E-GOVERNMENT: ICT FROM A PUBLIC MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

Kris SNIJKERS

Abstract

In this paper we will argue that the present e-Government approach is a technology-driven one. We will point out the difference between a technology-driven approach and an approach in which classic values of public administration are the leading principles. These values cover economic values (e.g. effectiveness and efficiency), democratic values (e.g. accountability, equity) and legal values (e.g. rule of law, privacy). On the one hand, these values are contradictory; on the other hand, ICTs are an instrument that gives us new possibilities to find a balance between them. This theoretical framework will be further explored and illustrated by a Belgian case in which ICTs successfully were used to improve public administration in all its aspects.

1 Introduction

During the past years a lot of attention has been paid to the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in business processes. In the public sector (e-Government) as well as in the private sector (e-Business) it was believed that ICTs could be used to achieve a more efficient and effective service delivery. In this way, both in the public as well as in the private sector, the (predominantly economic) perspective on the possibilities of ICTs was the same. In this paper we want to point out that economic values are not the only values that have to be taken into account in e-Government. The use of ICTs will not only affect classic economic values, but also legal and democratic values. However, these effects seldom are made clear in practice.

In the first section we will look at the present, common, perspective on e-Government in the public sector. We will argue that e-Government is developed mainly from an economic point of view. Yet, in public administration not only economic values have to be taken into account. In the second section of this paper we will explore the concept of ‘values’ in public administration. What are values in public administration? How can we categorise these values? What is the effect of these values on the way in which public administration and the relation between the citizen and the state is structured? The third section of the paper explores the influence of ICTs on these values. What happens when we introduce ICTs in public administration? Can we use ICTs to improve a certain set of values? In the fourth section it is argued that ICTs can lead towards a clash between different categories of values if the values of an e-Government project are not made explicit in advance. The last section of this paper explores a Belgian case: the Crossroad Bank for Social Security. In this project, it was tried to find a balance between several categories of values.

2 e-Government and the danger of technology driven change

In the public sector, ICTs were believed to overcome some known problems. Public service delivery used to be organised according to the needs and wants of the administration, instead of the needs and wants of the citizen. In this way, public service delivery suffered from the compartmentalisation and fragmentation of public administration itself. Information and services were scattered throughout the administration, making it difficult for citizens to find a solution to their specific problems. However, through the use of ICTs, it is now possible to

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1 Kris Snijkers is research assistant at the Public Management Institute, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium (kris.snijkers@soc.kuleuven.ac.be).
organise public service delivery according to the needs of the citizen. Front-office solutions like portals, pro-active services and one-stop-shops go hand in hand with the back-office integration of different administrations.

The introduction of ICTs leads towards new forms of governance, in which different actors from the public as well as from the private sector collaborate to produce public services. In these new forms of co-production of public services classic forms of government are substituted by new forms of governance. Notions like hierarchy, structures, command and control make way for new concepts like processes, outcomes, collaboration and networks. In order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public services, different administrations have to be prepared to open up their boundaries, to collaborate with others and to accept an increasing interdependency.

Yet, there is a lot of discussion about the influence of ICTs on the way in which public administration takes shape. Bouwman and others distinguish three different perspectives on this issue: technological determinism, socio-organisational determinism and the adaptive structuration theory (Bouwman et al. 2002). Technological determinism claims that technology has a causal influence on the way in which an organisation is transformed. The technology itself is the only determining factor of this transformation. This perspective is contested in socio-organisational determinism. In socio-organisational determinism it is not the technology that determines the way in which it takes shape, but the organisation and existing institutions in which the technology is implemented. The adaptive structuration theory takes a midpoint between these two extremes. In this last theory, technology as well as organisational structures create possibilities and difficulties for each other. Thus, the way in which an organisation transforms through the use of ICTs is the result of an interplay between technology and existing organisational structures.

Snellen en Van de Donk have a similar approach. They make a distinction between a causal and a functional line of reasoning (van de Donk and Snellen 1998). In their view, ICTs can be a causal factor of certain developments, for example an improved efficiency, but this does not necessarily mean that these new possibilities of ICTs will actually be used in practice. Snellen and Van de Donk argue that the new possibilities of ICT are only used in function of certain wishes, values or developments in public administration (functionality). The important element in this view is that, like in the view of Bouwman and others, technology is not believed to have a determining influence on the way in which public administration takes shape. Public administration will change through the interaction between new technologies that are used in function of existing institutional structures and existing or new ideas and values about the way in which public administration has to be shaped.

Yet, the present improvement of public service delivery through the use of ICTs is a very technologic-driven one, and, if there are any values at stake, these are mainly economic values. The core of the recent e-Government rhetoric seems to be ‘improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery by introducing ICTs’. Many e-Government benchmarks score the front-office use of ICTs, but fail to understand, analyse or score the improvement of back-office processes and the impact of these process innovations on public administration values (Janssen, Rotthier, and Snijkers 2003; Janssen, Rotthier, and Snijkers 2005; Kunstelj and Vintar 2004). Yet, public administration is not the same as business administration. Economic values like effectiveness and efficiency may very well be important values in the context of New Public Management, nevertheless other values like political and democratic values or legal security belong to the core of public administration. So, instead of a technology-driven approach to the introduction of ICTs in the public sector, it is needed to clarify
3 Values in public administration

In public administration, different sets of values are at stake. Now, what are we talking about when we speak about values? Values can be defined as ‘enduring beliefs that influence the choices we make among available means or ends’ (Kernaghan 2003). In this way, values are of great importance when we shape and reform public administration. Values are translated in the structures and organisations of administrations and are an important driver of change (Wise 2002). Even when values are not explicitly set at the forefront of reforms, they are implicitly present in the shadow of everything that happens in public administration. Values are inherent to every process, structure or organisation of public administration. Values touch upon every aspect of public administration: the way in which public organisations are shaped (specialisation/co-ordination), the way in which they interact with each other and the way in which they interact with individuals or organisations outside public administration (citizens, companies or other organisations).

Now, what are these beliefs that influence the way in which public administration is structured? It seems to be problematic to give an exhaustive overview of all values in public administration. As Kernaghan states, it is even more difficult to separate these values in watertight categories (Kernaghan 2003). Yet, the mere fact that it is difficult to categorise values does not mean that all values simply belong to just one category of ‘values’ and are complementary to each other. First, when we do categorise values, it is possible that some values can be placed in several categories. Second, and more important, there are a lot of values that contradict each other.

In this paper we will distinguish three categories of values: legal values, economic values and democratic values. The first category of values are legal values. Legal values comprise the belief in legislation as the guiding principle in public administration. The rule of law, legal equity, legality, uncertainty reduction and neutrality are important legal values. Public administration has to act according to the law that has been voted by parliament. Every citizen is equal before the law. This implicates that public administration has to apply the law in the same way for each citizen. The citizen is protected from abuse by (administrative) courts or ombudsmen. The second category of values are economic values. Economic values are values like effectiveness, efficiency, flexibility and customer orientation. Public administration has to perform well: the administration has to reach a maximum of output with a minimum of inputs. These economic values can be compared with business-values of private sector companies. The third category of values are democratic values. In this category, we place values like transparency, accountability, openness and social equity. According to these values, public administration should not be a closed organisation, but open to citizens’ scrutiny and respond to their wishes or needs. Citizens must be able to influence or participate in decision making processes in public administration. Public administration should treat all citizens in an equal manner. Here, we do not only mean a legal equity, but also a real equity in day-to-day life (e.g. equal ability to make use of public services).

Although the distinction between the three separate categories of values mentioned above may be arbitrary, our classification is of analytical use. Each category of values will lead towards other choices on the way in which we shape and structure public administration. We will now discuss three ‘ideal scenarios’ of public administration according to each category of values. Of course, in practice, these ideal scenarios will seldom occur, as several categories of values are combined in our view on public administration. Yet, as our analysis
will show, it is possible that one category of values prevails over another one and will dominate the way in which public administration is structured.

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<th>Table 1 - Legal, economic and democratic values in public administration</th>
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<td><strong>Legal values</strong></td>
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What would public administration look like if it was organised according to, solely, legal values? As stated earlier, these values comprise the rule of law, legality, legal equity, uncertainty reduction and neutrality. Considine and Lewis call this type of bureaucracy a procedural bureaucracy (Considine and Lewis 2003; Considine and Lewis 1999). This bureaucracy is more commonly known as the classic Weberian bureaucracy (Zuurmond 1994). A Weberian bureaucracy is organised according to the following principles: hierarchy, specialisation, formalisation and control. There is a hierarchic structure that consists of several layers. The most important steering instrument of this type of bureaucracy are laws and regulation. Politicians decide on public policy, these decisions are laid down in rules and regulations that are implemented by a neutral bureaucracy. The top of the hierarchy issues general laws that have to be applied in specific cases by the lower levels of the hierarchy. The lower levels of the hierarchy always have to apply the general rules in the same way. Yet, it is possible that several street-level bureaucrats apply and implement the central laws in a different way, or that one street-level bureaucrat applies the rules in a different way in different cases. To avoid this, systems of control and surveillance are introduced in the bureaucratic structure. The hierarchic top controls the lower levels in order to be sure that regulations are implemented in the same way as was meant by the top. However, street-level bureaucrats always have some level of discretion in the way in which they implement regulation, and systems of control and surveillance can not totally prevent abuses or unwanted ways of implementation. The relation between state and citizen can be seen as a coercive one (Vigoda 2002; Vigoda-Gadot 2004). The citizen is seen as subordinate to the law (Bekkers 1998; Maes 1999; Maes 1998). His participation to public policy is limited to his role as a voter of the politicians that decide public policy. In this way, the risk exists that public administration is not very responsive to citizens’ needs and wants, as citizens can express their discontent through elections only once in a four or five years.

Economic values came to the fore since the 1980s. Especially the ‘corporate culture movement’ and the ‘New Public Management’ were important in the uptake of economic values in public administration (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000; Kernaghan 2003). These movements led to the appearance of a corporate and market type of bureaucracy (Considine and Lewis 1999; Considine and Lewis 2003). Important values in this type of bureaucracy are effectiveness, efficiency, flexibility, and customer orientation. To realise these values, the
hierarchy as co-ordination mechanism does not seem to work (Thompson 2003; Thompson et al. 1991). The role of hierarchy, as main co-ordination principle, is taken over by the market. Different forms of competition between administrations, and between administrations and the private sector, are introduced. Privatisation, benchmarking and agentification are popular management techniques that are used in the public sector to enhance effectiveness and efficiency. Rules and regulation are replaced by the price mechanism as main co-ordination instruments. Civil servants are not only the loyal and neutral bureaucrats that implement regulation, but managers that are responsible for the performance of public administration. The relation between state and citizen is seen as an economic one: the citizen is a customer of public services. This relation between citizen and state is often referred to as the ‘clients-customer model’ (Vigoda 2002; Vigoda-Gadot 2004; Smith and Huntsman 1997; Maes 1999; Maes 1998; Bekkers 1998). The citizen wants to maximise the value he receives for his (tax)money. Hence, public administration has to serve the citizens in the same way as private sector companies do. However, according to Osborne and Gaebler: “Democratic governments exist to serve their citizens. Businesses exist to make profits. And yet it is business that searches obsessively for new ways to please the American people (Osborne and Gaebler 1993).” So, according to these authors, public administration should do its best in using private sector methods to enhance service delivery. Citizens live in a ‘consumer democracy’ (Bellamy and Taylor 1998). Public administration has to enhance the speed and accuracy of its service delivery. The opinion and wishes of citizens are not only important in elections. The administration should always try to be responsive to citizens’ wishes, for example through the use of customer satisfaction surveys (Vigoda 2002; Vigoda-Gadot 2004). In this way, public policy and public service delivery is not only determined by politicians, but by the ‘tyranny’ of the customer. This model is criticised for several reasons. First, the risk exists that public sector managers have more attention to reach their performance targets than for the public interest or the equity of public service delivery (Considine and Lewis 1999; Considine and Lewis 2003). Second, citizens are seen as passive subjects that consume public goods (Smith and Huntsman 1997).

Democratic values, like transparency, equity, accountability and openness, structure public administration in yet another way. This type of bureaucracy can be called a network bureaucracy (Considine and Lewis 1999; Considine and Lewis 2003). A network bureaucracy is not organised like a hierarchy or a market. Co-ordination does not happen through the use of coercion (hierarchy, rules & regulations) or competition (market, money & prices), but through collaboration, co-operation and partnerships. The relation between different administrations and between administrations and citizens is based on trust. The network model of co-ordination is based on the perception that resources, needed to solve a specific policy problem, are spread over several actors (van Venrooy 2002). All these actors have to collaborate and bring their resources together in order to solve the problem. The role of a specific actor is not based on his place in a hierarchy or his competitive advantage but on the knowledge or the resources he possesses in a specific situation. In a network, information is the most important co-ordination instrument. Through the exchange of information and knowledge, the participants in a network try to create openness and a shared vision or goal in the network. Moreover, through the exchange of information, the network will create a qualitative better output than one actor could create on its own. The relation between government and citizen completely differs from the previous two models. In this model, the citizen is a partner from government (Maes 1999; Maes 1998; Vigoda 2002; Vigoda-Gadot 2004). The difference with the hierarchic model is that the citizen is not subordinate to the government, but on equal footing with the government. The difference with the market model is that the citizen is not a passive consumer of products or services from public administration, but he can be actively involved in the ‘production’ of public services. Considine and Smith suggest that in the market model the risks exists that not all citizens have equal
rights (Considine and Lewis 1999; Considine and Lewis 2003). It is possible that economic stronger citizens are benefited over economic weaker citizens, as citizens are seen in the same way as customers of private sector companies. Yet, democratic values explicitly state the importance of equity: all citizens should be treated in the same way. Another important aspect in the relation between government and citizen is the transparency of public administration. Public sector decision making and the inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of public administration should be transparent and accountable.

The three categories of values that are mentioned here, and their corresponding co-ordination model, co-ordination instruments and perspective on the citizen are ideal typical scenario’s. In practice it will not be possible to take, for example, only economic values into account. Public administration should try to integrate all of these values in its structures, processes and relation to citizens. Yet, the different sets of values have a certain mutual exclusiveness. As each co-ordination model and co-ordination instrument enhances a specific set of values, it will be difficult to, for example, introduce an improved customer orientation in a classic hierarchic system. On the other hand, a very customer oriented administration may have less attention for legal or social equity.

4 Impact of ICTs on values in public administration

Now what is the impact of the introduction of ICTs in the public sector on these values? The use of ICTs can enforce a certain set of values. ICTs are, implicitly or explicitly, used in function of certain values. So, it is important to make clear which values are enforced and, thus, which values may be weakened.

ICTs can be introduced to improve legal values. In a classic hierarchy, rules and regulations are the most important co-ordination instrument. As stated earlier, these rules and regulations have to be applied in specific situations by street-level bureaucrats. However, these street-level bureaucrats have certain discretionary powers. They have a certain room to manoeuvre and to apply the rules and regulations in function of their own knowledge, wishes or capacities (De Roo 2001). First of all, a street-level bureaucrat has to know about the existence of a certain regulation and the way in which the hierarchic top wants the regulation to be implemented. Second, a street-level bureaucrat can have some other goals or views on a policy problem than the hierarchic top. In this way, it is possible that, even if he knows of the regulation and its intentions, he still applies the regulation according to his own views. Third, a street-level bureaucrat can lack the necessary capacities to implement a certain regulation. These capacities can, for example, refer to the necessary knowledge or information needed to implement the regulation. Due to the discretionary powers of street-level bureaucrats, it is possible that citizens are not treated in the same way (Snellen 2004; Snellen 1998). Scheepers argues that the amount of discretion of street-level bureaucrats is linked with the amount of standardisation and formalisation of his activities, the hierarchic control on his activities and the knowledge (or information monopoly) of the street-level bureaucrats (Scheepers 1991).

Yet, the introduction of ICTs has an impact on the discretionary powers of street-level bureaucrats. The hierarchic top used to lay down regulation in the form of written laws or regulation. However, according to De Mulder, with the introduction of ICTs, we can speak of a new, fourth, generation of regulation (De Mulder 1998). The first three generations were spoken, written and printed law. Through the course of history, the discretionary powers of street-level bureaucrats became smaller. The discretionary power was the largest with spoken regulation, because the ability to communicate the regulation to street-level bureaucrats and the
possibilities to control the implementation were limited. In this way, street-level bureaucrats did not know the regulation and it was difficult to control them. The use of written and printed regulation tackled this problem. The invention of the printing press, of course, has been of great importance as regulation and laws could be made public in an easy way. The control and surveillance of the hierarchic top became easier as decisions had to be based on formal written dossiers. During the past years, a fourth generation of regulation came to the fore: digital regulation. Through the use of ICTs, regulation can be comprised in applications or decision supporting systems that support the street-level bureaucrat in his day-to-day operations. The knowledge, wishes and capacities of the street-level bureaucrat will become irrelevant as he is bound by the ICT-systems that he uses. He does not make decisions by himself, computers and information systems make decisions for him. As this is the case, the rule of (digital) law and legal equity are enhanced. According to Bovens, Zouridis and Snellen, the street-level bureaucrat is replaced by a screen-level bureaucrat (Bovens and Zouridis 2002;Snellen 2004;Snellen 1998).

Beside the screen-level bureaucrat, Bovens and Zouridis point at the importance of the system-level bureaucrat. This is a new sort of bureaucrat: the technician that designs the information systems. These new bureaucrats play an important role because they may influence public sector decision making and the implementation of public sector regulation. Haque refers to this problem as ‘technocracy’ (Haque 2001). In a technocracy, experts are in a position in which they can affect policy decisions by shaping the information that is passed to decision-makers.

Beside the diminished discretionary powers of street-level bureaucrats, the possibilities of control and surveillance of the hierarchic top increases a lot through the use of ICTs. ICTs enhance the possibilities of control, calculation and transparency of a policy sector (Zouridis and Bekkers 1998;Lips, Boogers, and Weterings 2000). Through the use of ICTs the hierarchic top can collect a lot of data on the inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of the implementation of a certain policy. In this way, the hierarchic top gets more grip on the policy implementation. In the view of Scheepers, the hierarchic gets more control on the activities of the street-level bureaucrat, and the street-level bureaucrat looses his monopoly (Scheepers 1991).

ICTs also can be used in a scenario in which economic values are protected and served. In this scenario, competition between public (and private) administrations is an important principle. In such a case, ICTs offer new ways of co-ordination. Co-ordination through the use of regulation is replaced by co-ordination through the use of ‘prices and money’. So, a policy has to be implemented by that actor that can do this in the cheapest way. The core of this idea is that co-ordination does not have to happen through a detailed regulation of a certain activity or process, like it is the case in a hierarchic way of co-ordination, but by steering at the boundaries of administrations. The calculating capacities of ICTs offer the possibility to process information on the inputs and outputs of an administration (Bekkers 1998;Bekkers 1993;Bekkers 1994). In this way, steering on the boundaries of administrations becomes more easy.

The perspective on the relation between state and citizen is important in this scenario. The citizen is seen as a customer of public administration. In this way, to enhance economic values, ICTs predominantly will be used to enhance the customer orientation of public administration. Due to the principles according to which the classic Weberian bureaucracy was organised (hierarchy, specialisation, formalisation), public service delivery suffered from compartmentalisation, fragmentation and was supply oriented. Hence, it was difficult for citizens to find the public services they wanted. Yet, through the use of ICTs, it becomes possible to restructure public service delivery. Services can be integrated in function of the problem situation of a citizen (Leenes 2001). In this way, for example, all services related to ‘building a house’ can be delivered at one counter. This counter can be a real
one (e.g. a service centre) as well as a virtual one (accessible through phone, fax, digital television or the internet).

The use of ICTs can also enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of public service delivery. A classic problem of public administration is the management of information. Administrations are used to collect, store and process information on their own. Yet, this is an administrative burden for administrations as well as for the citizen. Administrations have to collect the same information over and over again, and citizens have to deliver the same information over and over again. This situation is not very effective or efficient for the administration as well as for the citizen. Now, through the use of ICTs, administrations can share information electronically or construct a shared database. In this way, information can be managed much more efficient and effective.

The most important difference between classic forms of bureaucracy and new forms of customer oriented service delivery is the shift of attention for tasks and responsibilities to attention for processes and outcomes. In the classic hierarchy, the emphasis was placed on task allocation and the creation of boundaries between different administrations. In this way, responsibilities could be demarcated in a clear way. New ways of public service delivery stress the importance of boundary-crossing processes. Processes have to be redesigned and innovated in order to maximise the added value of each step of the process (Hammer 1990; Hammer and Champy 1993; Davenport 1993; Davenport and Short 1990). These processes cross classic administrative and hierarchic boundaries. In an economic view on public service delivery, administrative boundaries seem to hinder the creation of customer oriented services.

The protection of democratic values can result in a third scenario. Here, important values are openness, transparency, social equity and accountability. The co-ordination mechanism here is the network. In a network, all administrations (and even profit or not-for-profit organisations) collaborate on an equal footing. To be able to collaborate in this way, the creation of trust between the partners is crucial. Trust between partners improves if they are open to one another and try to understand their perspectives and goals (Hart and Saunders 1997). According to Bekkers, the communicative character of ICTs can improve this form of co-ordination (Bekkers 1998; Bekkers 1993; Bekkers 1994). The communicative capacity of ICTs offers the possibility to create a common, shared, view on policy problems (e.g. through the exchange of information on a certain policy problem).

ICTs improve the possibility to create new forms of horizontal control on public policy. In the Weberian bureaucracy, the hierarchic top controls the implementation of public policy. Yet, in a network model of co-ordination, all partners are equal. Hence, the surveillance and control will happen in a more horizontal way (Bekkers and Homburg 2002). Classic patterns of control and surveillance are replaced by new forms of control and surveillance in a context of governance. Control and surveillance are not only executed by the hierarchic top, but by a lot of actors that all have, from a certain perspective, an interest in public policy. Information concerning the implementation of a policy can be collected and made available to society. In this way, new forms of accountability arise (Meijer 2002; Meijer 2004). As this is the case, administrations will experience a greater pressure to perform better.

In the relation between government and the citizen, ICTs can be used to improve the social equity of citizens. Social equity has to be treated distinctly from legal equity. Although citizens are legally equal, and rules and
regulations are implemented in the same way for each citizen, it still is possible that, in practice, citizens are not socially equal. For example, Western democracies have organised all sorts of allowances for social weaker target groups. These allowances can range from school allowances to extra allowances for health care or telephone costs. Yet, all these measures often are offered in a very fragmented and supply oriented way. The problem now is that the administration does not reach its intended target groups. People with a weak social background often lack the potential to discover all the services and allowances that are available for them. Often, it are the more privileged groups in society that make more use of public services because they have the knowledge, or the capacities to acquire this knowledge, to make use of these services. This problem is often called the Matthew-effect (the rich get richer, the poor get poorer). In the context of e-Government, the Matthew-effect is important, certainly in a scenario were predominantly economic values are improved by the introduction of ICTs. The improvement of public service delivery by the use of ICTs, in practice, often equals bringing public services or information on-line. Hence, it are only those groups in society, which have access to the internet, that can make use of the services and information. In this way, the improvement of service delivery as such does not improve social equity, as it are the social weak groups that don’t have access to the internet. This problem can be tackled by the introduction of pro-active service delivery. These types of service delivery don’t wait for a citizen asking for a certain service or information, but services or information are pushed towards citizens in a pro-active way (Leenes 2001). This type of service delivery is very demanding of public administration as it has to know which citizen is entitled to a certain service. In order to do so, different administrations have to share and combine information about citizens. For example, reductions in health care can be given automatically if health care administrations now that that a certain citizen is entitled to the reduction.

5 Introduction of ICTs and conflicting values

When ICTs are introduced to enhance a certain set of values, in a setting where other values used to prevail, the introduction of ICTs seems to be difficult. In the literature, the most common examples of this can be found in situations where ICTs are used to improve economic values (customer orientation) in an administration that used to be dominated by legal values. This situation was the most common in Western administrations during the past decade.

Ebbers describes the example of the Dutch tax administration (Ebbers 2002;Ebbers 2004). In his research he tries to investigate the possible influence of virtual front-offices on the way in which an organisation and the communication within an organisation is structured. According to Ebbers, an organisation has to adapt itself to the context in which it functions. In the case of the Dutch tax administration, this implies that if citizens make more and more use of the internet, the tax administration also has to make use of the internet to improve its customer orientation. Ebbers argues that organisations with high levels of standardisation, routinisation and uncertainty reduction have more difficulties to adapt to new evolutions in the ‘virtual world’. On the other hand, organisations with low levels of routinisation, and high levels of problem solving, flexibility and decentralisation are more able to adapt to the challenges of the virtual world. These two types of organisations can be related to our framework of values. Organisations with high levels of standardisation and uncertainty reduction will improve legal values while organisations with high levels of problem solving and decentralisation will enhance economic and democratic values. The conclusion of Ebbers is that in the Dutch tax administration the rule of law and legality are the most important values. Hence, the rigid structure of the administration, necessary to guarantee the rule of law and legality, hinders the improvement of customer orientation by the use of ICTs.
A classic problem of the introduction of ICTs to enhance public service delivery is the protection of privacy. Privacy of citizens can be at stake if an administration tries to enhance customer orientation or social equity through the use of ICTs. In order to do so, several administrations have to collaborate and integrate their processes. In this way, classic administrative boundaries tend to vanish or become less clear. Yet, these boundaries often fulfil an important function in public administration. First, they demarcate areas of accountability. Within administrative boundaries, accountability relations are quite easy to organise. But who is responsible for processes that run through administrative boundaries? What if a process does not reach its intended outcomes? In a classic hierarchy, tasks and responsibilities are allocated in a clear way. This may be not the case in boundary crossing processes (Pelgrims and Snijkers 2005). Second, administrative boundaries can be used to create a system of checks and balances between several collections of data. If several data concerning one citizen are spread over several administrations privacy of citizens is not threatened. However, when these data can be exchanged, regardless of traditional administrative boundaries, new techniques like profiling and data matching become possible (van Duivenboden 1999). In such a case, privacy, which can be related to legal values, can be threatened.

The issues mentioned here make clear that the use of ICTs in public administration poses some problems. ICTs are not neutral technical instruments, but can improve a specific category of values in public administration. Yet, the improvement of one category of values can threaten other categories of values. Hence, it is important that the possible outcomes of an ICT-project are made clear in advance and are taken into account. In this way, it is possible to use ICTs to find a balance between different categories of values and to try to reconcile them.

6 The Belgian Crossroad Bank for Social Security: the quest for balance

In Belgium, since 1990 a large informatisation project has been set up in the sector of social security. Social security was a very fragmented sector, as each category of allowances was taken care of by a different administration. In this way, several dozens of administrations were involved in social security (e.g. the RVP is responsible for the retirement pensions, trade unions are responsible for unemployment allowances, and the RSZ for the collection of the contributions from employers and employees). This fragmentation caused an inefficient information management within the administration as well as an administrative burden and lack of customer orientation for companies and citizens. The administration had to do a lot of unnecessary double-work (e.g. re-entering of information by several administrations, no electronic exchange of information) and had difficulties with the quality of information (e.g. up-dating of information). For citizens and companies, it was difficult to find needed services and to supply the same information to several administrations in the social sector.

In the 1970s and 1980s a solution to this problem was proposed. In line with an advice of the National Labour Council, the Law concerning the general principles of social security of employees of 1981 proposed the creation of a central database with social information. The centralisation of all information in the social sector could have a positive effect on the efficiency of information management and the improvement of customer orientation (economic values). Yet, it was seen as a threat to the privacy of citizens (legal value). Social information used to be spread over several administrations. Hence, the administrative boundaries protected citizens against an intrusion of their privacy. Here, we may conclude that the centralisation of all social information in one database can improve economic values, but can be a danger for legal values.
In 1990, the idea of a central database was abandoned and a clearinghouse, the Crossroad Bank for Social Security (CBSS) was set up. Through the use of a clearinghouse, information was not centralised in one database, but stayed within the classic administrative boundaries. All the administrations involved in social policy can exchange information with each other in an electronic way. However, not all information can be exchanged. A privacy commission controls and regulates which information can be exchanged and combined. In this way, the problems of a central database are eliminated.

How can we evaluate this initiative in the light of the public sector values discussed before? Does the CBSS find a balance between legal, economic and democratic values? The institutional setting and functions of the CBSS seem to improve legal values. As the exchanges of information are controlled and regulated by a privacy commission, privacy seems to be protected better than before. Values like the rule of law, legal equity and uncertainty reduction are improved. For example, before the introduction of the CBSS, it was possible for a citizen to obtain the same allowance several times from different administrations (e.g. from two or more local welfare agencies or from several trade unions). An administration could not find out if a citizen already obtained a certain allowance. Through the use of the CBSS, an administration can see if a citizen already obtained a specific allowance. The street-level bureaucrat (e.g. a social worker) is not dependent for this information from the citizen, but checks this information through the CBSS. Hence, a social worker has less freedom to apply social regulation. The improvement of surveillance and control never was an explicit objective of the CBSS. However, it will be clear that through the increased possibilities of information exchange and information processing, the possibilities for control and surveillance are greatly enhanced.

Economic values, like efficiency and customer orientation are improved. Administrations have not to re-enter the same data into their systems over and over again as they can exchange data electronically. In 2004, there were 378.3 million electronic transactions between the administrations in the social security sector (Robben 2005). In the past, these transactions used to happen on paper. Customer orientation is improved because citizens and companies do not have to provide the same information to different administrations (50, out of 80, administrative forms were abolished; the length of the 30 remaining forms has been reduced (Robben 2005)). Companies can provide information on wages or new employees in an electronic way.

Democratic values are of great importance in the sector of social security. Especially social equity is an important value, as many allowances are oriented towards social weaker groups in society. Through the exchange of information between several social administrations pro-active services have been developed. For example the automatic reduction of contributions in health care for widows or persons with a physical handicap. In this way, a citizen does not have to know about a service, allowance or reduction, but these are provided automatically. These pro-active services are only possible if several administrations exchange information and combine this information. The exchange of information leads towards a growing interdependence and transparency in the sector of social security. Hence, a strong collaboration and trust between the different administrations is needed (Snijkers 2005).

7 Conclusion

In public administration, ICTs often are used from an economic perspective. The main goal of e-Government seems to be the improvement of effectiveness and efficiency of public service delivery. Yet, economic values are
not the only values that can be improved by ICTs. In public administration, ICTs are used in function of certain values. So, it is important to make these values more explicit.

We distinguished three categories of values: legal, economic and democratic values. Legal values comprise the rule of law, legal equity, uncertainty reduction, legality and neutrality. Economic values are: efficiency, effectiveness, customer orientation and flexibility. Among democratic values are: openness, transparency, accountability and social equity. These three categories of values result in three different types of public administration and three different perspectives on the relation between government and citizen.

ICTs can improve a certain category of values. For example: legal values can be enhanced by the increased possibilities of surveillance and control. Yet, when ICTs are used to improve a certain category of values in a setting where other values used to prevail this can cause tensions. So, it is important to state in advance which values are important and have to be supported by the use of ICTs. If this is the case, ICTs can be used to reconcile different values.

In the Belgian sector of social security, the Crossroads Bank for Social Security is an example in which an effort was undertaken to balance different values. Through the use of a clearinghouse, traditional administrative boundaries between different administrations were not erased, but made permeable. Several administrations can exchange information in a controlled way. In this way, legal values (legal equity, control of fraud), economic values (efficiency, customer orientation) and democratic values (social equity) were reconciled. Such reconciliation asks a lot of efforts from the participating administrations. They have to collaborate in an open way, according to an e-Government vision in which several values are expressed.

8 Reference list


