, accessibility, and usability of government services by providing them online. Snellen (2005) describes this role as the application of IT to the 'improvement of the quality of public services to the citizens, as customers, clients, citizens, and subjects' and Goldkuhl (2007) offers three different conceptualizations of service: an exchange model, a communication model and a human action model. IT offers many opportunities to support service delivery over the Internet, and increasingly through mobile services. In this technological frame IT is an information processing tool (Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001), changing the way citizens communicate with service deliverers. It is also a productivity tool, but seen through the eyes of citizens and businesses, rather than government. E-government service improvements typically include better access, avoiding travel, shorter response times, better access to information, online applications and transactions, special provision for disability, online advice, automated benefits payment, and cost savings for citizens.

Finally, the *engagement ideal* focuses on engaging with civil society to facilitate policy development in accordance with liberal democratic principles - thus articulating the public good. Key representative values are democracy, deliberation and participation. The role of e-Government in engagement is to support deliberative interactions with the public and the co-production of policy – ‘to support the involvement of citizens in democratic policy making.’ (Snellen, 2005). A framing for technology for this position can be found in the social networking literature: technology is the facilitating media - a social relations tool (Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001).

In the analysis of Norwegian e-Government projects, value theory is used to strengthen the normative element of stakeholder theory, by providing a generalised and simplified foundation for the analysis of stakeholder interests across a range of diverse project types.

*A framing for stakeholder theory normative core development in e-Government*

The main research objective in this endeavour has been to frame an example normative core for stakeholder theory in the context of e-Government research. The early parts of the article have outlined the motivation for this development. Stakeholder theory has traditionally been illustrated as a nested model of three inter-related parts, namely descriptive, instrumental and normative aspects, where the descriptive and instrumental aspects are dependent on the normative core. Figure 1 illustrates the framing of stakeholder theory for e-Government use, incorporating a normative core rooted in public sector values.



**Figure 1. Stakeholder theory for e-Government, after Donaldson and Preston (1995)**

Whereas, the normative element of stakeholder theory in its private sector form is concerned to argue the intrinsic rights of a corporation's stakeholders on philosophical grounds, the framework for e-Government takes this argument as given in the public sector. Democratic government should obviously serve the interests of its citizen stakeholders. The value positions instead offer a way of categorizing the types of interests that stakeholders may be concerned with. A further difference is that stakeholder value in the framework is not primarily seen in economic terms, though this will be an important element of any discussion of interests, but also includes benefits such as service and engagement which are hard to quantify. Conventional ST and the e-Government adaptation share the descriptive task to identify meaningful stakeholder groups and relationships, and to investigate the instrumental effects of stakeholder interactions. The framework serves as the basis for the empirical case investigation to follow. In particular the analysis will develop insights into stakeholder groups, their salience, and the value positions they hold.

### **3 RESEARCH STRATEGY**

Our study is exploratory in nature, emphasising the understanding of phenomena within their real-life context (Yin, 2009). Exploratory case studies typically address how and why questions (Yin, 2009) concerning the dynamics present within a particularly contextual setting (Eisenhardt, 1989), with the objective of developing initial understandings (Kaplan and Maxwell, 2005). We use a multiple case study approach, to provide strong theoretical base for theory building (Yin, 2009, Benbasat et al., 1987), allowing for cross-case comparisons to clarify whether findings are idiosyncratic to a single case, or replicated through several cases. Multiple case studies allow us to establish patterns of relationships between constructs within and across cases with their underlying logical arguments (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) by recursive cycling among the case data. The method consists of selecting multiple cases, triangulating data during data collection, and analysing the data both within cases and across cases (Yin, 2009), where the data is investigated in many divergent ways (Eisenhardt, 1989).

#### *Case selection*

The selection procedure follows a theoretical replication logic (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, Yin, 2009), where cases are selected to illuminate relationships between stakeholders and their values. Whereas single- case studies may richly describe the phenomena, multiple case studies provide comparison to where propositions are more deeply grounded in varied empirical settings (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). To delineate constructs and relationships between

stakeholders, their various interests and their underlying normative value positions, our cases were selected based on two selection criteria.

First, the cases represent a portfolio of initiatives that typically to be found within the e-Government area, enabling cross-case comparison and more robust theory grounded in varied empirical evidence (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) in a context well-suited for studying the phenomena. Our cases represent various government levels (state, county and local) and project of various size, to elaborate on the phenomena we are interested in from various point of views.

Second, the selected cases involve key value positions that are predicted to vary, helping to develop a rich and heterogeneous understanding of how values promoted by various stakeholders influence project development. Stated project objectives - the motivation for why the projects were initiated in the first place - vary from issues related to reducing costs and improving the administrative procedures (Altinn and the eProcurement projects), enhancing quality of the services provided (Altinn, the eProcurement and the eDialogue projects), and better communication and inclusion of citizens and other stakeholders (eDialogue and the Democracy Square projects). The broad objectives within and between these cases allow us to analyse them in relation to value position theory. Different stakeholder groups are included in the chosen projects. A more detailed analysis of stakeholder salience (and their value positions) follows; our initial understanding of key stakeholders is included in Table 2.

Our case selection criteria focus more on the inclusion of varied cases across dimensions of objectives, stakeholders, theme and size, than on the comparison of findings from uniform projects. From the cases we have access to rich datasets meeting these criteria: retrospective accounts of the four e-Government projects, including detailed descriptions of contextual issues related to the nature of the e-Government initiative, project coordination and project outcome. Table 2 provides an overview of the four selected cases.

<b>Cases</b>	<b>Key stakeholders<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Project objectives</b>	<b>Government level</b>	<b>Projects size</b>
<b>Altinn</b> – platform for electronic dialogue between government and businesses	Administration Businesses	Reduce administrative burden for businesses, whilst and supporting administrative procedure	State	Several hundred million Euros
<b>eProcurement</b> – building and implementation of eProcurement system for the county	Administration Businesses	Reduce costs and loyalty to agreements whilst maintaining consistent administration	County	A few million Euros
<b>eDialogue</b> - develop and implement improved communication solutions between LK and civil society	Citizens Politicians	Improve efficiency at municipal one-stop-shop and increase political participation	Local	Less than one 100 thousand Euro
<b>The Democracy Square</b> – implement online discussion forum	Citizens	Increase citizen engagement	Local and county	Around 100 thousand Euros

**Table 2. Summary of cases**

### *Data collection*

Data collection strategies varied across the case studies investigated, since case studies are typically rich, empirical descriptions of instances of a phenomenon based on a variety of data sources (Yin, 2009). The research followed a multiple data collection, multiple analysis technique strategy. A common primary mode of data collection was open-ended interviews with stakeholders within the projects. Interviews included questions about the project's background, roles and responsibilities, project management, objectives and outcomes. Most of the interviews lasted at least 45 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed. Interviews should be supplemented by other forms of data (Walsham, 2006): project documentation for all the projects was an important source of additional data. Documentation included formal project documents, e-mail conversations and web-site studies. In addition, participant observation took place in some projects, and a Delphi study addressing several stakeholder groups was the primary mode of data collection in one of the case studies included. The cases were longitudinal - followed for several years - and have been the subject of several different analyses and earlier publications, both by the authors and by other researchers. This means that

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<sup>1</sup> Our initial understanding influencing the inclusion of the cases here, a more detailed understanding is further developed in the analysis later on.

there are several professionally researched secondary sources to complement the primary data collection. Table 3 summarises the data collection approach.

Case	Interviews	Project documents	Other data sources	Primary data analysis strategy	Time period	Secondary sources
<b>Altinn</b>	-11 Altinn officials - 4 government officials representing agencies using Altinn	Project plans, meeting minutes, risk assessments business cases	A large number of informal conversations with Altinn officials and representatives from agencies using Altinn	Explorative case analysis to understand if or how a government platform could lead to increased value for societal stakeholders.	<i>Data was collected over a 4 year period</i>	<i>References blinded for review (2 conference papers)</i>
<b>eProcurement</b>	3 interviews with government officials, 10 interviews with businesses representatives,	project mandate and plan, meeting minutes	Several informal conversations with the CIO	Qualitative case study based on stakeholder analysis to identify and understand resistance towards new systems implementation	<i>Data was collected over a 6 month period</i>	<i>References blinded for review (project report)</i>
<b>eDialogue</b>	2 focus group interviews including 2 government officials and 6 politicians	Project plans, minutes from project meetings, evaluation reports.	Delphi-study including 8 stakeholder groups, representing various stakeholder such as business associations, immigrant, administration officials and expats.	A two-step approach was conducted, starting with a stakeholder analysis based on interviews and project documentations, succeeded by the Delphi study analysis.	Data collection activities took place within a time period of six months.	<i>References blinded for review (conference paper)</i>
<b>The Democracy Square</b>	10 interviews with politicians, 6 with government officials and 2 with vendor representatives.	Project documentation and e-mails (approximately 200 pages of text)	Participant observation of monthly project meetings for 2,5 years. 593 online citizen and politician postings.	Explorative case analyses based on the genre perspective and stakeholder theory, content data analysis of project documents, minutes from observations and online postings.	The data was collected over a period of 15 month	<i>References blinded for review (2 journal papers)</i>

**Table 3. Empirical data sources**

### *Data analysis*

Reporting from multiple case studies is challenging since space does not permit rich narratives; here the use of tables to summarize case evidence is central to signalling the empirical grounding (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Our findings are firstly synthesised into tables that summarize data from individual cases according to our theoretical framework (Stake, 2006), following a pattern-matching logic where empirical patterns are compared with the theory predictions to strengthen internal validity (Yin, 2009). Next, cross-case assertions are generated by triangulating the findings reported from individual cases (Stake, 2006). Structured case descriptions follow to further emphasize the rigor and depth of the empirical grounding of the theory (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

The data analysis and cross-case synthesis was conducted in three steps. First, data from each case study were analysed to identify initial, broad categories of stakeholders and value positions from each case and to link related concepts within each case. We did so by analysing stakeholder's salience and values, as reported in table 4 and 5 in analysis and findings section (including supporting evidences from the cases). Second, we conducted cross-case analyses, exploring similar concepts and relationships across cases, comparing the categories identified from each case. The analyses included comparisons of the value positions and stakeholder analysis identified in each case (table 6), resulting in similar categories at the cross-case level. Furthermore, our cross-case analyses include the identification of how stakeholder's salience and value sponsor impact vary across project phases, as reported in table 7. Finally, we compared our results with previous research in the implication section, following Eisenhardt and Graebner's (2007) guidelines, to refine our concepts and understanding.

Our methodological approach is limited by the availability of suitable in-depth case studies and some differences in the ways data was collected between the cases. The variety of e-Government projects is exceptionally large, so that it is not possible with a case selection strategy to represent all the different types of projects, and the cases have a common Norwegian context, which may differentiate them in some ways from cases from other countries.

## **4 FOUR E-GOVERNMENT CASES**

### *Altinn (All-in)*

Altinn is the Norwegian government's digital interface with industry; considered a corner stone of Norwegian e-Government. It's origin can be traced to collaboration between the Norwegian Tax Administration, Statistics Norway and the Brønnøysund Register Centre in 2000. The concept of a G2B (government to business) portal emerged, and eventually materialized as the

Altinn web portal in 2003. In the initiation phase, the mandate for the portal was to simplify and reduce the administrative burden for business, whilst at the same time increasing efficiency in government agencies. The administration was instrumental in establishing the portal, representing a key stakeholder group together with business and industry organizations that would be the users of such services. All stakeholders are considered legitimate as the portal directly influences their processes. Internal stakeholders are considered powerful in relation to establishing and running the portal and have the power to decide whether to use the system or not. The portal benefited both internal and external stakeholders who therefore had a degree of urgency related to implementing and using the system.

The most evident value position (at the normative core) was service ideal, but the professionalism ideal and the efficiency ideal were also influential value positions. Early on, the focus was predominantly technical with emphasis on electronic forms. In 2004, the Brønnøysund Register Centre was made responsible for the administration and further development of Altinn by mandate from the Ministry of Commerce. Altinn quickly became popular and by 2009, 23 agencies and 1 municipality had joined. As the original contracts with systems providers (vendors) were drawing towards their end, a strategy process was initiated to investigate future possibilities. A joint vision for the consortium members was formulated and it became apparent that Altinn needed to be more than a technical platform to tap into the full potential of e-Government benefits. 'World-class e-Government' became the objective and slogan for the next version. The mandate from the Ministry of Commerce was revised, calling for reporting of the (economic) value generated by Altinn. Consequently, the project was implemented to identify benefits and define processes to ensure that the services provided through Altinn realized financial value. Business cases were developed and benefits realization plans were made for all new services. Business cases tended to be focused on financial returns, and the net present value of services delivered through the portal was estimated at roughly 2 billion Euros in 2010. Benefits realization is considered highly dependent on cross-agency collaboration and joint service processes. Hence, the Brønnøysund Register Centre refocused their technical administrator role towards facilitation of interoperability (both in terms of technology and processes) to leverage benefits. This effort is considered consistent with the professionalism ideal, as Altinn serves as technological infrastructure for Norwegian government organizations, and as the Brønnøysund Register Centre is enabling equity by ensuring that all organizations using the infrastructure is provided with support that enables them to maximize value. Against this backdrop, new technology was introduced and Altinn was rebuilt from scratch to meet the new requirements.

Key stakeholders (at the descriptive level of the stakeholder analysis) include the initiating agencies of Altinn (administration), the Ministry of Commerce (politicians - funding and

mandate), state agencies (administration - as actual or potential service owners) and industry (businesses). All stakeholders considered Altinn to be an important initiative as it serves their individual interests and therefor perceived a high degree of urgency; agencies have access to an e-service development platform that increases their productivity: industry gets improved services and reduced administrative burden and the Brønnøysund Register Centre improves its image as a central and innovative agency.

#### *E-procurement in Vest-Agder county*

Vest-Agder county is one of Norway's 18 regional governments, located in the southern part of Norway with about 175,000 inhabitants distributed across 15 municipalities. The main responsibilities of the regional counties are to provide secondary education, transportation and communication, culture, regional development, dental services and environmental issues. Vest-Agder county is highly distributed with 1600 employees spread over the county's 15 municipalities. The distributed nature of the county contributed to difficulties in efficient procurement, as local pragmatism often prevailed over procurement contracts agreed centrally. It was often more effective for the distributed units to purchase locally, rather than using existing purchasing arrangements which often involved additional bureaucracy and increased delivery times. To address this, Vest-Agder county initiated a series of pilot eProcurement projects. A proprietary solution was chosen and implemented in a stepwise fashion through three pilots spanning major units in the county. Key objectives were to reduce costs in relation to handling invoices and to improve loyalty to purchase agreements. The primary value position related to the normative core was thus the efficiency ideal, but the professionalism ideal was also important: the eProcurement system was seen as an infrastructure component that should ensure equity and compliance with rules, regulations and purchasing agreements.

Key stakeholders were the county administration (particularly the county buyers) and the suppliers. These are considered legitimate as they all have direct interests in the new system, due to its' effect on their processes. They also possessed the power to use, or not use, the new system. Initially, key stakeholders recognised potential benefits, were generally positive and expressed a sense of urgency to get the new systems operational – with the possible exception of the county buyers who were reluctant to have their autonomy curtailed. As the project entered the operational phase, the lack of national standards and uncertainty caused by competing initiatives made the suppliers reluctant to re-develop their inventory lists. This involved considerable effort without any certain return, as they would have to do it again if a competing standard prevailed. Although a national standardization body existed at this time, it had not yet come up with a national standard. The suppliers' urgency level evaporated with devastating effect. With few suppliers on board the eProcurement system never became a success, and the

proprietary solution was eventually replaced by a national initiative. The main causes for the slow adoption of the proprietary system were reported to be lack of industry standards, technical issues, and fear of committing to the 'wrong' standard by the suppliers.

### *eDialogue*

Lyngdal municipality, a medium-sized local municipality in Southern Norway, ran an initiative to identify the principle stakeholders and their interests in citizen-municipality communication. The project was driven by the administration since they considered existing communication channels with citizens to be deficient and detrimental to efficiency ideal. The administration thus defined the problem, initiated the project, and administered it throughout the various project phases. Stakeholder groups were asked to give input on their communication requirements for public affairs, their preferences concerning communication channels, their ideas on how Lyngdal could further develop eParticipation services, and suggestions on how to prioritize these. The most evident value positions in the initiation phase were engagement ideal (citizen-centricity and dialogue) and efficiency ideal (more effective and productive citizen-services); whereas service ideal was emphasized less. Salient stakeholders included politicians, especially the mayor, who initiated the project to better understand citizens' preferences on how to communicate and participate in local democracy. Politicians were therefore legitimate (initiated the project), with power to influence (e.g. by allocating funding) and displayed urgency (a need to address identified weaknesses). The administration was the second important stakeholder group, wielding power to influence based on their commission from the politicians, possessing urgency based on their perceived need for improvement, but with less legitimacy than the politicians, since the administration should ideally stay neutral in political discourse between citizen stakeholder groups and politicians.

The project was partly initiated to identify external stakeholders' interests (at the descriptive level). Several external stakeholder groups (such as citizens, businesses and NGO's) may legitimately influence eParticipation services and communication preferences (at the instrumental level). Though the internal stakeholders retained the power to design and commission eventual eParticipation services, external stakeholders possessed some influence through their participation. However, their urgency concerning the engagement ideal part of the project proved low; none of the external stakeholders expressed urgent need for any new services. They were more focused on efficiency ideal - issues related to efficiency and productivity - than political discourse and how to influence policymaking. External stakeholders preferred digital communication, while customized information on a need-to-know basis was considered important to avoid information overload. They would like to be

informed when their interests are affected, and to be able to access digital communication tools to respond to the municipality.

The communication preferences identified through the mapping exercises were fed back into the municipality's internal processes to develop better governance services. Services were elaborated incrementally to maximise benefits and prioritize identified quick wins. However, the project gradually lost momentum and disappeared from sight, although it was never formally terminated. The early phases of the project failed to generate a real sense of urgency from any stakeholder group. The project was initiated in response to an internal perception that external stakeholders needed better eParticipation services. Both politicians and the administration found the project to be important early on, but faced with a lack of obvious commitment from external stakeholders, could not sustain a sense of urgency sufficient to drive the project to completion.

### *Democracy Square*

A Norwegian municipality and two county administrations initiated the Democracy Square project. The project, designed to foster electronic dialogue between politicians and citizens through a discussion forum, where initiated to address the challenge of decreased voter turnout in local and regional elections, and legitimize local autonomy. The Democracy Square facilitated political debate for electors, aiming to increase their influence on policymaking. The primary value position was therefore the engagement ideal. From the initiation until the implementation phase, the project was driven by the administration who initiated the work, received funding, and participated in the project group. They were legitimate stakeholders in the initiation and development phases (appointed by politicians) with power to influence (through project funding from the ministry). Urgency was driven by a need to develop new services providing citizens (especially young people) the opportunity to interact with politicians before the upcoming local election. A second internal stakeholder group, the politicians, were not part of the project group before launch. Politicians had both legitimacy and power, while urgency from their part was taken for granted by the project group and consequently there was little emphasis on motivating them to participate. This turned out to be a mistake; politicians' interest in participating in online discussions with citizens was limited, and their absence in the discussions proved demotivating for other stakeholders.

The vendor, developing the technical platform, constituted the external salient stakeholder group in the early phases of the project. Their urgency came from their need to develop new products for the market, and the Democracy Square was a pilot project for commercialising their products. They received legitimacy early in the initiation of the project by being invited into the project group, and power from their ability to design and develop the system. Their

power was further strengthened by the fact that there were no other project group members with technical expertise to contradict them. Like the administration, the vendor's interest diminished after Democracy Square was launched. The technical platform was up and running, the bill was paid, and their interest was restricted to maintain the site. Further development and improvement of the services proved difficult: the vendor would not commit more time without further payment.

The second main external stakeholder group, the citizens, were not represented in the project group. Even though Democracy Square was explicitly targeted at young citizens, the project group consisted mostly of middle-aged men. However, emphasis was made on motivating citizens to participate, by distributing information to schools and marketing the project. Entering the operational phase a group of citizens (activists interested in discussing politics) became salient; being legitimate (the target group), having power (invited to initiate discussions) and displaying urgency (personal political motivation). However, their motivation fell away quickly since there were no policymakers present to hear their arguments. Many of the last postings, in the months before the site was closed, referred to the absence of the politicians – interpreted as contempt for the activists' opinions. The administration's saliency dropped after the project was launched, since they were not expected to actively participate in the online discussions. Interest in the project evaporated swiftly and it was terminated shortly after the election.

## **5 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

We analyse our cases using the stakeholder value framing (Figure 1) to identify which values drive salient stakeholders in e-Government projects. Stakeholder salience analysis identifies the key stakeholders and describes their salience related to each project objective based on the composition of the three salience attributes: power, legitimacy and urgency. Stakeholders with a clear direct impact on project outcomes are considered to be key stakeholders. Each salience attribute is assigned a rating of low, medium or high, and stakeholders receiving a rating of high for all three attributes are considered salient. Table 4 summarizes the salience analysis.

<b>Case</b>	<b>Key stakeholders</b>	<b>Power</b>	<b>Legitimacy</b>	<b>Urgency</b>	<b>Salient</b>
<b>Altnn</b>	Administration Politicians Businesses Vendor(s)	High High High Medium	High High High Medium	Medium High High High	S S S
<b>eProcurement</b>	Administration Businesses (suppliers) Standardization bodies	High High High	High High High	High Low Medium	S
<b>eDialogue</b>	Administration Politicians Citizens Businesses NGOs	High High Medium Medium Medium	Medium / High High High High High	High High (Mayor) Low Low Low	S S
<b>The Democracy Square</b>	Administration Politicians Activists Consumer citizens Vendor	Medium High Medium/ High Medium/ High Medium	Low High High High Low	Medium Medium High Low High	S S

**Table 4. Salient stakeholders for each case**

At least one salient stakeholder is identified in each of the four cases. However, different stakeholder groups are salient in the different cases. The administration is a key stakeholder in all four projects, reflecting its central role in initiating and implementing e-Government project; however, these efforts are so diverse that different stakeholders are potentially salient in different contexts. Thus, many different stakeholders can be legitimate in e-Government projects (reflecting the duty of government to serve broad communities of interests) and legitimacy ratings do not vary much. Power ratings also vary comparatively little: a stakeholder must have some degree of power to be capable of influencing a project's outcome. A key attribute in all four cases is urgency, as also suggested by Sæbø et al. (2011). Salient stakeholders in all four cases score high on all attributes, whereas other stakeholders score low on urgency, indicating urgency to be the attribute with key variation from one stakeholder group to the next.

The next analytical phase is to identify which value positions drive salient stakeholders in e-Government projects. This answered by a two-step analytical approach. Table 5 presents a value position analysis of the cases.

<b>Cases</b>	<b>Value positions</b>	<b>Supporting evidence / description</b>
<b>Altinn</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Service ideal</li> <li>- Professionalism ideal</li> <li>- Efficiency ideal</li> </ul>	<p>The main purpose of Altinn is to reduce the administrative burden for businesses.</p> <p>Regulatory professionalism was an important ambition to provide a common platform at the national level.</p> <p>All investments in Altinn shall be grounded in socio-economic benefits but benefits for government entities and industry or businesses are equally desirable, thus indicating the importance of both the efficiency and service ideals.</p>
<b>eProcurement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Efficiency ideal</li> <li>- Professionalism ideal</li> </ul>	<p>The main objectives are to streamline internal procurement processes and reduce related costs, while benefitting business partners by making them more attractive partners for government and by streamlining their internal processes. This relates well with the Efficiency ideal.</p> <p>Other desired effects include loyalty to agreements and IT infrastructure. This was corroborated in conversations with the CIO as disloyalty to agreements was frequent and seen as clear violation of the Professionalism ideal.</p>
<b>eDialogue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engagement ideal</li> <li>- Efficiency ideal</li> </ul>	<p>The main objectives include more effective communication and dialogue between the municipality and stakeholders, to accommodate for more and better engagement by for instance citizens, businesses and NGO within the municipality. Hence, the engagement ideal was the key value position for the initiation of the project.</p> <p>The project was also grounded in the efficiency ideal, aiming to make the communication patterns more streamlined and easier to use for all stakeholders, ideally to decrease the effort needed for the municipality as well as the external stakeholders.</p>
<b>The Democracy Square</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engagement ideal</li> </ul>	<p>The project was initiated to foster electronic dialogue between citizens and politicians, to increase citizens' participation in the public discourse, and was designed as an autonomous project independent of existing public services. Hence, the engagement ideal was the dominating value position, aiming to introduce new services to improve the dialogue, without really considering other value positions as core driver when initiating the project.</p>

**Table 5. Value position analysis for the cases**

All the value positions from our original model (table 1) are represented in the cases; however, value positions vary between cases. Table 6 identifies salient stakeholders representing particular value positions in the four cases.

<b>Value position</b>	<b>Salient stakeholder</b>	<b>Case examples</b>
<b>Professionalism ideal</b>	Administrations Politicians	Altinn, eProcurement,
<b>Efficiency ideal</b>	Administrations Politicians Businesses	Altinn, eProcurement, eDialogue
<b>Service ideal</b>	Administrations Politicians Businesses	Altinn,
<b>Engagement ideal</b>	Politicians Activists	eDialogue, Democracy Square

**Table 6. Value position and salient stakeholder analysis**

Table 7 *Error! Reference source not found.* identifies value sponsors at succeeding stages of the projects. In the most successful case (Altinn), both internal and external stakeholders were salient during initiation and operational phase, with the administration and the software vendor left to drive the implementation. Both the eProcurement and Democracy Square cases were unsuccessful due to a similar pattern of decreasing urgency in involvement by important sponsors. In the eProcurement case, potential supplier businesses could not be persuaded to standardize their inventory lists, leaving the project effectively stranded; in the Democracy Square case both the administration and the vendor ceased to be urgently involved, followed by politicians, leaving the project with no value sponsor in a position to ensure its success. Dialogue with external stakeholders in the eDialogue case effectively changed the direction of the project, (ironically) away from its original citizen engagement focus towards an information (as a service) and efficiency focus; the eventual outcomes are not known at the time of writing.

Case	Initiating		Implementation		Operational	
	Stakeholder	Value position	Stakeholder	Value position	Stakeholder	Value position
Altinn	Politicians Administration Businesses	Efficiency, Service, Professionalism	Administration Vendors	Efficiency, Service, Professionalism	Politicians Administration Businesses	Efficiency, Service, Professionalism
eProcurement	Administration	Efficiency, Service Professionalism	Administration Businesses	Efficiency, Service Professionalism	Administration (Businesses)	Efficiency, Service Professionalism
eDialogue	Administration Politician	Efficiency, Service, Engagement	Administration Politician	Efficiency, Service, Engagement		
Democracy Square	Administration Politicians	Efficiency	Administration Politicians Vendor	Engagement	Activist (Politicians)	Engagement

**Table 7. Stakeholders and value sponsors according to project phase**

Stakeholder groups sponsor various value positions. Administration, politicians and businesses have a common interest in sponsoring efficiency and service (though these values can compete or be in conflict) and administrators tend to work with an efficiency imperative (Rose et al., 2015a). Projects are often initiated to lower the administrative burden and, at the same time, to improve the quality of the services provided. However, only politicians and activist citizens demonstrate saliency in sponsoring the engagement ideal.

Our analysis, focusing on the normative core of the stakeholder theory by introducing values positions for e-Government, has implications for stakeholder theory as well as the e-Government field of research, which are discussed next.

## **6 IMPLICATIONS FOR E-GOVERNMENT THEORY AND PRACTICE**

### *Development of stakeholder theory for use in the e-Government field*

The basic normative proposition of ST is that there is a moral imperative to consider the interests of various stakeholders (rather than focusing solely on maximising shareholder gain) (Flak and Rose, 2005). This drives the instrumental proposition that stakeholder management might be more effective in increasing company value, and the descriptive need to identify stakeholders and consider their interests. ST raised interest in the management field as it provided an alternative perspective to the dominant profit maximisation logics (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). In the public sector, however, profit maximisation has never been the dominant logic (Rose et al., 2015b) and the imperative to consider stakeholders interests (to maximise the public good) is taken for granted. This implies that the normative core of stakeholder theory

in the public sector is undeveloped – and that the descriptive and instrumental applications of ST in the field consequently lack motivation and depth.

#### *Incorporation of value position theory*

Existing research has analysed stakeholder interests on a case-by-case basis (Lindgren, 2014, Scholl, 2004). Although it's always possible to analyse individual stakeholder interests on this ad-hoc basis, the use of generic value positions has a variety of advantages. Values refer to what is wanted (desires and intentions), what is intended for the future (aims and purposes), and to how choices about ends and means are prioritised (prizing and appraisal). Used in this way they represent a more comprehensive definition of 'interest.' Value positions represent the dominant value choices for a given context. These provide a baseline which can be argued theoretically, and also facilitate cross case comparison – consequently the development of generalizable propositions. They also facilitate connections to other bodies of theory and make it possible to develop advice for managers that transcends individual cases. The value position framework used for this investigation comprises efficiency ideal, service ideal, professionalism ideal, and engagement ideal (Rose et al., 2015b). It is derived from the values discussion in public administration and corresponding discussions in the e-Government literature that are explicitly designed to distinguish the ethos of public service from that of the private sector. This is also a normative discussion of what the focus of the public sector (and e-Government) ought to be. The value position framework thus carries an existing theoretical and empirical justification and is targeted at e-Government. Whilst the normative core of stakeholder theory has yet to be defined for the public-sector context, value theory (Rose et al., 2015b) is here shown to be a candidate for developing it. There may be other candidate theories and other ways of pursuing the contextualisation of ST, but the value position framework is a compatible good-fit tool that is easy to work with for experienced e-Government researchers. This research provides a simple illustration of how value position theory can be incorporated into stakeholder theory to provide an e-Government specific normative core. This increases the explanatory power of ST by facilitating the analysis of stakeholder interests in individual cases, and by enabling the analysis of interrelationships between stakeholders and value positions across multiple case studies. The field can benefit from a common comparable starting point for future analyses.

An integrated stakeholder theory for e-Government might relate normative, descriptive and instrumental elements with the following propositions.

- Value positions (normative ST), for instance efficiency, professionalism, service and engagement ideals, are espoused by known stakeholder groups, for instance politicians,

administrations, citizens, businesses, with different degrees of salience (descriptive ST), incorporating power, urgency, legitimacy.

- Stakeholder groups interact to influence the outcomes of e-Government initiatives (together with other factors) according to their salience (instrumental ST).
- Outcomes (for instance IT systems, administrative changes, new e-services) reflect these interactions - thus the value positions of the salient stakeholders.

#### *The salience of e-government stakeholders*

Our findings corroborate existing evidence that the administration usually is a primary stakeholder group within e-Government initiatives (Sæbø et al., 2011). It plays a commissioning and executive role that is difficult for other stakeholders to take over. The administration is therefore always a stakeholder, generally salient, and always brings its own value positions to the discussion table. Projects are dependent on government internal stakeholders experiencing high urgency. When the administration ceases to exhibit urgency in promoting the project it usually dies, even after implementation. The Democracy Square case shows what may happen when the administration ceases to drive a project after implementation. For policy makers, this implies that all e-Government efforts need a distinct administrative organization with clear responsibility for the outcome of the effort.

Many stakeholders are legitimate in the e-Government projects, which also makes the value positions that they espouse legitimate (Flak and Rose, 2005). Our findings show that many can also be powerful, especially if the power to default (not to participate in a meaningful way) is considered. Therefore, even in participatory contexts like Scandinavia, the defining salience attribute for stakeholders in the e-Government field is urgency. The value position that is being endorsed must carry weight in a stakeholder group's discourse, they must commit resources commensurate with the scope of the project and they must be able to sustain a sense of urgency through the life of the project. The eProcurement and Democracy Square cases show what happens when a key stakeholder loses urgency during the course of a project. This implies that e-Government initiatives need a salient stakeholder responsible for monitoring urgency amongst other stakeholders, and for revising the project objectives and/or bringing new stakeholders in if necessary. Policy makers need to trigger urgency in the responsible administrative organization, which is usually a primary stakeholder.

#### *Value propositions for e-government initiatives*

The efficiency and professionalism ideals are basic value positions for administrations - the efficiency imperative (Rose et al., 2015a) means that they usually promote cost savings and productivity gains with vigour. However, these internal value positions hold less intrinsic value

for other stakeholders, and all the projects we studied were dependent upon the active participation of external stakeholders who are not under the control of the administration. It therefore follows that the efficiency ideal must be matched with value positions important to other stakeholders for the project to succeed, at least in contexts where e-Service use is voluntary as is customary in Norway. The cases show the widespread promotion of the efficiency ideal by the administration; however, the eProcurement project was terminated despite the administration's urgent involvement. This should focus the attention of policy makers – projects focusing solely on administrative cost savings and productivity gains can be at risk.

Since the administration is commonly the primary stakeholder, but equally commonly dependent upon the urgent participation of other stakeholders, it follows that there is a need to create joint value propositions between internal and external stakeholders. The Altinn case demonstrates commitment from both internal and external stakeholders through the various phases, whereas the eProcurement project runs into difficulties because of the poor motivation of the external stakeholders, and Democracy Square loses momentum because of the poor motivation of the internal stakeholders (administration and politicians). Motivational values for both governmental and societal sponsors should be explored early in any e-Government effort, and should remain in focus through the life of the initiative.

It seems the engagement ideal value carries less urgency for the administration at the present time, and that there is no natural external stakeholder who is able to compensate for this lack. Our study confirms the conclusion of a number of earlier studies (e.g. Chadwick 2003, 2011). Therefore, there is a pressing need to marry these kinds of initiative with value motivations that carry more urgency. In the Democracy Square case we see that neither politicians nor administration display enough urgency to hold the project alive, despite the commitment of activists. Governments should be wary of launching engagement ideal efforts that do not incorporate other value positions, as such projects may be difficult to sustain. Engagement efforts are sometimes better left to NGOs and the citizens themselves. However, government stakeholders could benefit from participating in engagement arenas managed outside government and should consider doing so.

## **7 CONCLUSIONS, AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The starting point for this study was the observation that the normative aspect of stakeholder theory is poorly developed for the e-Government context. We sharpened ST by framing a value-oriented normative core that could serve to replace the primarily private sector focus of the original theory. We incorporated value position theory (Rose et al., 2015b) to provide the missing context specific normative direction. One of the strengths of stakeholder theory is its

descriptive power to identify stakeholders and their relative importance, often referred to as salience (Mitchell et al., 1997). Our study is novel in that it combines stakeholder salience (Sæbø et al., 2011) with public values (Rose et al., 2015b) for the first time. Value theory contributed four positions that stakeholders typically adopt: the efficiency ideal, service ideal, professionalism ideal, and engagement ideal. Several stakeholder groups were found to be salient in the projects we studied: administrations, politicians, businesses and activists. A wide range of other stakeholders were observed in the cases and many of these can also be legitimately involved, with the potential to be salient stakeholders in other types of projects. Both internal and external stakeholders were represented. The value positions were observed in various combinations through the cases, however promoted with varying degrees of urgency. The administration usually promoted the efficiency ideal with urgency, the regulatory professionalism and service ideals with less urgency (though the service ideal was a high priority for many external stakeholders), and displayed a concern for the engagement ideal. Businesses promoted the service and efficiency ideals. Administrations, politicians and politically active citizens promoted engagement ideal – though only the activists displayed consistent urgency in pursuing these goals.

We make the following contributions;

- We identify a problem with stakeholder theory in its adoption to the public sector, namely the inappropriate normative core and show that e-Government researchers have not recognised or addressed this problem
- We provide a value-oriented normative core for stakeholder theory appropriate to the e-Government field
- We show how stakeholder theory and value position theory can be integrated and use the resulting framework to analyse four Norwegian e-Government cases
- The analysis shows how stakeholders' interests are bound into generic value positions, how the interaction of internal and external stakeholders' influences projects, and how urgency is the determinant salience attribute.
- We derive implications for both the e-Government field and its future adaptations of stakeholder theory

Our work has implications for e-Government practitioners and policy makers: they need to develop stakeholder management that frames projects so that the values of different stakeholder groups, both internal and external, are explicit, incorporated and properly communicated. Project managers further need to maintain commitment (urgency) amongst important stakeholders through various phases of the project – also beyond the technical implementation.

Certain kinds of value motivations can combine well (service improvement and efficiency ideal) whereas other value framings may require more care, or should be avoided altogether, since they do not generate sustainable stakeholder urgency. The value framing provides guidance for managers defining goals for e-Government initiatives and simplifies their stakeholder analysis.

Avenues for future research include the exploration of reproducible stakeholder value studies in different political and democratic cultures, or across longer stretches of time, since the framing of our studies is derived within the boundaries of open, trusting and relatively equal Scandinavian societies with flat power distributions and thick government. The value framing that we principally engage with is most generalizable between the mature Western democracies; emerging democracies have much more focus on values associated with professionalism ideal - establishing reliability, honesty and integrity in their public services. Moreover, our study reveals the need for further elaboration of the specific roles of various stakeholders, to elaborate our understanding of sub-categories of stakeholder groups like politicians, citizens and businesses. For instance, more research is needed to understand how politicians differ regarding areas of responsibilities and governmental level (local regional or national). A further interest is to develop the technology framing aspect of the value position framework in the context of ST, which has been beyond the scope of the present article. This opens a possibility to build an information technology perspective into stakeholder theory that it currently lacks.

Our research is of exploratory nature. We take empirical cases chosen to illustrate a spread of stakeholders and their normative values, which act as exemplars but cannot be fully inclusive or representative of all e-Government cases. Furthermore, even though we will argue that the cases are typical, we acknowledge the fact that they are all from Norway. Therefore, the generalizability of our contribution is also limited. As we find our work to act as starting hypotheses, more detailed empirical studies are needed to further validate our work. Finally, a future research opportunity includes a further exploration on how to leverage cumulative cross-case research in the domain by exploiting the common reference frame for stakeholder analysis we have provided. While we have not investigated these relationships, it seems safe to assume that our work on the normative core has implications for both for instrumental and descriptive ST in the public sector. Instrumental aspects may include various stakeholder management issues as well as their effect on project performance; descriptive aspects may include further connections between stakeholder values and salience.

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