



IMAGES AND IMAGINATORS IN VIRTUAL ORGANISING

– THE NPO FRILUFTSFRÄMJANDET AND WWW.FRILUFTS.SE

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Abstract

From the very beginning of the www, web applications have been suggested as an efficient means of promoting organisational identity and of sharing information within organisations. This article draws on structuration theory, actor network theory, imaginary organisations and multiple organisational identities to explore the consequences of attempts to use web applications to revitalise a large non-profit organisation (NPO). NPOs form a substantial part of organised activity in many Western countries. They are also interesting because those who want to implement change have little opportunity to force organisational members to accept the change, and thus have to rely on adjusting change to what is in demand among the members, or convince the members of the merits of the change initiative. The change initiative in this article is shown to mean different things to different people, which depends, in part, on the organisational identities they ascribe to. The web technology also attracted many imaginers at different levels, each trying to further their imagination of the web-application-supported organisation. Depending on the perspective adopted, the analysis reveals both organising and disorganising effects of the web-application initiatives. The article concludes with six suggestions to would-be imaginers.

Keywords: virtual organising, imaginator, organisational change, organisational identity, technochange, NPO

1. Introduction

This tale deals with one of the old and large non-profit organisation (NPO) which had shrunk rather rapidly throughout the 1990's. It deals with how individuals within this organisation began to realise the potential offered by IT-mediated communication to revitalise their organisation, and how this awareness initiated action which in turn generated results – both organising and disorganising. It deals with planned change, of emergent strategies, (cf. [Mintberg, 1989; Ciborra, 1994]) and of opportunity-based change strategies (cf. [Orlikowski and Hofman, 1997; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002]). It deals with different perspectives, different aspirations, frustration and achievements [Westelius, 1996; Pratt and Foreman, 2000; Foreman and Whetten, 2002]. However it is, perhaps

above all, a tale of multiple purposes – potentially consonant, potentially conflicting [Checkland, 1990; Asaro, 2000; Pratt and Foreman, 2000]. Is it thus really a story of *one* organisation? No, it rather concerns a number of existing and potential imaginary organisations (cf. [Hedberg, Dahlgren, Hansson and Olve, 1994]), envisioned by a number of imaginers. Only some of these imaginers are at the top of the formal organisation. Some of these imaginary organisations are "Renovations", some are "New constructions", some are "Additions", but they all relate in some way to the large and old NPO. "Success" is often thought of in terms of conforming to a manager's or change initiator's intentions (e.g., [Schein, 1993; Huy, 1999; Fiol and O'Connor, 2002; Asaro, 2000]). However, in this article, success is shown to be a more relative concept, and adopts different meanings depending on which of these types of imaginary organisations the evaluator subscribes to.

There are, to a certain extent, parallels to developments within organisations in both the private and public sectors, but there are also some highly pronounced characteristics of the NPO which set it apart, or, at the very least, pose additional challenges to the would-be leader of change (cf. [Fiol and O'Connor, 2002]). One such trait is that membership of an NPO is more voluntary based compared with that of most other organisations. In terms of I/E-ratios [Hedberg et al., 1994]¹, most NPOs would probably rate as extreme imaginary organisations. Very few people are actually employed by the organisation and in order to function, it relies heavily on a network of individuals and related or partner organisations. You work for the organisation because of idealism or because you feel that it is rewarding in some way. There is little basis for a classical Marxist confrontation between managers and employees, as in [Howcroft and Wilson, 2003]. On the other hand, people in an NPO may be even more sensitive to the potential for increased control of their activities that an information system, describing activities at a detailed level, can provide to people at the centre of the organisation (cf. [Markus and Pfeffer, 1983; Westelius, 1996]). The NPO has little authority to force its members to perform tasks which they do not see the point in doing, or do not feel are sufficiently rewarding [Fiol and O'Connor, 2002]. This sets limits with regards to handling change initiatives and also reinforces the discretionary aspect of the use of information systems, including those intended to be mandatory from a central perspective (cf. [Westelius and Westelius, 1991; Westelius, 1996; Petri, 2001]).

Stories of – and theories about – organisational transformation often place the strong character, the leader, the imaginator, at the centre [Hopper, 1990; Schein, 1993; Hedberg et al., 1994; Cross, Earl and Sampler, 1997; Huy, 1999; Pratt and Foreman, 2000; Fiol and O'Connor, 2002]. The focus on, or call for, a strong leader at the centre is still common in IS literature [Damsgaard and Scheepers, 2000; Huang, Makoju, Newell and Galliers, 2003; Scheepers, 2003; Markus, 2004; Markus and Mao, 2004; Dubé, Bourhis and Jacob, 2005]. This corresponds to a diffusion model of change and, as noted by Latour [1986], a diffusion model hinges on the impetus from the sender as the important component in the transfer of knowledge from sender to receiver. In terms of learning, or adoption, it might be more reasonable to see organisational change from the perspective of the learner. It is the person performing a task who decides on whether to actually try to assimilate ("translate" in Latour's terms) impulses, pictures, ideas and concepts available

¹ Hedberg et al. (1994) propose a high ratio of number of people involved (I) to the number of people actually employed (E) as an indicator of an imaginary organisation.

in the surrounding or to work solely according to her own mind. Such a perspective would seem to be increasingly appropriate in our society where the emphasis is moving from push to pull, from a basic concept of data, “that which is given”, to *capta*, “that which is taken, ‘captured’ or selected”. We move towards a reliance on intranets (“It is posted on the net”), on private initiative “you are in charge – look for what you need, ask for what you need”. The diffusion perspective is more concerned with teaching while the reverse perspective is more towards learning. In the NPO, where there are few instruments of control to force members into compliance, the focus on the receiver, the individual who the imaginator expects to accept the vision of the imaginary organisation, seems even more appropriate. We could expect that each individual is her own imaginator, not necessarily heeding central initiatives, but “translating” them according to their own aspirations and situation – or even ignoring them altogether. As a result, there will be a (large) number of potential images – some traditional, some innovative; some conflicting, some compatible.

In this article, I draw on theory and findings from organisational change and from information systems research to form the basis for a discussion of organisational consequences arising from the introduction of www and intranet applications in large organisations. In particular, this frame of reference emphasises perspectives other than those of the central initiator. The main aim of this article is to further the understanding of the slow process of organisational change related to virtual organising in established organisations. An additional aim is to promote research concerning NPOs. Based on the analysis of a multifaceted case of IT-related organisational change initiated ten years ago in the Swedish NPO Friluftsförbundet, I propose that the traditional focus on a strong actor and a central management perspective obscures many of the interesting developments that take place when malleable technology, such as intranets and www-based technology is introduced into organisations. The analysis identifies both organising and disorganising effects of the web-application initiatives, depending on the perspective adopted. The article concludes with six suggestions to would-be imaginators.

2. Change, organising and organisation

The idea that change is constant can be traced back at least as far as Heraclitus of Ephesus, and his statement “Panta Rei”. However, change becomes easier to grasp and see if we investigate differences between states, rather than attempt to directly capture change itself. This has perhaps led to too strong a focus being placed on the static, on snapshots and on structure [Tsoukas and Chia, 2002]. As with many others, I believe that rather than taking either a structure or a flow-perspective, we need to look at both change and permanence. Tsoukas and Chia [2002] state that “change is the reweaving of actors’ webs of beliefs and habits of action as a result of new experiences obtained through interactions (p. 570)”. Here we have both change – the reweaving – and structure – the resulting webs of beliefs and habits of action. They go on to say that “Organization is an attempt to order the intrinsic flux of human action, to channel it towards certain ends, to give it a particular shape, through generalizing and institutionalizing particular meanings and rules. At the same time, organization is a pattern that is constituted, shaped, emerging from change (p. 570)”. Although I agree with the point they made, I will in this article adhere to the convention of using the word “organising” when referring to the change process, and “organisation” when talking about the resulting structures.

Two influential writers concerning change and structure are Giddens and Latour. Some hold their views to be incompatible. However, Walsham [1997] feels that it is potentially possible to combine them. To me, too, it appears more fruitful to view them as related writers, but with somewhat differing perspectives on a common topic. Giddens developed his structuration theory to analyse how structure in a social system of interacting individuals develops – and changes – through individuals' faithful re-enactment according to the existing structure or repeated modified interpretations and actions that diverge from the established structure [Giddens, 1984]. Key aspects of structure are signification, domination and legitimation. Structuration theory focuses on one enacted structure and how it remains or changes over time. It can be used to analyse intended as well as emerging change in an organisation.

It could be said that Giddens' structuration theory takes its starting point in an established structure and analyses how this structure is reproduced or modified over time. In his writings on actor network theory (ANT), Latour rather has the spread of change, the growth of an actor network around an idea, as his starting point. An idea will spread in a context of a multitude of existing actor networks, and this spread will require that new actors adopt the idea, with or without leaving the networks to which they already belong. Latour [1996] specifically also recognises IT artefacts, for example www applications, as actors. They interact with people, and embody an inscription, an idea about how they should be used. The inscription facilitates certain interpretations and actions and restricts the performance of other interpretations and actions. Asaro [2000, p. 277] expresses it in the following manner: "And technology is neither politically neutral nor deterministic, nor is it a perfectly plastic media waiting to be molded by political forces, but different technologies are more or less plastic and subject to being inscribed with political ideologies or enforcing political policies. Accordingly, technological artifacts are able to stand as shared referents by virtue of their material and practical consequences, and when engaged in a dialectic they offer resistances of their own which must be dealt with." Hanseth and Braa [1998] provide an example of how such resistance could at first be used by different actors to further their goals, but how, over time, this resistance developed into an obstacle to organisational change. Such potential for information systems to direct people's actions has long been noted. A quarter of a century ago, Hedberg and Jönsson [1978] argued that information systems tend to make organisations less flexible, and people in organisations conservative and less prone to change. They suggested that we should try to construct "semi-confusing" information systems, ambiguous enough to make users less prone to constantly re-enacting the same actions faithfully even in the face of changing conditions.

However, the original inscription is not necessarily sufficiently strong to force itself unchanged on other actors. Actor network theory has a number of traits that lend themselves to the exploration of IT-related organisational change projects where many actors have a large degree of discretion concerning their actions [Latour, 1996; Walsham, 1997; Hanseth and Braa, 1998; Gäre, 2003; Westelius and Edenius, 2003]. On the one hand, ANT emphasises that computer programs and accompanying work routines embody "inscriptions" that can direct one's work in ways similar to how other (human) actors can affect it. These inscriptions are formed by those designing and building the applications. On the other hand, power over the use of the application does not lie with the designers and initiators. Each new actor chooses, to some extent, whether to subscribe

to the network, and typically “translates” the capabilities of the artefact, the non-human actor, to the actual situation where he or she will use the artefact. Those wishing to promote the use of an artefact must then sell their inscription to others, try to enrol others for the network, while attempting to keep the inscription so unchanged that the network is still serving the goal they intended it to serve. Efforts to increase the size of the network can give rise to counter programs and counter-enrolment.

Others may hold slightly different views of what ANT stands for, but the description above is the concept of Actor Network Theory I use in this article. As Law notes on his ANT website, “*actor-network is not a single orthodoxy, a fully consistent body of writing with its holy scriptures. Indeed, the most creative texts are often those that change and rework its preoccupations and its tools - or which combine them in one way or another with those of other approaches with which it is in dialogue.*” [Law, 2004] This is in keeping with the central idea of ANT, namely that the spread of an idea (an inscription, in a growing network of actors adhering to the idea) will continuously change the original idea through the translations of it that the new actors make.

In terms of a manager initiating a website or other Internet-based e-service, an ANT approach would entail focusing on growing the network of people using and supporting the service, while simultaneously paying heed to how the translations new actors make change the original intentions. Two different goals could be envisaged. One is to try to keep the inscription as stable and unchanged as possible, educating or disciplining new actors whose translations diverge noticeably from the original intentions. This is a traditional approach in IS deployment. The other is to pay heed to the translations, trying to catch and incorporate interesting new ideas, and feed them back into the design of the artefact and further the spread of the new interpretations within the existing network. The latter approach could be seen as a form of participative design (cf. [Asaro, 2000]), or as following a strategy of opportunity-based change [Orlikowski and Hofman, 1997].

Following a strategy of opportunity-based change is more relevant the more open-ended or malleable the technology used is (ibid.). Intranets and www-based applications are highly malleable, which could be a problem for a central imaginator [Damsgaard and Scheepers, 2000]. Such applications often develop over time, partly in response to user input, partly based on the developers’ own visions. Whether or not this is an intentional strategy, they seem to develop in an opportunity-based way. However, a basic assumption often seems to be that digitalisation, if possible, is good, and that over time virtual handling of data and communication will replace physical alternatives. Robey, Schwaig and Jin [2003] question the idea of a purely virtual (or purely material) mode of working as being superior to the other. Instead, they suggest that well-designed intertwining of material and virtual aspects is likely to prove even better. They identify four types of results from intertwining: “More specifically, intertwining involves four aspects of the relationship between virtual and material representations of work: reinforcement, complementarity, synergy, and reciprocity. Using virtual and material representations to reinforce and complement each other are perhaps the most obvious aspects of the relationship. A synergistic relationship strives for new capabilities arising out of the interaction between virtual and material work. Finally, reciprocity is the principle that virtual and material representations operate as equal partners, each serving the other, rather than one dominating the relationship. (p. 126)”. As proponents of a computer-based application can be expected to have a strong focus on virtual alternatives, the

concept of intertwining promises to be an interesting, balanced tool when analysing and understanding how www applications affect the organising in an organisation.

Thus, when studying organisational change connected with information systems use, both the existing structures and the intentions embodied in the design of the IT support are important. However, they are not the sole determinants of the unfolding change. We should be attentive to the many actors “beliefs and habits”, and their networks, rather than just the intention of a central imaginor or team of change agents. This is likely to be particularly important when studying the developing use of malleable technology, such as intranets and www-based applications. Finally, rather than judging the development against an ideal of a purely virtual mode of working, we should pay heed to the mindful and the unintentional intertwining of virtual and material practices.

3. Multiple organisational identities and multiple networks

As Latour and others in the ANT tradition note, actors are engaged in different nets. To ascribe to a new net, a new inscription, they interpret that inscription according to their own setting and understanding, and choose to ascribe to their translation of the inscription – or not to ascribe. ANT thus leaves the door open for multiple frames of reference. In organisational science, multiple organisational identities are attracting increased attention (e.g. [Fiol and O’Connor, 2002; Pratt and Foreman, 2000; Foreman and Whetten, 2002]). A co-op, for example, can be viewed as both a “family” and as a vehicle for economic efficiency by its members [Foreman and Whetten, 2002]. Such different views of organisational identities can coexist across an organisation (be holographic, as in the case of the co-op), or be particular to a group or even single individuals (be ideographic). In the ideographic case, when different people hold different conceptions of the organisational identity (or identities), they will come to different interpretations of the change alternative, and thus the change initiative will meet a variety of receptions [Checkland and Scholes, 1990; Pratt and Foreman, 2000]. Regarding a proposed www application, for example, the translations people make of the inscription of the application will depend on how they believe the application matches the identity or identities they believe the organisation has (or should have).

Perhaps multiple identities are even more pronounced in NPOs than in other organisations. Some coexist within a part of the organisation, or even across the entire organisation, some are specific to certain sub-organisations, types of role holders or some other grouping. People belonging to the organisation can be expected to react strongly against a change that they believe clashes with organisational identities that they cherish, or when a measure to strengthen an identity they want to strengthen fails to be adopted in the hoped for way [Fiol and O’Connor, 2002]. Pratt and Foreman [2000] suggest that managers in an organisation need to manage the number of identities (Identity plurality) and the compatibility (Identity synergy) of the identities that exist within an organisation. High plurality and low synergy can be valuable when facing diversity or to cope with a changing environment, but these are also associated with costs. One means of attempting to reduce plurality and increase synergy is to create mediatory myths: stories and images of organisational identity that show existing identities to be compatible. Another method is to devise meta-identities identifying traits existing across identities and thus to promote the idea of compatibility.

Given that multiple ideographic identities exist, and will continue to do so, in an organisation where someone wants to introduce change, there are different paths the initiator of change can follow. Checkland and Scholes [1990] suggest that for someone attempting to introduce a change initiative, it is important to negotiate and compromise at the design phase in order to achieve a change that is socially acceptable. The proposed change should be designed in such a way that it is meaningful according to the different worldviews held by those who will be affected by the change. Pratt and Foreman [2000], hold the same basic belief that change must be compatible with values that those affected cherish and thus they suggest the path of multivocality. Using multivocality is to formulate actions in such a way that they are open to many different interpretations, and can thus be accepted by people with differing views of the organisational identity.

These stories for sensemaking regarding identities or change initiatives, and the negotiations and compromises, could be viewed as examples of programs to win actors for a network around a new idea, such as a website with the inscription to promote the unity within a large and dispersed formal organisation. Hedberg et al. [1994], talking about the central imaginator trying to build an imaginary organisation (a virtual organisation), and Tyrstrup [2002], exploring the roles managers fill in organisations, building on Weick's [1995] concept sensemaking, view the leaders' perhaps most central task as assigning meaning to what goes on, and to promote their version of how to interpret the present and the future. This idea of the importance of promoting ones own interpretation in order to grow the network ascribing to the idea is also central in Latour's writing (e.g. [Latour, 1986]). Thompson [2002] furthers a similar, but more individualistic, idea "building on Giddens' conception of emergent meaning, which is located at the level of the individual and always saturated in social context. However, I go further than Giddens' model of the reflexive actor, conceiving individuals rather as constructive authors in assigning meaning to their shared environment (p. 187)". Combining the idea that central actors should promote their interpretation of the present and the future with Thompson's idea that we are all "constructive authors", we can expect that in a large organisation, there are many imaginators, not just one, each trying to imagine their organisation, and live by this imagination or even actively promote their image to others. When multiple imaginators are involved, the spreading use of www applications can, even if successful from the viewpoint of local imaginators, be expected to have organising as well as disorganising effects, when viewed from a central perspective.

4. Why study technochange in an NPO?

Why should we care about non-profit organisations? One reason is given in the introduction: the NPO is an extreme case, affording a would-be leader of change little opportunity to force people to adopt the proposed change. But NPOs are also important in their own right. With his by now classical studies of Italian society Putnam [1993] demonstrated that differences in organised civic activity could help to explain differences with regards to how well societies function economically and politically. The concept *social capital* denotes the trust, reciprocity and involvement generated by forming networks and participating in organised activity. The social capital is a cornerstone in a well functioning economy and society. In "Bowling Alone" (2000), Putnam analysed the present American society, and noted that organised civic activity is on the decline – a

trend which is alarming if the connection Putnam and others find between organised activity, social capital and a healthy society is real. That many well-established NPOs find it difficult to retain existing members and even more difficult to attract new ones is not a strictly North-American phenomenon; it is for example also noticeable in Sweden.

In Sweden, NPOs have been an important part of society for the last 100 years, and most Swedes are members of, and spend some or even considerable time and energy on, such organisations [Lundström and Wijkström, 1997]. In the US, NPOs at present employ 10% of the workforce and account for a sizeable proportion of the economy. When this is taken into consideration, it is surprising that the large portion of social activity revolving around non-paid activities carried out in connection with NPOs by citizens in their “spare time” is rarely studied and discussed and, if studied at all, is mainly discussed as a source of inspiration for the business arena [Wijkström, 1999; Fiol and O’Connor, 2002; Foreman and Whetten, 2002].

The situation is similar in IS research. In discussions and research concerning e-commerce and e-enabled transformation, much attention has been directed to the profit potential of new business ventures – Amazon, Gant, eTrade ... Non-profit organisations have, to a large extent, been so far ignored. Today, there is a strong interest in what www-based IS applications can do to aid the public sector in serving the general public. There is a widespread belief that there is a large, untapped potential in the use of such applications in the public sector, and in the civil society [Martin and Byrne, 2003]. There are also signs that present ventures in the public sector build on a belief that if information systems providing relevant information and potentially useful tools can be created and implemented, they will also be used [Gupta and Papagari, 2004; Edenius and Westelius, 2005]. Such a view has long been criticised in business settings (e.g. [Markus and Keil, 1994]). This could be seen as a sign that the public sector is reluctant to learn from business settings. Examples from other non-commercial settings, such as NPOs, can be expected to have a greater impact on idea development within the public sector. Thus, this article is an attempt to place NPOs on the IS research agenda because the non-profit sector is in itself an important part of our society and, in addition, can provide insights useful in a business setting, and offer examples to e-government initiatives that the public sector is more willing to learn from than from business settings.

5. Data collection

The case is based on interviews and discussions with five central staff personnel (the managing director, two people responsible for the web-initiative, one leading the learning organisation effort, and one with experience from building a related, virtual organisation, now partly merged with Friluftsrämjandet), meetings with the website partner and the membership administration partner, participation in www.frilufts.se-related workshops with district-level staff and club-level board members. Other sources include the site itself, a database on members who have logged onto the organisation’s website, computer log statistics about member and non-member use of the site, and member communication material, such as the organisation’s magazine.

To further investigate the perspectives of other stakeholders, I employed e-mail questionnaires with free-format answers in order not to direct the answers and to allow for connections and associations that I had not envisaged. The questionnaires were intended to capture the range and variety of views and perspectives. The purpose was

thus mainly ideographic, not an attempt at statistically sampling the population. Recipients of the questionnaire were chosen to cover variance in geographical location, size of community, type of activity, and sex, within each function: chairperson, leader, and member. Questionnaires were also sent to all 93 webmasters.

The interviews were mostly carried out during the winter and spring of 2000-2001, the email questionnaires were administered, and answers received, in February and March 2001, and the workshops were held in the autumn of 2001. Discussions with the managing director took place in 2004 and discussions with the two people responsible for the web initiative have continued up to the spring of 2005.

6. The story of Friluftsrämjandet's attempt at IT-based transformation

6.1. Friluftsrämjandet

This is how the outdoor-activity non-profit organisation Friluftsrämjandet (The organisation for the promotion of outdoor life), or FF for short, presents itself on the web:

FF has guided people to adventures for more than a hundred years. Ever since 1892, when some enthusiasts founded the "Association for advancing skiing in Sweden", we have worked to get as many as possible to enjoy outdoor activities in our wonderful nature. In 1892, the goal was to put Sweden on skis. We reached it.

Today we are the largest outdoor-activity organisation in Sweden, with broad and deep activity. We can offer everything from acquainting small children with the woods, via hiking, to mountainbike and climbing. Our 10 000 well-educated leaders arrange 60 000 activities a year, enjoyed by our 100 000 members.

The goal of the organisation is to encourage people to spend more time on outdoor activities. Traditionally, FF has been geographically organised, with 450 local clubs belonging to 23 districts, which in turn meet at a national level. At each of the three levels there are boards of directors, thus meaning that there are several thousand board members in the organisation. Most also serve as leaders in one or more activities. The largest local club has almost 3.000 members. 10% have 500 or more members. Another 40% have between 100 and 500. 15% have ten or fewer members. Practically all outdoor activities are organised and carried out at the local level through local initiatives. The headquarters in Stockholm employs a staff of about 10. Being an organisation built on voluntary work and the interest or even passion of individuals, the administration of FF runs on a tight budget. Of a yearly 25 MSEK,² over 40 percent is from membership fees and less than 1/3 is funded by state grants. The membership fee is split 45, 20, 35 between local clubs, district and central organisation. The money retained by headquarters mostly covers expenses at the central level, including membership administration, member magazine, committees and some subsidies to district and local level.

The clubs were conceived from a common idea of promoting outdoor life by organising activities, however, over time many clubs have developed to such a point where it is not obvious that they have more than the name and the purpose in common.

² Almost 3 million Euro.

Although officially all the clubs are parts of FF, it is somewhat dubious to talk of this collection of people, clubs and activities as "one organisation".

The membership turnover is substantial. On average, 40% of the new members leave the organisation within two years, 80% within four. Those who stay at least five years tend to remain as members. For a number of years during the 1990's, most clubs were losing members more rapidly than they were recruiting new ones. Had FF outlived itself, or was there a way to revitalise the organisation and make its offer more attractive in the ever increasing competition for people's time and attention?

6.2. The web initiative

In 1995, the marketing manager Carl, and Göran, the other person at central level responsible for IT in FF, decided to use the web as yet another channel to raise the visibility of FF. www.frilufts.se, or frilufts.se, as it is called, started life as a classical presentation of the organisation, but soon included less static material, such as tips for the outdoors-activity interested but less experienced site visitor. The web initiative so far had no ambition to transform the organisation.

After some time, the web was used to provide the local clubs access to the membership register. This was done in collaboration with two small companies: one building the website and the other managing the membership register.

6.2.1. *A web-based application for capturing the potential of virtual organising*

The website appeared to have the potential for further development. It could be used to initiate closer links for the organisation. Carl and Göran, and others at the central level, started to view it as the basis for a unified imaginary organisation, frilufts.se, that would help strengthen the traditional organisation. Knowing who is who and what is what in an organisation with 23 districts, 450 clubs, and more than 10.000 leaders is a non-trivial task. Collating this information and posting it in a format on the web which would be easy to browse and search, promised to substantially reduce points of friction regarding both the establishment and retaining of contact, vertically as well as horizontally. The managing director perceived this as a means of creating a new, network-based organisational structure without having to formally change the existing, hierarchical one. Provided that the register was kept up to date, a member or potential member could quickly find the name and contact details for the individual responsible for an activity, club, district or function. Those working in and for the organisation could quickly find out who the contact person was and how to contact them regardless of where this individual was located within the organisation. In principle, it had also become possible to e-mail anyone in the organisation, because an FF email address could be generated for every member. The potential for creating an unprecedented connectedness was obvious. However, for this to work in practice, members would have to activate their addresses and either check their mailboxes regularly or forward mail to another address that they actually use. (By 2001, less than 10% of the members had done so).

To some extent, spreading the idea worked well. By the middle of the year 2000, almost 100 clubs had webpages under the FF domain. However, the imaginers at the centre were not the only ones able to visualise the potential offered by using the web and the Internet. A further 50 clubs, which had started on their own, hosted their web sites at

alternative sources. All these addresses could now be tied together by being linked to the club and district in the contact register. Once you found the club you were interested in you would also have the link to that club's webpages. Addresses to the clubs on the FF domain posed no administrative problems. However, regarding those hosted elsewhere, establishing the correct links hinged on someone at the local level deciding that a link at frilufts.se was sufficiently important to take the trouble to provide the URL to the central webmaster. This did not always happen. For many people at the club level, the organisation they imagine is not the centrally imagined, all-Sweden-encompassing one. It is a local one including a local net of individuals and organisations. Sometimes, the local image does not even encompass the entire local club, but rather an activity-based subset of it – often including other, more or less local, non-club members and interested parties. For some, the social web of people in the club is what matters most, while for others, the sport, and the possibility to practice it, forms the basis for their membership.

Through the contact register, FF could become a virtual community. It had become possible to “see” all the others in the more than 100.000 member organisation. The next step was to move beyond the organisational structure level. On the web, the 450 clubs could become one, virtual club. Local webpages are useful for those interested in what is happening at a specific club, but checking what happens in neighbouring clubs, or clubs elsewhere, requires a visit to each local website. If, on the other hand, all activities were registered in a common database, it would become possible to find them regardless of the organising club. The value this would have to a member may depend on the type of activity: being able to locate skating trips or rock climbing excursions could appear quite attractive, while reading about outdoor day-care in another community would be of little practical value. For a leader, on the other hand, finding out about activities in other clubs could be a source of inspiration and could lead to useful exchange of knowledge and experience. For them, finding and building a learning community could be the – or a – relevant organisational vision. Finally, at district and central level, such a database could provide an easy overview of what is actually going on in the organisation.

To support this virtual FF club, an activity database was designed, which allowed leaders at the local level to post their activities and report enrolment, attendance and other statistics that form part of the general administration for activities. Webpages and pdf files can be generated from the database for online display from central or local websites or for printing and distribution as paper leaflets.

6.2.2. *Promoting the web-application*

So far, the description has centred on potential benefits, but achieved usefulness depends on actual use. The frilufts.se initiative was conceived at headquarters, and Carl and Göran felt it was their responsibility to assist in its promotion and its ability to fulfill its potential in serving FF. They tried to work through the local webmasters, and also derived lists of “web-active leaders” (In October 2001 around 1,700 people) to whom they sent updates regarding changes and improvements, e.g., “now you can register your participation statistics online”. The web application thus brought an opportunity to directly contact a large number of leaders. They had anticipated this consequence of the web-initiative but were rather surprised by the low adoption rate.

However, there were also consequences which they had not expected. They were surprised by what the increased ease of contact meant for those who are visible and hold central positions in the organisation. Soon, a deluge of e-mail filled their inboxes. Given the speed of electronic contact, many also expect questions and problems to be handled immediately or at the very least, within a matter of hours. Furthermore, members, activity-leaders and board members who saw the site compared it with commercial sites, and with other computer software that they came in contact with at work or at home. Other programs that they used were fast, rather bug-free, relatively easy to navigate and were equipped with comprehensive help-functions. Why, then, should they not pose similar demands on frilufts.se? This "reverse view" of the imaginary organisation came as somewhat of a surprise to the central imaginers. Suddenly their adopted tool to support their vision had also brought associated assessment standards and planted them firmly within the organisation. To the non-profit organisation FF, these new standards called for a considerable increase in quality and responsiveness and in an organisation with such an ambitious venture and with such limited resources, such expectations were very difficult to meet.

6.2.3. *Local development and the central application*

Out of the 450 local clubs that existed in the year 2001, the central project team believed that approximately 150 would probably have substantial use for the present applications. Out of these, 93 had started using the FF web and had their own webmasters. These webmasters were also the local "super users" and served as an important source of information (and inspiration) to the central development team.

Some local clubs had felt that a web presence would prove useful and had thus created their own solutions, hosted in diverse ways. At the FF central office, this was seen as somewhat of a problem, as it weakened the potential inherent in the FF solution, and also weakened, or at least did not reinforce, the FF brand. Some local clubs had a URL merely consisting of their own name, or some combination of the geographic location and something that resembled "Friluftsfrämjandet", whereas others had the URL of the web hotel or other organisation hosting their site. However, the majority of local clubs had not begun to use the web in any form and, due to their small size, those clubs were unlikely to do so in the near future.

6.2.4. *Summing up the central actor perspective*

As can be seen, much attention and considerable effort at the central office had been directed towards designing, evaluating and promoting the website and its use within the organisation. The hope, and belief, was that it would become an evermore-useful tool and an important instrument in revitalising the organisation. The image also included the hope that by facilitating contact, by displaying the activities in all clubs as parts of one great whole, by including the links to partner organisations, and by providing a record of what had been done, it would not only help to create the unified, imaginary organisation frilufts.se, but would also help in the ongoing effort to turn FF into a learning organisation.

So far the story has been concerned with ideas, visions, and creating the technical possibility to turn ideas into reality. It is now time to examine some of the evidence of the use, benefits achieved and effects of the venture.

6.3. Statistical evidence of use

One thing that was apparent from the central level was the activity happening on the web. By 2001, when the site had been in existence for a couple of years, and the activity database had been in operation for some time, close to 10.000 (10% of total membership) had logged in to be able to access parts of the site that were not publicly available, and to be able to design their own view of the site. By 2005, corresponding figures were 20.750 (21 %). Of those who had logged in, 75% had indicated the types of activities that they were interested in. Their range of interest was typically not narrow. On average, they indicated around 40% of the total range of activities.

Friluft.se attracted considerable traffic. 20.000-25.000 pages were accessed each day. In three months, a total of 45.000 distinct IP-addresses accessed pages at friluft.se. The majority of the site visitors, however, only accessed the publicly available pages. 2.850 distinct users logged in to the site, accessing parts of friluft.se that were not publicly available.

The use of friluft.se mail addresses would make push notification of members an easy task, but despite this possible advantage, activation of friluft.se email addresses was somewhat lower than site login. Only around 5% of the members had activated their email accounts. Peer pressure seems to have played a role, provided that the group of members who activated their accounts was not very small. Mail activation showed a negative correlation to the size of the club. One explanation could be that in the larger clubs there were so many members that the individual became anonymous. Another explanation could be that e-mail adoption in general spread more quickly and at an earlier stage in the larger towns where the large clubs are situated, and that the members there already had an e-mail address elsewhere when FF launched its initiative.

Explanations of the overall low friluft.se mail address adoption could be that members in general use another mail address and do not bother to have a second one. This was reinforced by a number of local clubs who maintained local mailing lists to notify their members of certain activities. Another possible explanation, and one that worried the proponents and the opponents of the friluft.se initiative alike, was that a large proportion of the members perhaps did not use e-mail at all. This could lead to a division into the "connected" and the "non-connected" members, and would run counter to the attempt to strengthen the shared (holographic) image of FF. By 2004, the e-mail activation among members had tripled to around 15%, and among the 10.000 leaders it had reached 45%. The figures only increased marginally in 2005 and still fell far short of the targets.

6.4. Exploring views in the organisation

The following are the views expressed by webmasters, chairpersons, leaders and members in response to the questionnaire.

6.4.1. *The webmaster view*

An information problem?

Most webmasters seemed convinced that friluft.se could have an important role to play, and appeared somewhat (or highly) frustrated that the people in the organisation did not share their enthusiasm. Some viewed it as an information problem: if only the members

and leaders were properly informed of the potential benefits, e.g., through enthusiastic articles in the organisation's magazine, use would increase. Others had attempted to inform and explain but had found that it produced only minimal effects and tended to seek explanations elsewhere, for example in the design of the site.

Another explanation was lack of "computer maturity": knowledge of IT, habit of using computers for communication and information gathering and access to computers. This might appear to be surprising, given that Sweden is supposed to be a "connected" country, with between 50 and 90% of the population having access to the Internet (depending on the counting method used). However, the webmasters had noted that many of the members did not use computers as an everyday tool and certainly did not check their e-mail frequently even if they had an account.

All these points appeared to apply equally to both members and leaders. Distinguishing points between them included time constraints. Several webmasters considered that the time required in order for information maintained on the web to be up to date actually deterred leaders from using *friluft.se*. The time required to search for information regarding activities of interest was, however, seldom referred to as a deterrent for members. On the other hand, while a lack of interest by leaders in posting relevant information was often cited as something that kept the member interest in the web down, only one webmaster referred to a lack of member interest being a reason for low leader interest in posting information.

Missing explanations

The explanations given were all of a rational nature. The webmasters did not refer to a general resistance to a centrally designed solution. Neither did they refer to the importance of personal relations – i.e. that knowing the person who designed the solution (a local imaginitor) would create a social obligation to use those webpages, while the absence of such social ties would limit the acceptance of the centrally designed solution.

Effects on the organisation

A few webmasters said that there were no effects. More said "no effects so far", but expected something to start happening soon, or at least eventually. They could see that the quality regarding membership registers, information from centre and district to local level and co-ordination within the districts increased. Some also noted an increase in the quality and timeliness of information regarding activities, but only two out of twenty-seven could say that the use of the web had actually led to increased activity – more time spent on outdoor activities. Some more said that it was possible that the level of activity had increased, especially through more participation in activities in neighbouring clubs, but that it was difficult to prove this assertion.

Some also looked at the potential offered by the web presence to attract new members, and one actually noted an increase in recruitment that he attributed to the well-maintained local webpages.

There were also consequences of the new communication channel and communication practices that were not unequivocally positive. One aspect was the transfer of costs for the communication to the members – they had to put in an effort to keep informed, and the ones who were active webusers and understood the application

bore a greater load by being asked to help others and to take a greater responsibility for maintaining the web-published information.

In general, the webmasters seemed to subscribe to the image promoted by the central imaginators, but, as could be expected, many viewed their local part of the great image as being the most important.

6.4.2. *The chairpersons' views*

Chairpersons at central and district level sympathised with the central imaginators' vision. They felt that the website was helping to form a conception of Friluftsförbundet as one organisation rather than a series of local and district level units having little but a name in common. To them, it had meant that contacting people was increasingly easy, there was an increase in the quality of received data, and there was also the possibility to analyse and access current statistics. In the terms of Hedberg et al. [1994] it bonded the imaginary organisation together and made it concrete for all and not merely to the original iminator. They also believed in the usefulness of the available activity presentations and expected this to increase in the future. One chairperson even reported that the use of the web had increased the participation in the trips that were arranged. To some, but not all, frilufts.se was also an important source of information concerning what went on at local level and in other districts.

At the local level, views were more mixed. Their images of the organisation were typically not the same as those of the central imaginators. To many, *the* organisation is the local club and its connections. There could be connections to the rest of FF, but that did not mean that the entire FF organisation was a relevant entity. Regarding the website, some viewed it as an important source of information regarding what was happening, particularly in other clubs. Others (the majority) viewed it as a tool with or without potential, but not delivering much benefit so far. Among those who were less enthusiastic, some held the view that use of the web had little to contribute to the dissemination of information within the local club.

However, most local chairpersons appreciated the increased ease of contact with other parts of the organisation offered to them by the website. Some explicitly shared the view held higher up that frilufts.se actually helped to strengthen the bonds and the feeling of being one large organisation, and valued that vision. Most of them also believed, or at least hoped, that the website would come to play an important part – maybe even the most important role – in communication within FF and as the tool that would assist the members to keep track of the activities offered – especially those outside the member's own club. Whether this could be a result of efforts within the organisation or whether it would need assistance from the development of computer use, and the use of the web and e-mail, in society in general seemed open to debate.

6.4.3. *The leader view*

Views on importance, discretionary and mandatory systems

The leaders tended to take a view of the relevant organisation as being that which shared their interest in specific activities – for some within the local club, for others across the country and regardless of FF membership status. Those who responded to the questionnaire were fairly equally divided into positive and negative attitudes concerning

the web application. Roughly half rarely used the web to either gather or post information regarding activities. Those who did not post information regarding their activities did not view the web as an important means of communication with the members, while those who posted information did believe in the value of the medium. It thus did not appear to be viewed as a mandatory system; no one seemed to post information because they were supposed to or because someone told them to do so. The use appeared to be purely discretionary. It is interesting to note that there were even those who stated that the web was used by people in their specific line of interest, but that they themselves still did not believe in the value of the medium. There were also those who were not negative to the web in principle, but who would only start using it actively when they could see that a majority of the members were using it.

The fact that I received this type of comment from leaders who had logged in and who had activated their e-mail account lent credibility to the view held by many webmasters and chairpersons that the use of the web was subject to a vicious circle – members did not use it because leaders did not post information regarding activities, and leaders did not post information because members did not use it. This is a classical example of network externalities – the usefulness of belonging to a network increases with the number of members in the network. Provided that the usefulness is low, only those with a low threshold, with negligible cost involved in the use of the network, will actually use it.

Positive and negative attitudes

Most leaders seemed to evaluate friluft.se in terms of its usefulness in communicating with members. However, the attitude that the application was something negative also existed. I received comments such as “it turns attention away from what is really important”, and “the web solution is an attempt by the top to control the organisation”.

6.4.4. Member views

Members who responded and stated that they used friluft.se typically valued the possibility to access information on activities outside their own club. Others saw it as a good idea, nice to know that it existed, and believed that they would start using it eventually, while still others found that it provided no benefits in comparison with existing information channels. Some claimed that it made them aware of more activities and led to higher participation, while others mainly found it to be a convenient channel. Whatever their attitude to friluft.se, they all seemed to view it as an ordinary part of a contemporary organisation. No one described it in terms such as revolutionary, path-breaking or astonishing.

7. Discussion

What began as a central administrator’s attempt, to see how his organisation could benefit from the use of the WWW, came to trigger, and indeed seems to require, changes in the structuration process in the organisation [Giddens 1984].

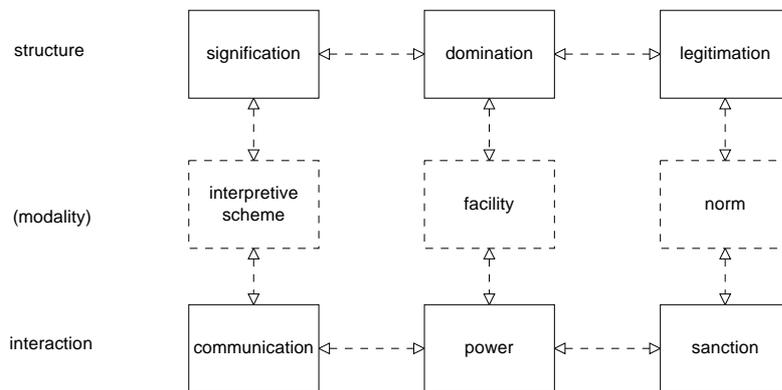


Figure 1 The Duality of Structure (Giddens, 1984, p 29).

7.1. Signification, interpretive schemes and organisational identities

One important change was how the initiators gradually came to view this tool for facilitating administration and communication as a means to revitalise the organisation and bring into existence a completely new organisational logic. From being custodians of the existing organisation exploring the use of a new tool, they turned into imaginers envisaging an entirely new organisation, albeit superimposed on the existing one and supporting it. This new organisation would revolve around the logic that contact is based on interest in a specific activity rather than on where in the geographically organised hierarchy your membership is registered.

To the initiators, this was a change in signification: how they perceived the role of the communication made possible by the activity database. They had power over the development of the application, but not over those who were to use it and indeed they were not seeking domination. In their minds, what would legitimate the web-based application was its usefulness, and neither they nor anyone else held norms that proposed the establishment of sanctions or application of facilities of power. In terms of Giddens' framework, only the leftmost column was a legitimate area for influencing others, with communication as the tool (cf. Figure 1). FF is an NPO, and the norms concerning the central administration's right to direct communication in the local clubs were rather uniform across the organisation: the role of the central administration should be to serve the local units, not control or direct them. In the case of deploying friluft.se as well as in most other matters, power rested with the activity leaders and the members. If they found it advantageous to use it, they would. If they did not, no one could legitimately force them.

The problem for the initiators was that what the developing application signified to them in terms of usefulness and potential to rethink how the organisation functioned was not widely shared within the organisation. At the outset, the two initiators were alone with their vision of the imaginary organisation, but soon enlisted the managing director. Eventually they also enlisted others from within the organisation who believed in the potential usefulness of a shared, web-based application. However the attempt to further increase the actor network around their vision was complicated by the existence of

multiple ideographic interpretive schemes concerning computerisation, and multiple ideographic organisational identities [Pratt and Foreman, 2000]. To some, the internet and the web were natural communication tools. To these individuals, *frilufts.se* made perfect sense as a tool to facilitate administration and communication; they subscribed to the central imaginers' inscription [Latour, 1996] with little or no change, at least in principle. Unlike the imaginers, however, if an actual attempt to use the application did not prove useful to them, few would actively strive to promote the application. This is a type of non-use that is well known in information systems literature, and is either attributed to poor implementation management [Markus, 2004; Scheepers, 2003; Damsgaard and Scheepers, 2000; Markus and Mao, 2004] or to a lack of understanding of user needs in the design phase [Skok and Kalmanovitch, 2005; Markus and Mao, 2004; Markus, 2004]. There still remained other would-be users who viewed outdoor activities and computer use as two incompatible worlds that do not, and should not, mix. To them, *frilufts.se* competed with the outdoor activities rather than supported them. To some of them, the non-computer-mediated communication regarding the activities was in itself part of the social activity of being a member of FF, whereas computer-mediated communication was administration foreign to the FF idea. They did not even translate the innovation, they refused to be enrolled. This reason for non-use is not prominent in previous information systems research.

Another aspect of the interpretive schemes and organisational identities concerned how people viewed centralised initiatives within the organisation. To some, ascribing to a holistic identity, centralised initiatives strengthen FF, the organisation whose branches span Sweden; it is good for members that FF is strong and unified. Thus, using *frilufts.se* to communicate between leaders and members was good, as it would help promote the feeling of being part of one, common FF. To others, ascribing to the idea of a local part as the relevant organisation, centralised initiatives are in opposition to local interests – perhaps not maliciously so, but still. Centralised initiatives strengthen the hierarchical power structure, which is detrimental to local activity and detracts attention and resources from the outdoor activities. Thus, by conforming to a uniform structure when communicating would, by definition, hinder rather than promote the outdoor activities of the local club. Though not a common feature in web-application research, such misgivings have for example been reported in connection with ERP systems projects [Scott and Wagner, 2003].

7.2. Power aspects, norms and organisational identity

As time passed, and board members, webmasters and some leaders and members began to see and appreciate the potential visualised by the initiators – began to visualise the same imaginary organisation – and feel frustration over the slow pace of adoption, they started using resources they controlled to modify the norms. In terms of Giddens' framework, all three forms of interaction began to be employed in attempts to further their imaginary organisation (cf. Figure 1). In many commercial organisations, this would not have caused any raised eyebrows [Markus, 2004; Scheepers, 2003; Huang et al, 2003], but in the NPO, this was a dramatic shift in organisational culture. Certainly, they still tried to use positive reinforcement, but also started to feel that it would be legitimate to devise some sanctions and to start using the facilities at their disposal to wield power – to start to “force” use – to achieve the benefits that the widespread use of the application

could bring. There were those who felt that part of the role of a board member should be to be an active frilufts.se user and additionally that benefits such as participation in trips and attending courses should be subject to active use of frilufts.se. In some districts, the boards dictated that no activities would appear in the conventional paper-based programs unless they had been entered in frilufts.se. Some clubs started to cut down on the financing of traditional modes of communication in order to promote the use of the web. Perhaps the changing norms will assist in speeding up adoption rates or perhaps, as yet, unexpected changes in the structuration process will send the development along new paths.

7.3. Enlisting the transformational power of the IT application

Drawing on the actor-network idea, frilufts.se could be thought of as an organising actor, but web technology could also work as a disorganising actor. It proved an unruly actor, difficult to keep as a faithful ally, but eager to lend a hand to whoever tried to enlist it. The centrally held vision of the imaginary organisation frilufts.se still exists, and appears to be spreading, but can it be said that FF has been transformed by frilufts.se? As a whole: hardly, but possibly in parts and with regards to certain respects. The image of the organisation as seen at the upper levels has changed. There, the more unified, virtually bonded FF promoted by frilufts.se appears to be a reality. Since the end of 2002, the presentation of Friluftsfrämjandet on Frilufts.se contains the following passage: "The activity database on the web has become Friluftsfrämjandet's national activity magazine, which, by being printed in a paper version has given all members access to the entire offering of Friluftsfrämjandet. This has taken us a step closer to our vision of being the natural meeting place for all those with an interest in outdoor activity." The total number of members has started to increase again. The imaginers behind frilufts.se want to believe that this development is partly due to the web application. In certain activities, there has been a transformation and geographical boundaries have become less important. There are cases where communication has improved at the local level. There are examples of how the web-presence has helped in recruiting new members. There are changes appearing in the signification, domination and legitimation structures, but looking at the breadth and depth of the organisation much remains unchanged, with regards to both attitudes and actions.

What has happened, however, is that the imaginers at the centre were not alone. Just as they saw a way of using the web and Internet to bring into existence the imaginary organisation that they envisaged, others, at the local level, also saw the same possibility to bring *their* visions to life. This organising activity could be seen as organising or disorganising from a central perspective, depending on whether it is seen as strengthening or weakening FF. Damsgard and Scheepers [2000] noted that such activity is highly likely in connection with malleable technology, such as Intranets, and warned that unless centrally managed, it would result in disorganising effects, at least eventually. In the highly decentralised culture of FF, local imaginers wielded sufficient power over resources to start constructing their virtual contact centres and meeting places. In fact, the low cost of contact offered by web technology and e-mail meant that the resources over which they held domination suddenly were sufficient to start reaching out across the boundaries of the local clubs. These local board members, activity leaders or other functionaries took on the role of webmaster in an FF club to turn their vision into action.

In one way, these local imaginers met with the same problems as the central ones – low adoption, few helpers and a low proportion of club members sharing their vision of the new, imaginary organisation. In another way they had more of an opportunity and less of a problem. For those who were not attempting a Renovation job – to revitalise their local club – but rather a New construction or an Addition [Hedberg et al, 1994] – organising a sufficient number of people within and outside the local club to jointly carry out activities – the measures of success were more favourable. To them it did not matter how many of the present FF members did *not* join their initiative; to them only those *joining* their imaginary organisation mattered. FF, as such, was not important to them as long as part of the network it provided could be used to further their vision. But there are also some cases of special activity interest groups that have decided to leave FF and start on their own because their imaginers felt that FF did not give room to or support their imaginary organisations. As IT-facilitated organising had become inexpensive, there was little incentive to remain in an organisation that did not support their visions. Exit is always an option, and they used it. To my knowledge, such examples of disorganising effects of IT-facilitated organising are rare in IS research. However, management-prompted exit of employees who do not ascribe to the technochange visions have been reported by, for example, Huang et al [2003].

7.3.1. *Intertwining the virtual and the material in Additions, Renovations, and New Constructions*

Drawing on the ideas of intertwining [Robey et al., 2003] we can note that using a computer application to reinforce or complement existing, material practices can make sense if our imaginary organisation is an Addition to the existing organisation. If, however, our imaginary organisation is intended as a Renovation of the existing organisation, this calls for intertwining that results in synergies or reciprocity with existing, material practices. Mere reinforcements or complements can hardly be considered renovations. This indicates that it is easier to achieve an addition than a renovation, as reinforcements and complements can be expected to be less complicated than synergies and reciprocities. Furthermore, a computer application that is intended to be either a reinforcement or an addition, runs the risk of detracting, rather than adding value within an attempted renovation. If, for example, the website is intended as a reinforcement of the communication between leader and members, to enable a member to find information regarding activities on the web as well as on paper flyers, it cannot be considered to be a reinforcement unless adoption is high, or even total. When some leaders posted their activities (or even only some of their activities) on the web, while others still used the traditional paper medium, neither proved as reliable as the flyer had been prior to the advent of the web. The result was that a member would have to search both the web and the paper flyers to make certain that she did not miss out on information. At first, this led clubs to continue using paper flyers and to ensure that activities posted on the net were also advertised on the flyers. After some time, some clubs decided that it was a requirement that the activity was entered in the web-accessible database for it to be included on the flyer, hoping that this would lead to a high use of the web-accessible database. But as long as both modes continued to coexist, the result was an extra cost to the organisation, only benefiting those members who appreciated the complement of electronically accessible information on activities in addition to a paper-based version.

Renovation was easiest to achieve in activities that naturally attracted participants across club borders. In kayak excursions, for example, where the physical activity depended on a sufficient number of members participating, but the paper-based mode of communication made it difficult to reach people in other clubs, there were obvious synergies to be achieved from posting activities on the web. Soon, over two thirds of the kayaking activities in FF were being entered into the web application, and the web became the primary medium for communicating excursions, giving members easier access to accurate information concerning a large selection of excursions, and leaders a quick marketing channel whose reach was extensive.

As the examples show, successful renovation depends on a sufficiently good match between existing needs and the potential of the IT tool to outperform previous modes of communication and become the dominant channel.

7.4. Translation of the frilufts.se idea to a local, individual network

Given the transition to a technology where communication costs (at least on the supply side) are radically reduced and where the possibility exists to easily reach many others and with little cost and effort, it would be expected that the centre would lose importance, and lateral communication – and communication initiatives – would increase. Potential imaginers need not be central staff, district and club board members and local activity leaders. They could as easily be found among the "ordinary" members, someone deciding to start their own (temporary?) organisation. In the FF setting this could for example mean that members would start taking initiatives, announcing (via mail or web) that "On Saturday at 9 am I intend to go on a hike from X to Y. Those interested in joining meet at X." However, I had no indication from anyone that this was actually happening. Maybe such initiatives existed, but no one reported them to me. How come such local imaginers did not seem to spring into action?

One answer to why I have not heard of such "temporary imaginers" is that FF does not support them. The official view is that such organising is disorganising. The FF policy has so far been to support leader-led activities, and leader in FF is an organisational role, not something someone can become for the afternoon. As a consequence, those who hold official roles in FF can obtain the e-mail addresses of the members from frilufts.se, but the members cannot. Similarly, when a leader sends an e-mail to a group of members, the mailing list is not included in the e-mail.

Another answer is that the members subscribe to the FF idea(1) of leader-led activities. When asked the question: "If you were to join a network/community, what activity related to your outdoor life would it focus on?" many members did not even understand the question. The idea of a network or community was something that did not match their frames of reference. And the absence of a strong "voice" on the matter appears to attest to that so far, the organisation is not filled with frustrated temporary imaginers. But on the other hand, most members are only temporary subscribers to the FF vision – as noted above, 80% of them leave within four years.

Is the community concept thus misguided – the brainchild of an academic? No, not altogether. There are people who understand the concept, want to make spontaneous contact with others and who find the doors closed within FF and frilufts.se alike. An alternative organisation, based on the community-idea, started as a commercial venture in 1999. Utsidan.se wanted to provide a forum that would attract people interested in active

outdoor activities such as climbing, skating, skiing and hunting. The commercial idea was that given a sufficient number of visitors, the site would be attractive to advertisers. Despite its 19,000 members, 150,000 visitors per month (of which perhaps 80,000 or 90,000 were unique visitors) and 1,500,000 hits per month it turned out that it was far from economically viable when the IT bubble burst. But the interest it generated shows that the idea had its merits. It is likely that some of the utsidan.se visitors and members were former FF members. It is also the case that some of the truly active utsidan.se members were also simultaneously members of FF and/or other organisations.

If we compare the physical organisation FF with the virtual utsidan.se we find that they were of similar size (FF 100,000 members, utsidan.se 80.000-90.000 unique visitors at the beginning of 2001). One was founded on the geographically organised, leader-led activity paradigm, while the other had the virtual community and temporary groups, meeting rather spontaneously on anyone's initiative, as its basic idea. If we look at frilufts.se, it carries some of utsidan.se's characteristics – the specific type of activity as the organisational logic rather than the geographically based clubs, the web and e-mail as the main contact medium for advertising and agreeing on the physical activities and meetings. At the same time, it retains the FF restriction on lateral member contact outside of organised activities. This leaves it somewhat stuck in the middle, and its moderate success so far despite the asset of FF's 100.000 members shows that there is some kind of problem with its imaginator's vision. Could it be that Putnam's analysis of the decline of civic engagement is correct and highly applicable to present day Sweden, that people do not want to spend their time away from work in organised activities? If so, it is probably high time that frilufts.se changes its policy regarding lateral, spontaneous contacts. Changing the policy, in practice, requires no more than the stroke of a pen (or rather a sequence of key punches) from the imaginator, but changing the norms and the established structure of legitimation that frilufts.se has inherited from – and will to a large extent continue to share with – FF is probably a much longer, more complicated and less conductible process.

On the other hand, utsidan.se did not discover a means of surviving as a commercial venture, while FF has managed to stay alive and active for more than a hundred years by never attempting to enter a commercial path. FF has organisational muscle that is envied by some utsidan.se constellations. The most active nucleus of the climbing community decided to join FF, forming a subgroup where two organisational identities can coexist, one upholding leader-led activities and the other relying on member-to-member organising of activities. This subgroup, having found clubs that will host it, now draws on the administrative capacity and the solid resource base of FF to further its goals, while still relying on the utsidan.se site and mailing lists to support the informal "community" aspect. This nucleus is thus yet a group of imaginator, making a part of FF a part of their imaginary organisation. From a central FF perspective, it is organising by bringing more activity under the FF brand, but also disorganising by harbouring an organisational logic that runs counter to the FF ideal of leader-led activities. For now, it is accepted, but not encouraged. In time, this idiographic identity clash could form a challenge to the central FF ideal of leader-led activities, a challenge invited through the experiment of using web-based applications to provide alternatives to the traditional hierarchical structure for organising activities.

8. Conclusion

What started out as an attempt to use the www to support communication and administration, over time grew into the idea to revitalise the organisation and build a new organising logic. From being custodians of the existing organisation, exploring the usefulness of a new tool, the actors at the central office came to be imaginers imagining a new organisation, although one complementing and reinforcing the existing organisation, rather than replacing it. This new organisation would be based on interest in different types of activities rather than on where in the geographically determined hierarchy the individual membership was registered. A growing network of actors has come to share the imaginers' vision, but there have also been completely different images:

What to the centrally placed imaginers – and to many computer-positive organisational members – was a flexible communication tool that could support outdoor activity, was to others a foreign intrusion that counteracted the very foundations of the organisation. Their image was that frilufts.se fragmented the organisation into isolated activity groups and reduced the social contact within the organisation.

The development of a common information system, that by some was viewed as a practical way of sharing development costs and a positive opportunity for standardising the communication regarding activities and organisation, was by others viewed as a way to reinforce the hierarchical power structure at the expense of local activity, and thereby diverting resources and attention from the outdoor activities.

What to some appeared as a strengthening of the brand Friluftsfrämjandet required to remain visible and to attract new members at a higher rate than the existing ones were leaving, to others appeared as active counteracting and weakening of their club's local anchoring, tradition and identity.

Even among those who shared the view that frilufts.se was, or could become, of value, images diverged. To some, the original imaginers' image of a Renovation of FF was the relevant one. Others saw frilufts.se as offering possibilities for practical Additions. Yet others valued frilufts.se because it facilitated their spending time on outdoor activities, rather than because of its support to the organisation. To them, frilufts.se offered a functioning platform for New constructions, organising activities without having to pay attention to the organisational boundaries.

Depending on the view regarding the application and the conception of identity or identities of FF, the evaluation of the success of the venture differs. Both central and local actors who dreamed of renovating the existing organisation experienced a difficult journey: low use, few helpers, a low proportion of members who shared their vision. Those who did not attempt to renovate the organisation, but rather add to it or build completely new organisations had easier journeys. To them, it was sufficient that the IT venture helped them organise a sufficient number of people to make possible the activity

they wanted to perform. To them, it was of little importance how many did *not* adopt their initiative; what mattered to them was how many joined *their* imaginary organisation.

The initiators' initial, and in line with the rhetoric of the time somewhat naïve, expectations on a rapid, perhaps even revolutionary change, has now been replaced by the realisation that the journey will be a long one. The journey is not primarily one of offering technical options, but rather one of promoting ideas regarding how the technical options can become integrated aspects of the organisation so that the web application can deliver the potential benefits that its proponents see in it. That journey is about learning; about the ability to actively utilise the possibilities that open up; about gradual changes of views, norms, interpretations, skills, and actions. It entails a "reweaving of actors' webs of beliefs and habits of action" [Tsoukas and Chia, 2002]. To achieve this, the *frilufts.se* venture has been made more visible and has been intertwined with almost all centrally initiated or designed initiatives: magazine, membership cards, leader training, organisational development efforts, etc. This is in line with recommendations concerning how to conduct technochange [Markus, 2004].

However, the grand vision of the imaginers behind *frilufts.se* has not become reality (yet) and the image they hold is undergoing constant development and modification. The less ambitious, sometimes consonant, sometimes conflicting visions held by a host of other imaginers have inspired, been inspired, modified and even sometimes been thwarted by the central imaginers, without one or the other dominating. The resource-distributing power of various officials in FF has been used in favour of local as well as central imaginers' visions. This case illustrates the complex nature of web-application-related organising, where the exercise of agency in favour of (or in opposition to) one image or the other makes the fate of the imaginator's imaginary organisation far more uncertain than a macro view of organisational units would imply. Unlike the image conveyed by conventional research [Scheepers, 2003; Huang et al, 2003; Markus, 2004; Skok and Kalmanovitch, 2005] web applications have not played a role in the organisation, they have played many roles in many (imaginary) organisations. Rather than saying that *frilufts.se* has made little difference to FF, I would say "The transformations have only just begun!".

In a sense, this is yet another example of IT-enabled organisational change, where imaginers underestimate the difficulties involved in achieving the adoption of their vision. However, it appears that others run the risk of repeating the same process (cf. [Martin and Byrne, 2003; Gupta and Papagari, 2004]). If the conclusions drawn from the present analysis of the *Friluftsfrämjandet* process were applied at an early stage in other ventures, much frustration could probably be avoided. Perhaps some imaginers would also achieve a better match between aspirations and outcomes. I conclude by summarising six points in the form of advice to would-be imaginers intending to employ malleable information technology in organisational endeavours.

- 1) Remember that ultimately, power over the outcomes rests with those who are to adopt an innovation, not with those who try to promote and spread it.
- 2) Do not presume a holographic organisational identity. Be attentive to others' perspectives and try to identify the idiographic organisational identities that can probably be discerned.

- 3) Expect that other imaginers will also attempt to enlist the technology to support their visions. Without explicit dialogue between imaginers, the chances are that the attempts will counteract or interfere with each other.
- 4) Do not expect that everyone will benefit even from a highly malleable technology. It will more easily support some activities and some perceived identities than others.
- 5) Do not entertain unreasonable expectations of rapid adoption, particularly if the change rests on intellectual persuasion and that people will voluntarily subscribe to the inscription, and you do not have other means, or organisational legitimacy to use them, for fostering adoption.
- 6) Try to identify Additions and New constructions that are attainable and meaningful, since they are less restrained by existing practices and conceptions. If you aim for Renovations, give due consideration to what types of intertwining between virtual and material practices are required for the IT support to contribute to the renovation, rather than weaken it.

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