Best Practices in the European Countries

Constitutional Monarchy of Sweden
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Introduction: e-Government

The term "e-government" focuses on the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) by Governments as applied to the full range of government functions. In particular, the networking potential offered by the Internet and related technologies have the potential to transform the structures and operation of government. The Swedish Government is determined to accelerate the development of e-government. To enable this process, it is powering up its management framework to bring the Swedish Administration into the digital age.

In order to do this, Sweden has in the past adopted projects for the technological development of the P.A.. The salient feature of Sweden’s effort to employ IT in public management reform is the Top Managers’ Forum, a body created in 1995 to address concerns about the compartmentalisation of efforts to apply technology. The Forum is chaired by the Minister of Finance and thus commands the presence of senior officials from other ministries and authorities. The Forum selects specific projects that cut across two or more organisations addressing:
- re-engineering of public administration with assistance of IT;
- open and secure electronic infrastructure to improve the exchange of information; and
- information management - policy, legal and managerial issues.

A second important aspect of Sweden’s IT efforts is the existence of numerous databases or registers that are available, subject to approval under Sweden’s Data Protection Statute. Typically, each database or register supports a specific application of IT; e.g. registering motor vehicles or collecting taxes, but they are also used as infrastructural information resources for external agencies, organisations, or even the business community at large. These include registers of names and addresses, company addresses, vehicles, chemical products, buildings and land use. Each person born in Sweden is assigned a unique personal identifier and persons who immigrate must apply for one. Thus, system developers begin with a range of data resources that can be employed in new ways to support public management reform and service to the public. Despite the existence of these rich data stores, Swedish officials characterised the state of their technology prior to the reforms as “stovepipe” systems; i.e. serving specific programmes or delivery systems in a vertical fashion, and as providing more tracking (after the fact) information than true operational support1.

But the last and more innovative project planned by the Swedish government to achieve a Public Administration based on the conditions and needs of citizens and businesses in different situations, is the 24/7 Agency, whose characteristic we’ll show in the following pages.

1. “The 24/7 Agency - Criteria for 24/7 Agencies in the Networked Public Administration”

The Swedish Government believes that modern information technology enables the State to create a society whose agencies are always open to the public. Using Information & Communications Technologies (ICT) to the full extent possible fulfils several purposes. It makes public administration more public-oriented. It should be possible to reach the

1 www.oecd.org
agencies at times when people need to do so, which is not always in normal office hours. Extending the agencies use of ICT strengthens the infrastructure, contributes to technological development and thus helps to boost Sweden’s competitiveness as an ICT-nation.

The project “The 24/7 Agency - Criteria for 24/7 Agencies in the Networked Public Administration” proposes a four-stage agency development towards fulfilling the aim of enhancing accessibility and providing service round the clock, seven days a week. The criteria recommended by the Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret) focus primarily on government agencies’ capacity to provide interactive services for the public and businesses. In addition, Statskontoret proposes criteria concerning general official information and its presentation. Also, public awareness of official activities can hasten and encourage the emergence of e-government. Finally, the project proposes guidelines for further work to develop the criteria.

The idea of 24/7 agencies is a vision that needs to undergo constant development as it becomes a reality.

For the Government it appears to be the greatest challenge that lies ahead. It will entail changing the citizen’s way of thinking; how the p.a. organizes itself and the services it provides. In particular, it will involve disregarding the organizational limits of the past, seeing Public Administration from the users’ point of view and starting to work together.

2. e-Government and citizens’ needs

Looking for the reasons why the Swedish Government needs increasingly to adapt public services to the needs of the citizens, we can find three factors determining public sector development in the last years in Sweden.

Citizens are demanding more value for money. The rapid development of online banking and other online services make people press for public services to be delivered online as well and to demand the same standard of service from government as they do from the corporate sector.

With growing internationalisation, competitive pressures in trade and enterprise are mounting and today a country’s administrative system is far more important as a competitive tool than it used to be. An administration that has the capacity to act quickly and vigorously and is accessible and open plays an important role for international competitiveness. A modern and efficient administration can be a powerful help to our companies in their exporting efforts and in attracting foreign investment.

The demographic trends: An ageing population will be demanding more of our public administrations, but public administration will have to do with fewer employees. And these demographic trends will not render any easier for the public sector as a competitive employer to attract a generation of employees.

These challenges call for new ways of working, new ways of structuring public services and new attitudes and relations with citizens.

To meet these challenges, to reach these objectives, the development of e-government plays a vital role.

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http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/1200/a/7656
With the “24-hour public administration” the Swedish Government intends to step up its ambition in developing, and particularly in order to create a public administration genuinely at the service of the citizens.

This project contains ambitious goals and this demands an equally ambitious strategy.

The overriding goal is this: all government services which can be delivered electronically should be delivered electronically, provided that this is technically feasible and economically defensible.

The Government also has a stated goal that different needs and conditions must be met so that no citizens are excluded from the new opportunities offered by e-government. Citizens must be able to choose between different service channels and e-services must have a design and a language that facilitate access for everyone.

A third objective is that citizens and businesses should always be able to use single points of access, regardless of how the responsibility is divided between different parts of the public sector.

A fourth objective is to provide easy access to public information online and indeed electronic channels whereby the public can participate in policy-making and decision-making.

In carrying out this strategy Sweden is fortunate enough to be able to rely on a public administration, which is highly decentralised in notion, made up as it is by some 250 public authorities enjoying a high degree of autonomy. One government policy has been defined4.

The heads of these agencies become powerful instruments in making things happen at the agency level, providing leadership and designing solutions adapted to the needs of its particular activities.

The Government shoulders the responsibility for setting the overriding goals, removing obstacles and legal barriers and supporting the agencies by providing them with guidelines and working methods; and by ensuring that the necessary infrastructure for e-government is put into place.

By and large this approach has proven quite successful and has made possible a rapid development of e-services.

But it’s true that it has also resulted in an uneven development, with some parts of the public administration making very rapid progress while others are lagging somewhat behind. Collaboration between national, regional and local government is also poorly developed, although there are several local projects under way.

The new strategy of the Government is to significantly strengthen the management framework for e-government. It intends to combine the advantages of Swedish decentralised model with a bit more central co-ordination.

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4About this point: the speech of Gunnar Lund, Minister for international economy, of 9 December 2003. In this speech, made at a forum of executives from across government, Minister Lund made it clear that he wanted to see efforts to implement the 24/7 Agency increase and accelerate. To this end, he has been reviewing the management framework for e-government and is planning to significantly "power it up"
3. The Swedish vision of 24-hour public administration and e-Government

The four main elements of this strategy of development have been defined over the past year.
Firstly, to create a high-level ‘Commission for the 24/7 Agency’.
When he was appointed Minister for International Economic Affairs and Financial Markets in October 2002, Gunnar Lund was also given responsibility for Public Administration policy. Since then, he has made clear that his priority in this area was to accelerate the development of the ‘24/7 Agency’ - the Swedish vision of a public administration using ICT to be able to deliver services 24 hours a day, seven days a week5.
“The development and implementation of the 24/7 Agency is the single most important issue within the field of public administration policy,” says Mr Lund. “We must become able to deliver better public services to citizens, in terms of both quality and speed, and this requires becoming more efficient at sharing information between public authorities.”
The 24/7 Agency concept was introduced in the action programme “Public Administration in the Service of Democracy”, which was presented in 2000 and aims to make Sweden the first country to become a true information society for the benefit of all its citizens. The concept was subsequently refined by the Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret), which was given responsibility for stimulating and supporting its development in June 2001. This task was assigned for two years and a final report on progress achieved was presented at the end of June 2003.
The Delegation was set up recently and brings together expert members from central government, industry, academia and local government6. A main task is to foster and increase co-operation between the different tiers of Government. Another priority task will be to improve the flow of know-how between research and development activities on the one hand and actual concrete projects of e-government being implemented in the public sector. Last but by no means least, the Commission will also have to propose funding arrangements for helping both central and local authorities to implement the 24/7 Agency concept. The presence of representatives from industry and research in the delegation will ensure that co-operation between public and private sector is exploited to the full in developing electronic services. Finally, the Delegation’s main aim is to provide visionary and innovative thinking, while focusing on concrete actions. It is also free to use committees and experts of its own.
A separate body comprising representatives from government departments and agencies will also be set up shortly, with responsibility for establishing an interoperability framework for electronic communications and services between authorities as well as with citizens.

6 By creating this high-level Delegation working under the authority of the Ministry of Finance, Minister Lund clearly indicates that he intends to widen the scope of the 24/7 Agency policies and activities.
In Mr Lund’s view, the creation of the new Delegation and the new inter-agency body start a new phase in the development of the 24/7 Agency, but they are not replacements for the Agency for Public Management. “We must make full use of the expertise, knowledge and experience available at the Agency for Public Management,” he says. “The agency has been a forerunner in the development of the 24/7 Agency and of course it will be a key actor in the future as well. Its new role will be more of a hands-on operator than of a leader, and we will also rely heavily on other authorities and draw from their experiences”.

Mr Lund does not foresee that the Swedish model of governance and administration will have to change because of the implementation of the 24/7 Agency policy. In this model, which was laid down almost three hundred years ago, public agencies and authorities enjoy large autonomy. Even though they are not independent from the government, they are self-governed. They are tools to implement the policies of the government, but it is their own responsibility to make things happen in their areas. This model prevents Ministers from engaging in micro-management practices, which would be contrary to the Swedish constitution.

But this model will nevertheless have to adapt and to evolve, because public administrations will increasingly have to work together. “They will have to co-operate more with each other,” says Minister Lund. “They will need to share and distribute information between themselves in a new way. Our model of administrative procedure does not encourage sharing and exchanging information between authorities, but e-services will change the way they work. They will have to improve their way of working and to work together to serve citizens better and become more efficient. Let’s say they will have to pull down barriers that should have been pulled down long ago.”

Beyond improved service delivery and greater efficiency, however, the key objective of implementing the 24/7 Agency must be to enhance democracy and make sure that everybody can benefit from e-government. “There are and always will be groups of people that for some reason cannot use the Internet or technology,” says Mr Lund. “We must make sure that those citizens will under no circumstances end up getting poorer and less accessible information and service than those that master information technology. We have to develop other means of communication with them to give them the same possibility to participate in a democratic information society. These issues will also be a

leading principle for the Delegation’s work, and I believe that introduction of e-services will encourage and support democratic inclusion and participation”.

4. Other ways of development towards e-Government

The Swedish Government elaborated three other aims to achieve. First of all, creating a new government board with the task of establishing an interoperability framework for electronic communications and services between public authorities as well as between the authorities and the citizens. The Board will comprise of representatives from key central government authorities.

Secondly, to develop institutions necessary for secure identification. Sweden seeks to establish a solution in co-operation with the private market so that citizens can use the same certificate for all kinds of e-services. A framework agreement has been reached with several banks and other actors offering services for electronic signatures, and a new round of framework agreements is in the pipeline.

Thirdly, remove legal obstacles to electronic communication. The Government has undertaken a review of all laws, which prescribe written procedures of one kind or another. The aim of this review is to promote the use of electronic documents and electronic signatures by identifying and eliminating unnecessary legal requirements for written procedures. The first report shows that out of 2000 requirements that were found in different legal acts, 1200 allow electronic signatures. The next phase of the work is to make adjustments in the remaining 800 legal acts.

“Our vision”, said Minister Lund, “is to provide citizens with an easy online access to all public information and services needed whenever needed. We will reach this goal and turn the vision into reality”.

5. e-Government and municipalities

e-Government is a pressing imperative for Sweden and the efforts to implement it should be accelerated⁸. In particular, to deliver on the promises of the 24/7 Agency (the Swedish concept of a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week online public service), the Government challenged the traditional Swedish model of governance, a very decentralised model that originates in the 18th century. In this traditional model, government and ministers define the overall policy directives but do not interfere with the work and practices of the agencies in charge of implementing them and of managing and delivering public services. Even though the principle of non-interference is not questioned, many in the Swedish government now appear to believe that delivering the 24/7 Agency vision in a timely manner requires implementing a joint and common approach across government bodies and layers and a stronger central leadership. This leadership is indeed necessary to make really innovative and consistent use of constantly evolving technologies and to avoid duplication of efforts. So far, agencies and local governments have been able to make use of IT for their services based largely on their own needs and decisions. But for e-government to succeed, they

will all have to be connected and interact electronically sharing the same infrastructure and standards. This requires, as the same representative puts it, "a light touch by a firm hand."

The Swedish model of governance may have to evolve if the country is to continue being one of the most successful nations in e-government. Some changes are therefore expected to occur in the management framework for e-government in Sweden. A new body is expected to be created shortly, a Government Agency Board that will gather representatives from the largest departments and agencies. This body will enable common standards to be set, which will then become mandatory for all agencies. Furthermore, the ICT Commission, a government IT advisory board which mandate has come from 30 May, will be replaced by a high level delegation which detailed mandate is not yet known but which will probably more operational than its predecessor. This new delegation will provide professional support to government agencies and local governments in implementing the 24/7 concept.

The provision of online public services irrespective of time, geographical location and the actual provider, is now seen as crucial to keep Sweden at the forefront of the IT literate nations. It is also seen as a major factor of economic competitiveness, both internally and on export markets as innovative e-government solutions will increasingly become attractive to other countries.

6. Swedish Government to work out e-Government standards and labels


Composed of representatives from several government departments and agencies, the group has been given responsibility for establishing technical and operational standards for electronic communications and services between public administrations as well as with citizens and businesses. The group will also be tasked with developing an interoperability framework and with awarding labels to e-government services complying with standards agreed. Members of the new group were appointed at the end of December 2003 by Gunnar Lund. The group will be chaired by Alf Nilsson, Director General of the Swedish Tax Agency (Skatteverket). The creation of this inter-agency group on e-government standards completes the evolution of the management framework for e-government in Sweden, which was announced by Minister Gunnar Lund in spring 2003, so as we told before. A high-level e-government delegation was appointed last November, bringing together members from central and local government, the industry, and academia, and tasked to provide increased e-government leadership across government.

7. Information Society

Last summer, Sweden ranked number one for the fourth consecutive year in the IDC Information Society Index -- based on statistics concerning Internet usage, e-commerce,
telecommunications infrastructure, broadband and wireless subscribers, education levels, press freedom and government corruption. Rather than resting on its laurels, however, Sweden is looking ahead, searching for the next breakthrough. One area of particular interest is how government policy is affecting progress toward an "Information Society for all," the motto that has given a voice to the intention of this most technologically advanced of countries.

A “learning policy” is a very important choice of words. The Swedish Parliament has insisted that policy be formulated in terms that can be objectively evaluated, then it is implemented and its effects evaluated. The results of the evaluation are then used to learn what worked, what didn't and to re-formulate, if necessary, policies that will more effectively move the activities of society toward the desired goals.

The Swedish decentralized model of government is the key to both the country’s success as well as contributing to some of its shortcomings; for example, its difficulties in synchronizing systems and networks among the county’s governmental entities. Some 290 Swedish cities, called “the community sector” have almost unbridled autonomy, the ability to raise taxes, etc., and save for a few federal mandates, cannot be told what to do. Even low-level community-sector officials have broad authority to sign contracts, make decisions, etc., without having to answer to a bureaucratic command structure. There is a tradition in Swedish industry to decentralize the decision-making to a low level, so both in the public and private sector, you have this tradition which is very good, because people start to take the initiative, and Sweden ranks very high in matters of innovative power of employees, because people are allowed to do things, without asking their boss or going up vertically in the organizations.

But this independence, which spurs innovation, can create problems elsewhere. There is a very quick development, but the systems are not communicative. And the government has no power at all to order: 'you must communicate, you must choose a standard or something.' Everything is voluntary, you must persuade them. The very tricky question is: will Sweden synchronize?

The Government should make it precise what is meant by an “Information Society for all”. There is another problem: Sweden is very poor in formulating precise objectives for what they want to achieve, and this is partly the result of the decentralized system.

Finally, an “information society for all” before all other countries is a very high and worthwhile goal. But the government lacks a strategy to reach those high objectives. Some countries have an IT policy for housing, for education, e-health program, but they lack a general IT policy. Sweden has the general policy covering all fields. There is an E-Europe approach which is also the Swedish approach. So we looked at is it a good idea to have a general IT policy?

While some government agencies have IT policies, there is a lack of coordination. In Sweden there is a ministry responsible for the coordination of IT policy - the Ministry of Industry - but if they say that IT should be used in culture or education or defence, or whatever, they have to consider what are the other ministers saying, because the minister

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11 This is the question placed by Kurt Lundgren, an adjunct professor at Stockholm's IT University with expertise in economics and IT
responsible for coordination of the policy has no power to influence the other ministries. They have no office of the E-Envoy.
The communities should make use of each others databases, should cooperate and save administrative resources.
A expert on the matter, Lundgreen, suggests a method for improving the system: if communities and agencies are cooperating with national standards, they should be eligible for additional financial assistance from the state. “So the communities and regional health care can have the freedom to choose, but if you want a local solution you pay for it. I think this is ... how to build bridges between the isolated islands. And this can be the main policy, when you lack the power of centralized government”.
Sweden has 300 hospitals for its 9 million inhabitants, and, said Lundgren, each hospital has its own IT systems and standards. <<A friend of mine”, said Lundgren, “a technology economist from Stanford, said to me: “You have a population exactly half of greater Los Angeles. And you have those 300 different hospitals, you have those different systems. You have a very small population ... and you must make those things compatible with each other”>>.

Conclusions

Summing up, Swedish public administration is in the process of a radical transformation. Information technology is both a prerequisite for this process and an important component of it. The modernisation of public administration is a long-term task, requiring tenacity and creativity. Sweden is now embarking on a new phase in the development of e-government. A high level commission to step up the development of e-services, an inter-agency board for creating an interoperability framework
Last but not least. Broadband deployment is a prioritised area for the Swedish Government. The main obstacle to broadband deployment on our behalf is of course the dictate of the geography. Sweden’s 20 inhabitants per square kilometre can be compared with Germany’s 230. This illustrates the divergence in potential investment costs per inhabitant.
It is now three years since the Swedish national broadband strategy was developed to meet this problem. The overall objective is that Households and businesses in all parts of Sweden should have access to high speed IT infrastructure within the next few years. The Government initiative aims at making market deployment the prime alternative. But there is also government funding to be used in rural and remote areas where there is no market deployment.
The municipalities (local authorities) are the bodies that administer the government funding. This has lead to political involvement at local level as well as at national level. This local involvement has turned out to be a precondition for a successful project. The number of households in January 2003, able to connect to any form of broadband is estimated to 25 % of all households.
Technically, the Swedish public administration has already made considerable progress. Now the Government is trying to take the next major step: to renew Swedish ways of working.