

Digital transformation or digital standstill? Status quo bias in Swedish public sector strategies

Public sector
strategies

91

Kristian Norling

*Department of Applied IT, Swedish Center for Digital Innovation,
University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden*

Received 3 April 2024
Revised 24 May 2024
Accepted 18 June 2024

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the impact of bureaucratic culture on the formulation and content of digital transformation strategies in Swedish local governments.

Design/methodology/approach – This research uses a qualitative content analysis method to examine strategy documents from local governments in Sweden. The analysis is focused on identifying concepts related to the definition of digital transformation strategy, organizational culture and agility. Relevant themes and insights were extracted using concept-driven coding.

Findings – The research uncovered a significant influence of bureaucratic culture on the content of strategy documents, which manifests through a strong status quo bias. This bias leads to a cautious approach toward digital innovation, limiting strategies to incremental improvements and maintenance of existing processes.

Research limitations/implications – The findings highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of how organizational culture affects digital transformation. The study suggests avenues for further research, particularly in exploring mechanisms to balance bureaucratic stability with digital agility.

Practical implications – The research proposes recommendations for policymakers and public sector managers, advocating for an approach incorporating cultural awareness to foster a more conducive environment for digital transformation within bureaucratic settings.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the field by revealing the nuanced role of bureaucratic culture in shaping digital transformation strategies within the public sector. It offers a unique insight into the Swedish context.

Keywords Stakeholder engagement, Organizational culture, Digital transformation, Agility, Public value, Status quo bias, Bureaucratic culture, Cultural transformation, Strategy documents, Strategic dialogue

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In recent years, the digital transformation narrative has become increasingly woven into the fabric of public sector organizations, where digital technologies are carriers and catalysts for organizational change (Berente and Seidel, 2022; Hanelt *et al.*, 2020; Mergel *et al.*, 2019; Warner and Wäger, 2019). Although the digital era shows potential, bureaucratic culture challenges public sector reforms (Lindquist, 2022).

© Kristian Norling. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode>



Transforming Government:
People, Process and Policy
Vol. 19 No. 1, 2025
pp. 91-107
Emerald Publishing Limited
1750-6166
DOI [10.1108/TG-04-2024-0078](https://doi.org/10.1108/TG-04-2024-0078)

Digital transformation in organizations involves integrating digital technologies into all aspects of organizations, fundamentally changing how organizations operate and deliver value to stakeholders (Hanelt *et al.*, 2020; Vial, 2019). However, this transformation is impeded by entrenched organizational and cultural barriers, as highlighted in studies by Tangi *et al.* (2021) and Wilson and Mergel (2022). The public sector often magnifies these barriers due to institutionalized cultures and bureaucratic norms. For example, a study of a digitalization project in the Norwegian Court Administration highlights the institutionalized culture, roles, and behaviors associated with bureaucracy as a particular set of challenges of specific importance to public sector organizations (Bjerke-Busch and Aspelund, 2021).

Strategy documents play a crucial role in this context; they guide and reflect the strategic priorities of public sector organizations (Pollitt, 2009; Sebastian *et al.*, 2017). However, the focus on internal efficiency (Norling, 2024; Norling *et al.*, 2022), a hallmark of Weberian bureaucracy characterized by rule-based work and meritocracy (Gay, 2000), often conflicts with the need for innovation and responsiveness in digital transformation. This tension is further complicated by mimetic isomorphism among public organizations striving for legitimacy (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Recognizing this, by adopting an interpretive perspective and employing a qualitative content analysis methodology, the study aims to contribute to the understanding of digital transformation in the public sector by exploring how bureaucratic culture shapes digital transformation strategies in Swedish local governments (Meijer and Bekkers, 2015). The guiding research question is: *How does bureaucratic culture impact the content of digital transformation strategies within public sector organizations?*

This research not only responds to the call for more empirical studies on digital transformation in the public sector (Mergel *et al.*, 2019; Tangi *et al.*, 2021; Warner and Wäger, 2019), enriching the discourse on public sector strategies (Bryson and George, 2020), digital transformation strategies (Chalias *et al.*, 2019), and how organizational culture affects them (Grover *et al.*, 2022; Wilson and Mergel, 2022), it also contributes to prescriptive theorizing on culture management in information systems research (Kummer and Schmiedel, 2016).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. An overview of related literature sets the stage, followed by a detailed account of the methodological approach. The findings section then describes and analyzes the content of the digital transformation strategies, and the final chapter discusses the findings and their broader implications.

Previous research

For successful digital transformation, organizations should define a digital strategy, as demonstrated by the findings of a study of 25 incumbent organizations (Sebastian *et al.*, 2017). In a study on the successful transformation of three German media companies, Matt *et al.* (2016) described creating a strategy as a primary concern that should contain four dimensions:

- (1) the use of technologies;
- (2) changes in value creation;
- (3) structural changes; and
- (4) financial aspects.

Additionally, Kane *et al.* (2015) argued that strategy drives digital transformation, further corroborating the centrality of strategy in driving transformation efforts. In the public sector, strategy is commonly manifested as a document, and written records are

foundational to bureaucracies (Pollitt, 2009). Furthermore, strategies are high-level steering documents in Swedish local governments, mirroring the context in which they were created. In other words, strategy is essential for digital transformation (Chanas *et al.*, 2019), and the strategy document is an important artifact in a public sector setting.

The purpose of strategy documents extends beyond merely outlining future plans; they are dynamic tools for capturing and refining developing strategies until a finalized version emerges (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2011). They are instrumental in facilitating the learning process from ongoing strategy practices (Korin *et al.*, 2022) and in navigating paradoxical tensions by fostering substantive interactions and diverse inputs from stakeholders (Heracleous *et al.*, 2018; Knight and Paroutis, 2017). Strategy documents help in “crafting compromises” by allowing stakeholders to align and reach consensus on new strategic directions (Hall, 2017). Although strategy documents can be broadly defined to include any discourse on an organization’s long-term orientation (Lundgren and Blom, 2016), this study specifically focuses on official digital transformation strategies as the object of analysis. This focus on strategy documents sets the stage for examining their role in the broader context of digital and cultural transformations within organizations.

Research has increasingly recognized that digital transformation is as much a cultural as a technological shift (Grover *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, Bitzer *et al.* (2021) found that digital transformation is closely linked to agile and cultural transformation, forming a triad of transformations necessary for continuous change. The cultural dimensions of digital transformation are a critical but underexplored facet in the literature (Grover *et al.*, 2022), especially the interplay between organizational culture and digital transformation strategy (Wilson and Mergel, 2022). Previous research has examined the strategic direction of digital transformation strategies in municipalities (Norling *et al.*, 2022) and regions, emphasizing an iron cage on internal efficiency (Norling, 2024).

Recent studies in the public sector have further explored the role of organizational culture in shaping digital transformation efforts, with comparative insights from various regions. Tangi *et al.* (2021), in a study of Italian public administration, investigated the driving and impeding factors of digital government transformation, highlighting the importance of organizational culture in facilitating successful transformations. Similarly, Edelmann and Mergel (2022), in a study of digital transformation implementation in the Austrian public sector, view culture as a critical factor, requiring a shift in mindset and participatory approaches. Comparative insights from other sectors further underscore the significance of organizational culture in digital transformation. Butt *et al.* (2024) found that Nordic industrial organizations adopted a proactive and deliberate approach to culture in the context of digital transformation. The leadership actively used culture to steer and control the adoption of digital technologies. The study underscores the need to update and revitalize various elements of organizational culture, such as tangible artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions, to create an environment that supports digital transformation. Collectively, these studies highlight the relevance of organizational culture in shaping digital transformation initiatives, regardless of the sector or regional context.

In the public sector, a digital transformation strategy acquires a distinct connotation, defined as a “concrete approach to digital technology-driven change in public organizations that aligns intent and capabilities to achieve objectives and create public value” (Norling, 2024, p. 4). This definition is consistent with Pedersen (2018), who proposed balancing transformation and developing capabilities. Previous research also illustrates that an effective digital transformation strategy in the public sector requires balancing technological change with agile and cultural transformation (Bitzer *et al.*, 2021).

Status quo bias is a cognitive phenomenon that significantly influences decision-making processes. This leads to a disproportionate preference for existing conditions, often resulting in resistance to change and innovation (Samuelson and Zeckhauser, 1988). This bias manifests in various forms, including insulation bias, which hinders the recognition of new opportunities; novelty bias, which can overvalue untested solutions; and scaffolding bias, which affects how existing structures are perceived in resource allocation. These manifestations can impede the adoption of new technologies and systems (Leemann and Kanbach, 2023; Shirish and Batuekueno, 2021).

Contrary to expectations, research indicates that public managers may not be more risk-averse or adherent to the status quo than their private sector counterparts (Nicholson-Crotty *et al.*, 2019). This finding is critical, as it challenges assumptions about decision-making in the public and private sectors. It indicates that the bureaucratic culture might be the source, not the sector. The implications of status quo bias extend to user attitudes toward new information systems, impacting their acceptance and utilization (Lee and Joshi, 2017). In the context of the digital age, overcoming the status quo bias is a critical challenge. Addressing this bias is crucial for public sector employees to embrace change and facilitate digital transformation (Oschinsky *et al.*, 2021). In conclusion, understanding and mitigating status quo bias is essential for fostering a culture receptive to innovation and transformation, particularly in the digital realm.

Method

This study uses content analysis to examine Swedish local governments' digital transformation strategy documents. Four reasons guided the choice of these documents. First, it is essential to consider the representativeness of the public sector since Swedish local governments manage healthcare, dental care, public transport, and regional development. Second, they have comparable rules and strategy documents, making them easy to compare. Third, the researcher's language skills, expertise, and knowledge of Swedish local governments made them suitable. Finally, the researcher found no previous population studies on digital transformation strategy content.

This study adopts an interpretivist perspective, recognizing that knowledge is socially constructed and that understanding social phenomena requires interpreting the meanings and experiences of those involved (Walsham, 2006). The author's 20 years of practical experience working in one of the Swedish local government organizations studied in this research provides a unique insider perspective that informs the interpretation of the data (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Consistent with this stance, the paper employs a qualitative content analysis methodology to uncover the subjective meanings and cultural assumptions embedded within the digital transformation strategy documents of Swedish local governments.

Swedish local governments are governed by elected parliaments responsible for critical public services, including healthcare, dental care, regional development, and public transportation, voluntarily engaging in culture, education and tourism. With the power to govern themselves and levy taxes, the 21 local governments in Sweden generated €35bn in revenue in 2020, primarily from taxes (SKR, 2021a). In the past, IT expenditures have accounted for around 3% of their total expenses (SLIT, 2023). These regions are significant employers, with a workforce of 290,000, of which 70% are healthcare professionals (SKR, 2021b).

The region's political assemblies approve strategies, considered the highest hierarchical forms of steering documents, superseded only by policy documents. Plans related to the strategy, as well as follow-ups, are typically the responsibility of the top management team.

Digital transformation strategy documents were collected from 20 regions by downloading them from websites or requesting public documents. However, Region Halland, representing 3.3% of Sweden's population, did not have a strategy. To address this issue, unobtrusive techniques, such as analyzing publicly available information on the region's website and news articles related to their digital transformation efforts, were considered (Kellehear, 2020). However, as the primary focus of this study was on the content of official strategy documents, Halland was ultimately excluded from the analysis, acknowledging the potential limitations this may pose to the generalizability of the findings. The results section presents an overview of the collected documents, see Table 3.

This study covers the aspect of strategy document content, where the quality was analyzed, as suggested by Bryson and George (2020), using themes derived from the strategy definition: *intent*, *capabilities*, *objectives*, *public value*, and *technology*. The content analysis methodology employed here aims to uncover the organizational and cultural assumptions that influence digital transformation strategies in public organizations.

Document analysis was used to analyze the collected data. This involved skimming, reading and interpreting the data using Gibbs' (2018) concept-driven coding method. The process was iterative and inductive and included creating, merging and splitting codes to identify significant themes derived from the concepts in the definition of the digital transformation strategy. Table 1 illustrates examples of coding. The Swedish term "digitalisering" is often translated to "digitalization" in English. However, in the context of organizational change and strategy, the term is often interpreted as "digital transformation," which is how it is translated and used in this study. It reflects the broader process of integrating digital technology into organizations, profoundly changing how they operate and deliver public value.

Familiarizing with the data involved rereading the strategy documents and coding them using Atlas.ti. A total of 20 strategy documents, comprising 284 pages and 62,834 words, were coded.

During the study, some of the codes were found to be unclear or open to interpretation. A workshop was organized to ensure accuracy, and a senior researcher was invited to serve as a critical reviewer and auditor. This resulted in an extensive dialogue that helped refine the

Document ID	Document quote	Code	Concept
R1	"Region Blekinge will be the best at using the opportunities offered by digital transformation, within our operations but also for our residents"	Best	Intent
R9	"Digital transformation requires resources in the form of skills, time and money to create benefits in the business"	Competence	Capabilities
R17	"... more time for care through increased digitization in infrastructure and support processes"	Efficiency	Objectives
R10	"Value creation for society arises when new solutions are adopted, disseminated and become a way of working long-term"	Societal	Public value
R6	"For a modern society, infrastructure is a prerequisite and digital transformation is dependent on a functioning infrastructure"	Infrastructure	Technology

Source: Author's own work

Table 1.
Coding examples (by
the author)

coding (Saldaña, 2013). The revised coding was used to analyze the results presented with characteristic quotations.

Results

The strategy documents discuss digital transformation as a societal, organizational, and technological phenomenon. Although promising technologies such as AI and organizational development are explored, digital transformation is distinct from and not integrated with organizational development. The strategies do not explain how digital transformation affects other strategies, initiatives, or investments. For example, while the strategies mention a change in facilities utilization for healthcare, “New digital solutions and working methods will enable healthcare to a large extent take place where the citizen lives his life instead of in the region’s premises” (R9) the strategies do not mention how this affects facility management. Case in point: Facility investments are decoupled from digital transformation strategies.

Digital transformation was defined in only half of the strategies (Table 2). The influence of the national Swedish eHealth strategy (Skr., 2017) is evident, with seven strategies directly referring to it.

Assumptions are preceded by descriptions of the current situation and the external environment, ‘what is’, and are often nonsensical, highlighting the importance of digital technology in a society without any reflections on the repercussions or basic assumption of the purpose of regions. The only passage in all the strategies where assumptions are challenged is “The region should always question whether the work it does could be done differently to create added value” (R1). Digital has brought new opportunities and changed behaviors and expectations, but, for example, the focus of facility management is still primarily on digitizing existing facilities rather than questioning the need to build new ones; “[. . .] continue the digital development of property control systems and digitization of the construction process” (R2).

Following the definition, a strategy should include *intent*, *capabilities*, *objectives*, *public value* and *technology*, which the strategies cover. However, several analyzed strategies lacked definitions of how digital affects organizational culture and agile ways of working, as presented in Table 3. Furthermore, the regions do not detail or define actions: “The digital

Table 2.
Definitions of digital
transformation

Region	Definition (<i>author emphasis</i>)
Blekinge	... <i>organizational development</i> and should be based on the needs of operations
Dalarna	... <i>organizational development</i> and properly managed, it can enable <i>improvements and streamlining of operations and reduce costs</i> .
Gotland	The societal process in which various forms of <i>IT support are increasingly integrated into operations</i> and fundamentally affect them
Norrbotten	... <i>the use of information and medical technology to develop working methods and processes</i>
Östergötland	... <i>the change of a process or way of working that is made possible by digital management</i>
Skåne	... <i>organizational development with the help of digital technology</i>
Stockholm	Primarily as <i>organizational development using information technology</i> .
Uppsala	... <i>organizational development</i> and should be based on the needs of operations
Västerbotten	... <i>organizational development with IT and medical technology, briefly organizational development with technology</i>
Västmanland	... <i>organizational development using digital information technology</i>

Source: Author’s own work

Region (ID)	Document name	Valid	Pages (words)	Definition	References	Intent	Capabilities	Objectives	Tech	Public value	Agile	Culture
Blekinge (R1)	<i>Strategi för digitalisering</i>	2021–2025	9 (2454)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Delarna (R2)	<i>Strategi för digitalisering</i>	2021–2025	8 (2827)	x		x	x	x	x	x		
Gävleborg (R3)	<i>Digitaliseringsstrategi region gävleborg</i>	2020–2022	7 (1583)		x	x	x	x	x	x		
Gotland (R4)	<i>Digitaliseringsstrategi för region Gotland</i>	2018–2022	6 (1661)	x	x		x	x	x	x		
Jämtland- Härjedalen (R5)	<i>Riktlinjer digitalisering</i>	2019	7 (1463)		x	x	x	x	x	x		
Jönköping (R6)	<i>Digitaliseringsstrategi</i>	2020	16 (3630)		x	x	x	x	x	x		
Kalmar (R7)	<i>Digital agenda för Kalmar län</i>	2021–2022	37 (13222)		x	x	x	x	x	x		
Kronoberg (R8)	<i>Digitärsisk vård: Region kronobergs plan för digitalisering av hälso- och sjukvården</i>	2020–2027	11 (2150)			x	x	x	x	x		x
Norrbottnen (R9)	<i>Digitaliseringsstrategi för framtidens hälsa och vård</i>	2018	8 (2563)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Örebro (R10)	<i>Digitaliseringsstrategi för örebro län</i>	2021–2026	20 (4906)		x	x	x	x	x	x		
Östergötland (R11)	<i>Region östergötlands digitaliseringsstrategi</i>	2018	22 (2438)	x		x	x	x	x	x		
Skåne (R12)	<i>Strategi för digitalisering IT och MT</i>	2021–2025	47 (5877)	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sormland (R13)	<i>Strategi för digitalisering</i>	2018	2 (674)			x	x	x	x	x		
Stockholm (R14)	<i>Strategi it och digitalisering</i>	2020–2023	12 (3083)	x		x	x	x	x	x		
Uppsala (R15)	<i>Strategi för digitalisering</i>	2019	12 (3563)	x		x	x	x	x	x		
Värmland (R16)	<i>Strategi för digital utveckling</i>	2018	6 (1283)			x	x	x	x	x		
Västerbotten (R17)	<i>Digitaliseringsstrategi</i>	2025	23 (4923)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Västernorrland (R18)	<i>Digitaliseringsstrategi</i>	2022–2024	22 (2313)			x	x	x	x	x	x	
Västmanland (R19)	<i>Digitaliseringsstrategi</i>	2021–2024	3 (839)				x	x	x	x		
Västra Götaland (R20)	<i>Hälsö- och sjukvård i interaktion med invånare och patient</i>	2019	6 (1282)	x			x	x	x	x		

Source: Author's own work

Table 3.
Strategy document
content quality
overview

transformation strategy itself does not include underlying documents, such as action plans and concrete activities” (R3).

Intent is present in all but three strategies, where the most common intent featured by seven regions is related to the goal set by the Swedish government; “Sweden aims to be the best in the world at using the possibilities of digitalization” (Skr., 2017, p.7) in 2025. Two regions state that they aim to be the best in Sweden and, ergo, the best in the world. Half of the strategies had a vision or referred to the overall vision of the region.

Capabilities are featured in all strategies and are often mentioned as essential. However, how to develop capabilities is not elaborated on: “The capability to take advantage of new technology and new solutions will be strengthened, and new processes will be developed and adapted for new, more digital ways of working” (R15). The dominant theme, featured in 17 strategies, emphasizes the need to develop skills and competencies related to digital technology. This is followed by leadership and management in 12 strategies and infrastructural and technological capabilities in nine. Only two strategies explicitly mention organizational ambidexterity, exemplified by the exact formulation: “Achieving this [conditions for innovation and new thinking] requires the ability to manage both innovation and efficiency within the same governance” (R1 and R15). The strategies showcase only one explicit example of contextual ambidexterity: “Digital transformation should be a source of strengthened efficiency and innovation” (R15).

Objectives are present in all strategies, where digital is viewed primarily as a means to an end. “Digitalization is not an end in itself; It is used as a means” (R15), and as a tool, “Digitalization is a powerful tool that supports the business in achieving its goals so that quality and efficiency increase” (R4). The evaluation of the achievement of goals is generally not defined in the strategies, “[...] digitalization shall be followed based on established indicators” (R14) and is mentioned as something that should be done; “The region will measure and follow up digitalization as part of drawing conclusions and adapting future developments” (R18), without explaining how. Measurements are most often performed annually. “Region Östergötland shall annually measure and follow up the general digitalization work” (R11).

Public value is mentioned in all strategies and divided into *administrative*, *citizen*, *economic*, and *societal value*. Value is often used as a goal, but generally, it is not concretized on how to achieve it. Moreover, the created value is not evaluated through predefined Key Performance Indicators, effects, or measured monetary value; instead, the value is determined case-by-case and through *ad hoc* decisions. To exemplify, value is mentioned as to how it should be effectuated; “Through the pilot, the effect is proven, and based on this, the management team makes decisions about implementation.” (R18). The diffusion of innovation and value distribution is illustrated by how to disseminate new digital services, not by continuous learning: “When developing services as part of innovation, take into account the spreading of the digital service.” (R14). An example of implicit administrative value is; “Established methods, standards, and tools should be used and coordinated to procure better, develop, and manage IT systems and digital solutions and e-services.” (R15). The strategies do not state how digital transformation changes the value proposition or creation; “Digital transformation also provides value-creating efficiencies for the business” (R11), but views value as a second-order effect; “The purpose of the transformation is to create value for citizens” (R7) instead of focusing on creating value as the driving force of change. Only one region mentions co-creation to create value: “We create lasting value that makes a difference together with partners, customers, and users” (R12).

The use of technology is prominently featured in the strategies dominated by digital infrastructure, AI, broadband, information security, and cybersecurity. Infrastructure is

mentioned as a necessary capability for digital transformation: “Access to digital infrastructure is a prerequisite for the digital transformation of the public sector and for us to be able to solve the societal challenges” (R10); however, often, this is related to physical infrastructure in the form of broadband access. The strategies sometimes include digital platforms as infrastructure; “Digital infrastructure shall support the potential for innovation and new development, promote mobility, and create the conditions for testing and deployment of new technologies, for example, AI” (R15). Although AI is mentioned prominently, it is for its potential, not its actual use; “AI will also contribute to the future digital development work of the entire region” (R8).

Agile is only featured in two strategies, indirectly mentioned by R9: “By purposefully testing new solutions on a smaller scale, developing step by step, and daring to make mistakes, digital transformation simultaneously creates learning and is de-dramatized.” R12 is more elaborate, directly mentioning agile and relating it to transformation. “To meet the transformational pressure that comes with radical change, we need to work more agile.”

Culture is not given much attention; although the strategies are about digital transformation, culture is only featured in three strategies. R1 describes how digital transformation affects the organization: “Digital transformation is about much more than technology. Technology is always an important component, but to have full effect, technology, organizational culture, skills, and working methods must be developed together under unified management”.

In aggregation, the strategies often view digital transformation through the lens of technology, infrastructure, and potential organizational development without fully integrating these aspects into a cohesive approach. Although the strategy documents recognize the importance of digital transformation, there is a noticeable lack of detailed objectives and concrete activities to execute these strategies. The influence of national strategies, such as the Swedish eHealth strategy, is evident and a sign of mimetic isomorphism. Additionally, the strategies fail to challenge existing assumptions or reimagine the role of digital technology in organizational and societal contexts. The analysis reveals a gap between the strategic intent outlined in these documents and the actions needed to realize digital transformation.

In essence, the strategies display awareness of the importance of digital transformation but demonstrate a cautious approach that often prioritizes maintaining the status quo over embracing change. The results underscore the need for a more integrated and action-oriented approach to digital transformation that aligns technology adoption with organizational culture and agile practices, moving beyond traditional infrastructure investments to leverage digital innovation to create public value.

Discussion

This study explored digital transformation strategy documents from Swedish local governments, recognizing that digital transformation is not merely a technological shift but a strategic endeavor. The aim was to dissect the content of digital transformation strategies to uncover how they align with or deviate from the definition of digital transformation strategy, framed by the research question: *How does bureaucratic culture impact the content of digital transformation strategies within public sector organizations?*

In addressing this question, the study navigated the complexities of bureaucratic culture’s influence on digital transformation, scrutinizing strategy documents as reflections of strategic priorities and intent (Norling, 2024; Pollitt, 2009; Sebastian *et al.*, 2017). The examination was rooted in the understanding that digital transformation represents “a

concrete approach to digital technology-driven change in public organizations that aligns intent and capabilities to achieve objectives and create public value” (Norling, 2024, p. 4).

A significant observation in exploring the digital transformation strategies of Swedish local governments is the prevalent status quo bias, a tendency to adhere to existing practices despite potential benefits from innovations (Samuelson and Zeckhauser, 1988). This bias is a critical aspect of the analysis, as it unravels the bureaucratic culture of these organizations (Oschinsky *et al.*, 2021) and subsequently manifested in the strategic direction (Norling, 2024; Norling *et al.*, 2022)

Acknowledging digital transformation is more than a technological upgrade; it is a strategic renewal that requires a fundamental rethinking of operational and value delivery mechanisms (Hanelt *et al.*, 2020; Vial, 2019). The core challenge lies in overcoming the entrenched bureaucratic norms that favor the status quo and prioritizing internal efficiency over innovation (Norling, 2024; Wilson and Mergel, 2022). This tendency toward a status quo bias reflects a resistance to change and hints at deeper organizational phenomena such as knowledge corridors and competency traps (March, 1991; Shane, 2000), which could stifle innovation if not addressed.

The status quo bias observed within the strategy documents reflects a deeper bureaucratic culture that prioritizes risk aversion (Torugsa and Arundel, 2017) and routine rigidity (Gilbert, 2005; Zhen *et al.*, 2021) over the adoption of potentially transformative digital practices (Meijer, 2015). This bias is not merely a preference but a manifestation of cultural and structural barriers that inhibit innovation within public sector organizations. Moreover, the current strategies often fail to challenge implicit assumptions, relying on tried-and-tested methods at the expense of exploring new avenues. This indicates that what is known and familiar informs strategic choice; simultaneously, the unknown is ignored (Stopford and Baden-Fuller, 1994), indicating a pervasive status quo bias resulting from the bureaucratic culture, hindering the exploration of digital technologies and practices that could drive transformation.

The analysis underscores the absence of a shared digital transformation definition, leading to a strategic consensus deficit that hampers alignment and effective stakeholder communication (Meyfroodt, 2020). To bridge this gap, a concerted effort to establish a shared understanding amongst organizational stakeholders of digital transformation is crucial, aligning with Kane *et al.* (2015) and Sebastian *et al.* (2017) on the importance of clarity in digital strategy for it to be successful.

In summary, the impact of status-quo bias on the content of digital transformation strategies is profound. It results in a strategic focus that often overlooks the potential of digital technologies to redefine public services and value creation. Instead, there is a tendency to maintain existing processes and technological infrastructures, limiting the scope of digital transformation efforts (Boyne, 2004; Oschinsky *et al.*, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires a more nuanced approach that transcends mere digital infrastructure and views digital technology as a catalyst for strategic transformation (Berente and Seidel, 2022). Strategies should evolve from static to dynamic documents that facilitate dialogue and are co-created with stakeholders, embodying a living strategy that adapts to emerging challenges and opportunities (Hautz *et al.*, 2017), as presented in Table 4.

Swedish local governments and future digital transformation strategies should prioritize capability development, ensuring that skills, leadership, and infrastructural foundations are in place to support digital transformation (Pedersen, 2017; Warner and Wäger, 2019). Additionally, a reorientation toward public value creation is imperative, ensuring digital initiatives translate into tangible benefits for citizens and society (Nasim and Sushil, 2010). Finally, the interplay between agile practices and organizational culture is critical. Embracing agility can facilitate a cultural shift toward a more enabling environment for

Table 4.
Transition of
strategy artifacts,
public value, and
assumptions from
current to future
orientation

Category	Current state	Future state
Artifact	<i>Strategy document</i> The strategy document serves as a tool for instruction and policy implementation. The document is an end in itself.	<i>Strategic dialogue</i> Strategy documents are used as mediums for strategic dialogue and shared understanding. The strategic dialogue should be focused on charting strategic direction and co-creating strategy with stakeholders. The strategy document is a means to an end.
Public value	<i>Economic and administrative value</i> Economic and administrative values are important outcomes of digital transformation strategies. However, there is a lack of explicit detail on how to enhance or measure these values through these initiatives.	<i>Citizen and societal value</i> To maximize public value creation, organizations should adopt a multifaceted strategy that emphasizes stakeholder participation, centered around public value creation.
Assumption	<i>Physical places</i> Strategies prioritize the physical aspect of improving infrastructure and digitizing existing facilities and capabilities, but fail to fully explore the potential of digital transformation in reimagining the use and need for physical spaces.	<i>Digital spaces</i> Focusing first on digital spaces has significant implications for strategic priorities and organizational structure. The structure of an organization reflects its strategy.

Source: Author's own work

innovation, aligning with [Bitzer et al. \(2021\)](#), [Rebentisch et al. \(2018\)](#), and [Grover et al. \(2022\)](#) on the role of agile in digital and cultural transformation.

Addressing status quo bias within Swedish local governments requires a deliberate shift toward a culture that embraces innovation and experimentation and an acceptance of failure ([Butt et al., 2024](#)). Thus, Swedish local governments should embrace innovation and experimentation to overcome status quo bias, including accepting failure as part of the process. This involves challenging established bureaucratic norms and fostering a strategic dialogue that prioritizes agility, stakeholder engagement, and the transformative potential of digital technologies ([Bjerke-Busch and Aspelund, 2021](#); [Oschinsky et al., 2021](#)).

In conclusion, overcoming the inertia imposed by status quo bias and bureaucratic culture requires a multifaceted strategy that includes capability development, stakeholder participation, and a strong focus on public value based on ongoing strategic dialogue. This approach not only addresses the challenges of digital transformation but also sets the foundation for a future where public sector organizations are agile, innovative, and closely aligned with the needs and expectations of society.

Theoretical implications

In exploring the digital transformation strategies of Swedish local governments, this research contributes to the theoretical understanding of how bureaucratic culture affects strategy content. It has revealed a prevailing status quo bias and a tendency to adhere to existing practices, which is a critical conclusion of the analysis. This bias underpins the strategic direction ([Norling, 2024](#)), leading to a preference for maintaining “what is” over embracing “what could be”. The theoretical implications of these findings are manifold. First, the study extends the theory of cultural inertia within the literature on strategic

management by empirically demonstrating how status quo bias can impede digital transformation in practice. This expands upon previous research (Norling, 2024; Norling *et al.*, 2022; Oschinsky *et al.*, 2021), highlighting the presence of status quo bias and its role in shaping strategy content within the public sector. Second, the observation of status quo bias deepens the discourse on the performative role of strategy documents (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2011). This study suggests that strategy documents do more than articulate plans; they act as a medium for cultural expression and transformation. By reflecting the strategic intent of an organization, strategy documents have the potential to perpetuate or alter the existing cultural narrative, supporting the idea that they are instrumental in facilitating a strategic dialogue (Bourgoin *et al.*, 2018) between stakeholders. This aligns with open strategy (Hautz *et al.*, 2017) and advances the notion that strategy formulation is an inclusive and dynamic process that can actively shape and is shaped by organizational culture. Thus, this study posits that strategy documents are not mere instructional tools but pivotal in organizations' cultural and strategic renewal. Strategy documents can influence and reshape the strategic direction of the strategy content by surfacing established norms and fostering a culture that prioritizes agility, stakeholder engagement, and digital innovation.

Practical implications

This study has several practical implications, summarized in Table 5, proposing that future strategy documents should do more than act as a manual. Strategy documents should present a clear strategic intent based on explicit assumptions, enabling a strategic dialogue that can shape the narrative around digital transformation. A reimagined strategy could catalyze a cultural shift, encouraging a departure toward a digital, innovative, and citizen-centric public value creation. To this end, a strategy document should begin with a clear executive summary that encapsulates the purpose and overarching goals of the digital transformation. The introduction should set the context for the transformation and offer

Category	Description
Definition	The introduction should set the context and offer a precise definition to ensure a shared understanding of digital transformation
Assumptions	The underpinning assumptions should be critically evaluated and explicitly stated to ensure alignment with the strategic intent
Intent	The strategic intent section should outline the aspirations and align them with broader organizational and public value goals
Objectives	Objectives should be clearly articulated, for example, as SMART or OKR, bridging strategic intent with actionable outcomes
Capabilities	The assessment of current capabilities should critically evaluate existing infrastructures and skill sets, identifying areas for development
Technology	A technology roadmap should elaborate on how technology will be used as a catalyst to achieve the objectives
Public value	The public value proposition should be explicit in detailing the benefits for citizens and society, providing metrics for evaluation
Agility	Agility should be discussed in terms of how new solutions can be tested and implemented while ensuring that initiatives continuously deliver public value
Culture	Cultural considerations should be critically addressed and integrated to foster an organizational digital culture that supports innovation and the creation of public value

Source: Author's own work

Table 5.
Advice for
practitioners

precise definitions to ensure a unified understanding. A section on strategic intent should outline the aspirations and align them with broader organizational and public value goals. At the same time, the assessment of current capabilities should critically evaluate existing infrastructures and skill sets, identifying areas for development. Clearly stated objectives should bridge strategic intent with actionable outcomes. At the same time, a technology roadmap should elaborate on how technology will be used as a catalyst to achieve the objectives. Public value creation should explicitly detail the benefits for citizens and society, providing metrics for evaluation, and a separate section on organizational culture should discuss current norms and propose cultural initiatives to support digital transformation. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be in place to assess progress and facilitate strategy adjustments as needed. A concluding statement should reaffirm the strategic direction and invite the participation of stakeholders. Finally, the appendices should provide additional materials and references supporting the content of the strategy document.

This structured approach to strategy documentation aims to guide Swedish local governments toward digital, innovative, and citizen-centric public value creation, balancing the drive for efficiency with the imperative for innovation. It encourages co-creating strategies with all stakeholders, reflecting a participative culture adaptable to the evolving digital landscape. By embedding these elements into future strategy documents, organizations can foster strategic dialogues that guide and transform organizational culture.

Conclusion, limitations, and future research

The analysis of strategy documents from local governments in Sweden has revealed the impact of bureaucratic culture on digital transformation. This can stifle progress due to a focus on incremental improvement based on current practices, in other words, a status quo bias.

Strategy documents, as cultural artifacts, often perpetuate the status quo. They delineate goals and challenges that reflect long-standing organizational beliefs without critical assessment. Thus, culture becomes a silent strategist, influencing the direction and content of these documents. In other words, organizational culture shapes the strategic direction and limits the content of the strategy.

This study has three primary limitations. First, it examines only the macro level of Swedish local governments, thus necessitating a broader exploration of how strategy documents are employed throughout various organizational levels, preferably through organizational case studies (Tsang, 2014a, 2014b). The study's focus on Swedish local governments may limit its generalizability to other contexts or geographies. Variations in institutional structures among public sector organizations across different countries pose a challenge to the generalization of the research findings (Bannister, 2007). Comparative research in other countries is encouraged to ensure the transferability of the findings. Third, the study captures a snapshot in time, potentially overlooking how strategies and bureaucratic culture evolve over time. Longitudinal survey studies could provide insights into the dynamic interplay of digital transformation strategies and organizational culture (Orlikowski, 1996).

This study has identified a potential research direction for exploring the relationship between organizational culture and strategy formulation. This entails delving deeper into the strategy formulation process, critically evaluating the explicit and implicit assumptions underlying strategy documents, and replicating the study in other geographical regions and organizational populations. It is also important to take a longitudinal view to understand how organizational culture and strategy formation change and interact over time as organizations evolve and encounter different environmental factors. Finally, it is important

to analyze the role of strategy documents not only as instructional tools but also as expressions of organizational culture and instruments for cultural transformation, studying how they facilitate strategic dialogues.

References

- Bannister, F. (2007), "The curse of the benchmark: an assessment of the validity and value of e-government comparisons", *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 73 No. 2, pp. 171-188, doi: [10.1177/0020852307077959](https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852307077959).
- Berente, N. and Seidel, S. (2022), "Digital technologies: carrier or trigger for institutional change in digital transformation?", *Digital Transformation and Institutional Theorizing: Consequences, Opportunities and Challenges*, Vol. 83, pp. 197-209, doi: [10.1108/s0733-558x20220000083008](https://doi.org/10.1108/s0733-558x20220000083008).
- Bitzer, M., Hinsen, S., Jöhnk, J. and Urbach, N. (2021), "Everything is IT, but IT is not everything: what incumbents do to manage digital transformation towards continuous change", *ICIS 2021*, pp. 1-17.
- Bjerke-Busch, L.S. and Aspelund, A. (2021), "Digitalization, Approaches, Case Studies, and Tools for Strategy, Transformation and Implementation", Springer International Publishing, Cham, pp. 277-290, doi: [10.1007/978-3-030-69380-0_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69380-0_15).
- Bourgoin, A., Marchessaux, F. and Bencherki, N. (2018), "We need to talk about strategy: how to conduct effective strategic dialogue", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 61 No. 4, pp. 587-597, doi: [10.1016/j.bushor.2018.03.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2018.03.008).
- Boyne, G.A. (2004), "Strategy content and public service organizations", *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 231-252, doi: [10.1093/jopart/muh015](https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muh015).
- Brannick, T. and Coghlan, D. (2007), "In defense of being 'native': the case for insider academic research", *Organizational Research Methods*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 59-74, doi: [10.1177/1094428106289253](https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428106289253).
- Bryson, J. and George, B. (2020), "Strategic management in public administration", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, doi: [10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1396](https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1396).
- Butt, A., Imran, F., Helo, P. and Kantola, J. (2024), "Strategic design of culture for digital transformation", *Long Range Planning*, Vol. 57 No. 2, p. 102415, doi: [10.1016/j.lrp.2024.102415](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2024.102415).
- Chanias, S., Myers, M.D. and Hess, T. (2019), "Digital transformation strategy making in pre-digital organizations: the case of a financial services provider", *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 17-33, doi: [10.1016/j.jsis.2018.11.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsis.2018.11.003).
- DiMaggio, P.J. and Powell, W.W. (1983), "The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48 No. 2, p. 147, doi: [10.2307/2095101](https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101).
- Edelmann, N. and Mergel, I. (2022), "The implementation of a digital strategy in the Austrian public sector", *DG.O 2022: The 23rd Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research*, pp. 391-399, doi: [10.1145/3543434.3543640](https://doi.org/10.1145/3543434.3543640).
- Gay, P. D. (2000), *In Praise of Bureaucracy: Weber, Organization, Ethics*, Sage, doi: [10.4135/9781446217580](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446217580).
- Gibbs, G.R. (2018), "Analyzing qualitative data", *Analyzing Qualitative Data*, Vol. 703, pp. 38-56, doi: [10.4135/9781526441867](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526441867).
- Gilbert, C.G. (2005), "Unbundling the structure of inertia: resource versus routine rigidity", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 48 No. 5, pp. 741-763, doi: [10.5465/amj.2005.18803920](https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2005.18803920).
- Grover, V., Tseng, S.-L. and Pu, W. (2022), "A theoretical perspective on organizational culture and digitalization", *Information and Management*, Vol. 59 No. 4, p. 103639, doi: [10.1016/j.im.2022.103639](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2022.103639).
- Hall, M. (2017), "Crafting compromises in a strategising process: a case study of an international development organisation", doi: [10.1111/faam.12119](https://doi.org/10.1111/faam.12119).

- Hanelt, A., Bohnsack, R., Marz, D. and Marante, C.A. (2020), "A systematic review of the literature on digital transformation: insights and implications for strategy and organizational change", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 58 No. 5, pp. 1159-1197, doi: [10.1111/joms.12639](https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12639).
- Hautz, J., Seidl, D. and Whittington, R. (2017), "Open strategy: dimensions, dilemmas, dynamics", *Long Range Planning*, Vol. 50 No. 3, pp. 298-309, doi: [10.1016/j.lrp.2016.12.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2016.12.001).
- Heracleous, L., Gößwein, J. and Beaudette, P. (2018), "Open strategy-making at the wikimedia foundation: a dialogic perspective", *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 5-35, doi: [10.1177/0021886317712665](https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886317712665).
- Kane, G.C., Palmer, D., Phillips, A.N., Kiron, D. and Buckley, N. (2015), "Strategy, not technology, drives digital transformation", *MIT Sloan Management Review and Deloitte University Press*, Vol. 14.
- Kellehear, A. (2020), *The Unobtrusive Researcher: A Guide to Methods*, Taylor and Francis.
- Knight, E. and Paroutis, S. (2017), "Becoming salient: the TMT leader's role in shaping the interpretive context of paradoxical tensions", *Organization Studies*, Vol. 38 No. 3-4, pp. 403-432, doi: [10.1177/0170840616640844](https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840616640844).
- Korin, H., Seeck, H. and Liikamaa, K. (2022), "Reflecting on the past – a key to facilitating learning in strategy practice?", *Journal of Strategy and Management*, Vol. 16 No. 2, doi: [10.1108/jsma-02-2022-0027](https://doi.org/10.1108/jsma-02-2022-0027).
- Kummer, T.-F. and Schmiedel, T. (2016), "Reviewing the role of culture in strategic information systems research: a call for prescriptive theorizing on culture management", *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, Vol. 38, pp. 122-144, doi: [10.17705/1cais.03805](https://doi.org/10.17705/1cais.03805).
- Lee, K. and Joshi, K. (2017), "Examining the use of status quo bias perspective in is research: need for re-conceptualizing and incorporating biases", *Information Systems Journal*, Vol. 27 No. 6, pp. 733-752, doi: [10.1111/isj.12118](https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12118).
- Leemann, N. and Kanbach, D.K. (2023), "Cognitive biases in resource cognition: evidence from action research", *Management Decision*, Vol. 61 No. 9, doi: [10.1108/md-10-2021-1379](https://doi.org/10.1108/md-10-2021-1379).
- Lindquist, E.A. (2022), "The digital era and public sector reforms: transformation or new tools for competing values?", *Canadian Public Administration*, Vol. 65 No. 3, pp. 547-568, doi: [10.1111/capa.12493](https://doi.org/10.1111/capa.12493).
- Lundgren, M. and Blom, M. (2016), "Textual objects and strategizing: the influence of documents as active objects on strategic recursiveness", *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 223-244, doi: [10.1080/14697017.2015.1120765](https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2015.1120765).
- March, J.G. (1991), "Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning", *Organization Science*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 71-87, doi: [10.1287/orsc.2.1.71](https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2.1.71).
- Matt, C., Hess, T., Benlian, A. and Wiesböck, F. (2016), "Options for formulating a digital transformation strategy", *MIS Quarterly Executive*, Vol. 15.
- Meijer, A. (2015), "E-governance innovation: barriers and strategies", *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 198-206, doi: [10.1016/j.giq.2015.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2015.01.001).
- Meijer, A. and Bekkers, V. (2015), "A metatheory of e-government: creating some order in a fragmented research field", *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 237-245, doi: [10.1016/j.giq.2015.04.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2015.04.006).
- Mergel, I., Edelmann, N. and Haug, N. (2019), "Defining digital transformation: results from expert interviews", *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 36 No. 4, p. 101385, doi: [10.1016/j.giq.2019.06.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2019.06.002).
- Meyfroodt, K. (2020), *Strategic Planning through a Cognitive and Behavioral Lens: Strategic Plan Use, Strategic Consensus, and Strategic Voice*.
- Nasim, SSushil. (2010), "Managing continuity and change: a new approach for strategizing in e-government", *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*, Vol. 4 No. 4, pp. 338-364, doi: [10.1108/17506161011081327](https://doi.org/10.1108/17506161011081327).

- Nicholson-Crotty, S., Nicholson-Crotty, J. and Webeck, S. (2019), "Are public managers more risk averse? Framing effects and status quo bias across the sectors", *Journal of Behavioral Public Administration*, Vol. 2 No. 1, doi: [10.30636/jbpa.21.35](https://doi.org/10.30636/jbpa.21.35).
- Norling, K. (2024), "The iron cage of internal efficiency: a content analysis of digital transformation strategy direction in Swedish regions", *Qeios Pre-Print*, doi: [10.32388/bo865k.2](https://doi.org/10.32388/bo865k.2).
- Norling, K., Lindroth, T., Magnusson, J. and Torell, J. (2022), "Digital decoupling: a population study of digital transformation strategies in Swedish municipalities", *Digital Government*, 2022, pp. 356-363, doi: [10.1145/3543434.3543639](https://doi.org/10.1145/3543434.3543639).
- Orlikowski, W.J. (1996), "Improvising organizational transformation over time: a situated change perspective", *Information Systems Research*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 63-92, doi: [10.1287/isre.7.1.63](https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.7.1.63).
- Oschinsky, F.M., Stelter, A. and Niehaves, B. (2021), "Cognitive biases in the digital age – how resolving the status quo bias enables public-sector employees to overcome restraint", *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 38 No. 4, p. 101611, doi: [10.1016/j.giq.2021.101611](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2021.101611).
- Pedersen, K. (2017), "Realizing e-government benefits with minimal capabilities", *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*, Vol. 11 No. 2, pp. 262-285, doi: [10.1108/tg-11-2016-0083](https://doi.org/10.1108/tg-11-2016-0083).
- Pedersen, K. (2018), "E-government transformations: challenges and strategies", *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 84-109, doi: [10.1108/tg-06-2017-0028](https://doi.org/10.1108/tg-06-2017-0028).
- Pollitt, C. (2009), "Bureaucracies remember, post-bureaucratic organizations forget?", *Public Administration*, Vol. 87 No. 2, pp. 198-218, doi: [10.1111/j.1467-9299.2008.01738.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2008.01738.x).
- Rebentisch, E., Schuh, G., Dölle, C., Mattern, C. and Abel, H. (2018), "Defining agile culture using topic modelling", *EDS92: Proceedings of the DESIGN 2018 15th International Design Conference*, pp. 2111-2120, doi: [10.21278/idc.2018.0394](https://doi.org/10.21278/idc.2018.0394).
- Saldaña, J. (2013), *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 2. ed. Sage, Thousand Oaks, Calif.
- Samuelson, W. and Zeckhauser, R. (1988), "Status quo bias in decision making", *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 7-59, doi: [10.1007/bf00055564](https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00055564).
- Sebastian, I., Ross, J., Beath, C., Mocker, M., Moloney, K. and Fonstad, N. (2017), "How big old companies navigate digital transformation", *MIS Quarterly Executive*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 197-213.
- Shane, S. (2000), "Prior knowledge and the discovery of entrepreneurial opportunities", *Organization Science*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 448-469, doi: [10.1287/orsc.11.4.448.14602](https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.11.4.448.14602).
- Shirish, A. and Batuekueno, L. (2021), "Technology renewal, user resistance, user adoption: status quo bias theory revisited", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 34 No. 5, pp. 874-893, doi: [10.1108/jocm-10-2020-0332](https://doi.org/10.1108/jocm-10-2020-0332).
- Skr (2017), Hur Sverige Blir Bäst i Världen På Att Använda Digitaliseringens Möjligheter –En Skrivelse Om Politikens Inriktning.
- SKR (2021a), The Economy Report May 2021.
- SKR (2021b), "Personalen i välfärden".
- SLIT (2023), IT Och Digitalisering i Hälso-Och Sjukvården 2022.
- Spee, A.P. and Jarzabkowski, P. (2011), "Strategic planning as communicative process", *Organization Studies*, Vol. 32 No. 9, pp. 1217-1245, doi: [10.1177/0170840611411387](https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840611411387).
- Stopford, J.M. and Baden-Fuller, C.W.F. (1994), "Creating corporate entrepreneurship", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 7, pp. 521-536, doi: [10.1002/smj.4250150703](https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.4250150703).
- Tangi, L., Janssen, M., Benedetti, M. and Noci, G. (2021), "Digital government transformation: a structural equation modelling analysis of driving and impeding factors", *International Journal of Information Management*, Vol. 60, p. 102356, doi: [10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2021.102356](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2021.102356).
- Torugsa, N. (.) and Arundel, A. (2017), "Rethinking the effect of risk aversion on the benefits of service innovations in public administration agencies", *Research Policy*, Vol. 46 No. 5, pp. 900-910, doi: [10.1016/j.respol.2017.03.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2017.03.009).

-
- Tsang, E.W.K. (2014a), "Case studies and generalization in information systems research: a critical realist perspective", *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, Vol. 23 No. 2, pp. 174-186, doi: [10.1016/j.jsis.2013.09.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsis.2013.09.002).
- Tsang, E.W.K. (2014b), "Generalizing from research findings", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 369-383, doi: [10.1111/ijmr.12024](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12024).
- Vial, G. (2019), "Understanding digital transformation: a review and a research agenda", *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 118-144, doi: [10.1016/j.jsis.2019.01.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsis.2019.01.003).
- Walsham, G. (2006), "Doing interpretive research", *European Journal of Information Systems*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 320-330, doi: [10.1057/palgrave.ejis.3000589](https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ejis.3000589).
- Warner, K.S.R. and Wäger, M. (2019), "Building dynamic capabilities for digital transformation: an ongoing process of strategic renewal", *Long Range Planning*, Vol. 52 No. 3, pp. 326-349, doi: [10.1016/j.lrp.2018.12.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2018.12.001).
- Wilson, C. and Mergel, I. (2022), "Overcoming barriers to digital government mapping the strategies of digital champions", *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 39 No. 2, p. 101681, doi: [10.1016/j.giq.2022.101681](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2022.101681).
- Zhen, J., Cao, C., Qiu, H. and Xie, Z. (2021), "Impact of organizational inertia on organizational agility: the role of IT ambidexterity", *Information Technology and Management*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 53-65, doi: [10.1007/s10799-021-00324-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10799-021-00324-w).

Corresponding author

Kristian Norling can be contacted at: kristian.norling@ait.gu.se

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com