

Understanding the dynamics in e-Participation Initiatives: Looking through the Genre and Stakeholder lenses

Keywords: eGovernment, genre theory, stakeholder theory, analytic framework.

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Abstract

Conventionally, e-Participation initiatives are considered to be successful only if users use these services. While the growing body of e-Participation literature has listed and studied challenges and barriers to achieving this end, conceptual clarity on why such projects are considered as failures is yet to be achieved. We argue that this is due to the inadequate understanding of the complex stakeholder dynamics of an e-Participation project. In this paper, we seek to address this knowledge gap by proposing that using Stakeholder theory complemented by Genre theory provides an interpretive lens to understand the complexities in the development and use of e-Participation projects. To illustrate our proposed lens, we apply it to analyze an e-Participation project in Norway at its development and use phases. Our findings indicate that a key factor that influences success of e-Participation initiatives is high saliency of at least one stakeholder group at various phases of the initiatives. The saliency of stakeholders changes over the life of a project and hence the salient stakeholder also varies. Consequently, it is not essential for the same stakeholder group to be salient throughout, only that *some* stakeholder remains salient. Our interpretive lens also extends the discourse on Stakeholder Theory where in traditional Management literature, it is meant as a tool to identify stakeholder groups to which management or owner of an organization should pay attention. We show that it is also useful to identify which stakeholder groups will act to protect their interests. Based on our findings, we propose insights into studying and developing e-Participation projects.

Introduction

In spite of a huge increase in the number of e-Participation service offerings, a number of studies indicate that, with some notable exceptions, the vast majority of projects have not yet delivered their promise (Sæbø, Rose & Flak, 2008). Simply put, users do not seem to be using these services as intended (Esteves & Joseph, 2008). This is considered as an indication

of failure. In fact, this observation has been made about the broader area of e-Government in general. (Sæbø, Rose & Flak, 2008).

This state of affairs has been attributed to several reasons in the literature. A series of stakeholder consultations in the UK suggests that the sheer complexity of social and managerial issues provide formidable challenges for further development of e-Government initiatives (Irani, Elliman & Jackson, 2007). Several specific challenges have been identified. These include the complexity in establishing and maintaining the integration of agencies necessary to develop seamless services to citizens (Strejcek & Theil, 2003), lack of managerial innovation (Moon, 2005), privacy concerns related to sharing and exchanging data (Otjacques, Hitzelberger & Feltz, 2007) and ordinary citizen's lack of awareness of available government information (Heeks, 2000).

These studies have revealed key socio-organizational aspects that need to be incorporated in e-Participation initiatives. Yet, development of such initiatives is often characterized by a techno-centric approach with minimal citizen involvement (Olphert & Damodaran, 2007). Much effort is spent on developing more and more sophisticated systems and increasing the number of services to provide to citizens. Inadequate attention is paid to the reason why the purported intended users – the citizens (C) – would adopt these services and interact with the government (G) through these systems (Carter & Belanger, 2005).

The problem is arguably even more complex. In any e-Government initiative, a variety of entities other than citizens and government are involved. Even these entities are not homogeneous; they consist of a variety of categories that have different agendas and goals. For example, within government, there are administrators and politicians who differ in terms of what they aim to accomplish through an eGovernment initiative. Such nuanced differences determine to a great extent the success or failure of such initiatives. For instance, in the realms of eParticipation, politicians have been identified as an inhibiting factor (Mahrer & Krimmer, 2005). Our lack of understanding of the political interactions of these entities hinders us from gaining a clearer perspective of eGovernment efforts (Heeks & Stanforth, 2007).

We argue that simply focusing on the citizen and consequently considering use by citizens as a success measure provides us with a limited, and often distorted, view of success or otherwise of e-Participation projects. The dynamics of an e-Participation initiative are far

more complex. There is therefore a need for a sharper analytical lens to understand such initiatives. In this paper we attempt to address this need. We begin by focusing on the interaction between the main entities in an e-Participation initiative, namely Cs and Gs. Such interactions are essentially communicative events (Päivärinta & Sæbø, 2008). Hence the question becomes, “*why* do Cs and Gs communicate?”

To answer this question, we turn to genre theory (GT). A genre is “a recognizable communicative event” (Bhatia, 1993, p. 13) which has a purpose and rationale behind it. In IS, it has been used to study the communication structure within organizations (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992) and in determining requirements for systems in general (Päivärinta, 2001) and in e-Participation specifically (Päivärinta & Sæbø, 2008). Since the genre perspective provides insight into the purpose and reason for enacting any communication, we appear to have answered the questions raised above, namely “why do Cs and Gs interact”? Yet, question remains about who exactly the interacting parties are? Is it just Cs and Gs?

GT actually addresses these issues. In the “5W1H” framework proposed by Yates and Orlikowski (1992) to analyse genres, one of the Ws is “who/m”. However, GT offers little guidance on how to identify these “who/ms” and to address potentially divergent interests. Thus, the “who” element in the genre theory needs to be further explicated by incorporating the intentions and value premises of the interacting parties.

To do so, we turn to Stakeholder Theory (ST) which has been proposed (Flak & Rose, 2005) and used (Flak, Nordheim & Munkvold, 2007; Scholl, 2006) as a useful theory for the e-Government domain. ST helps identify the key people and organizations that have an interest in a project. They include citizens who are users of the system, government entities that are providers of these services, administrators who decide on the fate of the initiatives, politicians who fund such projects and citizens who may not be participants in the interaction but nevertheless are affected by them. ST thus provides a deeper analysis that are useful to identify stakeholders and reveal their agendas (or their stakes). To specify stakeholders, we draw upon a finer grained conceptualization of basic entities in eGovernment (Flak, Sein & Sæbø, 2007). We propose that using GT and ST and contextualizing the stakeholders gives us a theoretical lens to understand the dynamics of e-Participation initiatives.

As an illustration of our interpretive lens, we present a case of e-Participation project in which we were involved. The project was the development in a Norwegian municipality of a

discussion forum called DemokratiTorget (“Democracy Square” in English). Based on the case analysis, we elaborate our analytical lens and discuss how it can be used to inform the development and implementation of e-Participation initiatives.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we present and describe the theoretical premises, beginning with GT and following with a description of ST that includes a framework of deeper grained definition of entities in e-Participation. Next, we describe and analyse our case. We then discuss our findings and conclude by offering implications for practice and suggesting avenues for future research.

Theoretical premises

Genre perspective

The genre perspective was introduced to IS research by Yates and Orlikowski (1992) who used it to investigate organizational communication by applying it to “recognized type of communications (e.g. letters, memoranda or meetings), characterized by structural, linguistic and substantive conventions” (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, p. 300). They state that the genre is a typified communicative action, invoked in a response to a recurrent situation, including the history, nature of practices, social relationships and communication media within organizations. Genres also include expectations on communities and roles, re-produced and utilized by the communicative utterances (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).

While unique genres help us to understand individual communicative acts, it is more useful to place them in a system of interrelated genres to study more comprehensive contexts such as e-Participation. This concept of *genre systems*, to organize temporal, spatial and social dimensions of communications, is defined by Yates and Orlikowski (2002, p. 16) as “*organizing structures within a community that provide expectations about the purpose, content, participants, form, time, and place of communicative interaction*”, and consists of genres linked together, constituting coordinated communicative processes. They introduce six dimensions of communicative interaction to analyze; purposes (why), contents (what), participants (who/m), forms (how), time (when) and place (where). This is the “5W1H” framework (See Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 here]

The theory of genres of organizational communication has inspired a number of information systems (IS) researchers (e.g., Päivärinta, Shepherd, Svensson & Rossi, 2008). In e-Participation, it has been used to analyze the purpose and nature of communication in a government- initiated discussion forum (Rose & Sæbø, 2005). The 5W1H framework specifically provided the basis for guidelines to develop e-Participation systems that combined eDemocracy models and genres (Päivärinta & Sæbø, 2008). The key element in these guidelines was analyzing the purpose of the communication, and subsequently concretizing the view of the IT artifacts supporting various purposes. The genre analysis and the 5W1H framework form a useful analytical lens and we will use it to organize our case analysis in this paper.

As we pointed out in the Introduction section, GT is useful in analyzing e-Participation initiatives but does not provide a means to either distinguish the different stakeholders involved (the “who/ms) or how to account for their different agendas and interests. A theory that specifically addresses these issues is Stakeholder Theory.

Stakeholder theory

The concept of stakeholder has become much used in a number of disciplines including information systems (e.g. Shankar, Urban & Sultan, 2002) and organizational science (e.g. Donaldson & Preston, 1995). The principle argument in ST is that narrowly focusing on the needs of the shareholders of a company is limiting and companies could increase their profitability and competitiveness by focusing on the needs of a wider set of stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). Hence, the relationships with important stakeholders should be actively managed. In essence ST can be seen as a set of management principles that combines ethical, descriptive and normative aspects (Flak & Rose, 2005).

The ethical aspect encourages the discussion of the merits of managing the legitimate interests of multiple stakeholders. The normative aspect allows us to identify stakeholder types who may require a varying degree of involvement in a project. The involvement ranges from moderate (e.g. treating stakeholders with respect), to intermediate (incorporating some stakeholder interests in the governance of the corporations) and finally to demanding (participation for all stakeholders in the decision processes) (Hendry, 2001).

The descriptive aspect provides techniques for identifying and analyzing properties of stakeholders and stakeholder relationships. The stakeholder analysis is one such well known technique. Stakeholder analysis is used in many contexts, including eGovernment (e.g. Scholl, 2001, Flak & Nordheim, 2006i, Klieschewski & Scholl, 2006). However, stakeholder analysis, or at least its common application, is better described as a practical instrument than a validated scientific theory. A notable exception is the theory of stakeholder salience (Mitchel, Agle & Wood, 1997). The theory of stakeholder salience offers theoretically sound arguments for why the needs of some stakeholder are considered salient and thus met, while those of others are not. Salience depends on the relationship attributes of *power*, *legitimacy* and *urgency* (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Table 2 summarizes these attributes and Figure 1 depicts the relationships between them.

[Insert Table 2 here]

[Insert Figure 1 here]

The sum of the attributes in Table 2 determines the salience of a stakeholder, i.e. “the degree to which managers give priority to competing stakeholder claims” (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997, p. 869). They further argue that these attributes are variable and not a steady state, they are not objective realities but socially constructed and that stakeholders may or may not consciously and willfully exercise them. Stakeholders possessing all three attributes, whom they term “Definitive stakeholders,” are more salient than stakeholders who only possess one or two of them. Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) do not discriminate between the relative importance of the attributes, nor discuss if context affects the relative importance of the attributes. The salience attributes has been successfully applied in recent eGovernment studies (e.g. Scholl, 2004 and Flak, Nordheim & Munkvold, 2008) and we will use salience as a key element of our analytical lens by discussing the attributes for stakeholders’ relationships with e-Participation projects.

To contextualize stakeholders to e-Participation, we use a conceptualization of e-Government entities proposed by Flak, Sein & Sæbø (2007) who posit that while “Government” (G) and “Citizen” are the most essential stakeholder groups, each of these entities comprise a variety of categories. Within each entity, the different categories differ in terms of interests and modes of operation and cannot be viewed as unified entities promoting common interests. For example, G consists of politicians who set policy, administrators execute these policies and

service providers actually interact with the citizens. Citizens can be simply consumers of these services or form a small but active minority that actively attempts to influence policy. This leads to different objectives of communicating within and between these groups.

Table 3 shows a version of the framework adapted to the context of our case. Although a citizen category called “Direct decision makers” is a part of the framework, we left it out in the Table because because the system we studied was a discussion forum where no decisions were made. We added a sub-category from the “Business” entity. This was “Vendor” since this is a key stakeholder in most e-Participation projects, especially in our case. Finally, we added a column (rightmost in the table) that lists the interest of each entity.

[Insert Table 3 here]

The analytical lens

We now integrate the two theoretical premises described in the previous section into an analytical lens to study the dynamics of e-Participation initiatives. The 5W1H framework of GT provides a comprehensive set of concepts for the analysis. ST complements this by fleshing out the “who” element by providing concepts to identify different actors involved, their agendas and interests and a means to understand their interaction. The identification of the stakeholders in our lens is based upon conceptualization of the basic e-Participation entities that allows us to drill further down and be more specific and parsimonious in identifying specific stakeholder groups. Genre analysis informs our stakeholder analysis by first providing insights to the purpose (“why”) and the nature (“what”) of the communicative act and then clues to identify specific subcategories of stakeholders. While the 5W1H framework provides the backbone of our analytical lens, the salience analysis from stakeholder theory adds two important contributions; 1) an approach to understand key stakeholders and 2) a way of understanding the dynamics of the salience attributes. Next we illustrate this lens, shown in Figure 2, to analyse an e-Participation case in Norway named DemokratiTorget.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

The DemokratiTorget

Development of the DemokratiTorget

In 2003, the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion granted funding for the DemokratiTorget project to foster “electronic dialogue between politicians and citizens” by establishing an on-line discussion forum. The project was initiated by three public entities, namely, Kristiansand city and the counties of East- and West-Agder. Kristiansand, located in West Agder is regarded as the regional capital of the southern region of Norway. The two counties have approximately 265,000 inhabitants out of which Kristiansand accounts for approximately 76,000.

The project was initiated in March 2003, approximately seven months before local and regional elections held in September. It was seen as an attempt to encourage electors to influence political decision-making processes and arrest the decline in voter participation. Specifically targeted were citizens aged 18 to 22. Another aim was to ensure that information broadcast to electors was correct by providing direct information exchange and discussion between politicians and citizens through an electronic meeting place. The meeting place would run as a pilot and it was hoped that the project would identify areas where new IT-based solutions would strengthen citizen’s participation in the political process. Developing a follow-up project, as required by the funding agency was also an objective.

A project group was set up to develop, launch and market the system. It included representatives from the three initiating public entities plus the educational sector (as young people were seen to be especially important in the process), and a vendor headquartered in Kristiansand. This vendor, whose focus areas included developing and implementing E-democracy software, was contracted to develop the system.

In the initial meeting of the project group, the project manager (an administrator of Kristiansand city) outlined the different roles for each group member, estimated the time-demand for each member and described the objectives of the project in detail. Pressed for time, the group jumped straight to technical issues without discussing the main objectives of the project in detail. Just one month after the initial meeting, the group discussed first a prototype, then outlined requirement specifications, and finally the interpretation of E-

democracy and what to achieve through the initiated project.

The project group focused mainly on two issues. First it discussed strategies to get citizen participation. Politicians were considered more or less committed to participate. They could get instructions and help on using the system, but less attention was given to motivate them to participate in the actual development of the project. The political parties were simply kept informed about the project's progress. To inform the targeted group of young citizens, marketing material was distributed through the local school system. Later, it was discovered that only a small amount of this material reached the students. No attempt was made to find out why this happened, but project members thought that part of the explanation could be that the distribution happened at the wrong time – the exam period just before summer holidays. Moreover, the material was sent to principals and not to the teachers who actually had to distribute it to the students. The project group also discussed the kinds of services young people would like to have. No youth were included in these discussions. Thus, discussants were, to quote a member of the group, “on thin ice”. The launching of the site was widely advertised in regional newspapers and covered by regional radio and television channels.

The second area of focus for the group was the technical solution. Within a few months, the vendor presented a description of their ideas. The vendor saw this project as a pilot for their forthcoming priority in the e-Democracy field. The description formulated objectives and background slightly different from what the project group had settled on earlier. For example, the Internet was now seen as an “old and less flexible communication channel” and the “primary communication channel (for DemokratiTorget) is therefore SMS”. Young people have also, according to the vendor's views, “high standard of living, nothing to complain about and only a minor desire to influence or change the society”.

Due to delays, the project group saw the prototype only at the end of July, which was less than two months before the election. Technical flaws remained which required further development. The design was not discussed further in detail by the entire project group before it was launched in August of 2003, 26 days before the election.

Use of the DemokratiTorget

The DemokratiTorget forum was set up with 25 discussion categories which included subjects of perceived local and regional political interest. The categories were based on suggestions

from the vendor and approved by the project group. Administrators from Kristiansand city served as moderators of the forum

The forum got off to a brisk start. In the 26 days between launching and Election Day, 525 contributions were posted for an average of approximately 20 per day. Responses to the postings peaked around election time. The politically themed debates mainly concerned local and regional issues. However, one discussion targeted democracy and the Internet itself. Contributors agreed that dialog was important. A commentator in one of the debates summed up one of the forum's dilemmas:

“I agree with Esben that dialog is important. However there will be a problem if it turns out that the political candidates don't take it (the DemokratiTorget) seriously, but just consider it a kind of exercise in democracy” (all quotations are translated from the original Norwegian)

Some early issues about the forum concerned the practical operation of the forum, both at the technical level (some complaints about navigation speed) and at the level of policy and social convention. One contributor was enraged that some critical comments he posted were never displayed and assumed these had been censored. The board moderators denied this accusation, but retained the right to censor “inappropriate” material in general. What happened to these messages remained unclear. The forum then addressed ethical questions with regard to postings (i.e. how challenging, rude or offensive a contribution could be).

The project was evaluated by the project group in the autumn of 2003. It generally to believe in the future and potential of the site. However, activity slowed down considerably after the elections and petered down to no activity on several days with many discussions fizzling out in unanswered questions. Only 68 contributions were recorded in the 269 days after the election. At this point the forum was closed down due to inactivity

Data collection

The longitudinal case study was conducted as doctoral dissertation work of one of the authors. The approach was interpretative (Klein & Myers, 1999), requiring substantial involvement in the research situation over a period of time.

The research followed a multiple data collection, multiple analysis strategy (See Table 4). The data was collected over a period of 15 months covering two distinct phases: the initial genesis and development of DemokratiTorget, and its subsequent implementation and use (See Figure 3). Involvement in the development phase lasted approximately five months, from the initiation of the project until the discussion forum was launched. Data collection methods included direct and participant observation of the project, project documents study, fifteen semi-structured interviews of politicians and administrators, system observation and transcription of project email conversations (e.g. with the vendor). For the use phase which lasted 10 months, the main data source was the postings made to DemokratiTorget.

[Insert Table 4 here]

[Insert Figure 3 here]

Findings

Studies based on the earlier analyses of the data are published elsewhere. These analyses include textual content analysis of the contributions posted in the discussion and a genre analysis to relate the contributions to design and management considerations. For the purpose of this paper, we conduct a fresh analysis of the data using the proposed analytical lens while also drawing upon the previous analyses where appropriate.

Our analysis of the development phase is based mainly on observations, interviews and document analysis. We studied the use phase mainly through the transcripts from the postings over the 10 months period that the system was running. To do so, we analyzed the communicative discourse recorded in these transcripts using genre theory perspective. We were thus able to uncover the extent and patterns of use of the system as well as the nature of the postings. Since the postings were anonymous, we could not contact citizens. The politicians were easier to identify.

Tables 5 and 6 summarize our findings of the development phase and use phase respectively. The tables are organized according to our analytical lens (shown in Figure 1). In the next section, we present our analysis.

[Insert Table 5 here]

[Insert Table 6 here]

Discussion

Insights from the development stage

DemokratiTorget was initiated and driven by two stakeholder groups, namely the administrators and the vendor. The project group consisted of members from these two groups only (each of the government units, namely the municipality, the two counties and the educational sectors were represented by administrators in the project group). The project was funded by a central government agency. The administrators therefore were not dependent on the local politicians for resources required for the project. Thus, their salience was high at the development stage; they had all three attributes; power, legitimacy and urgency to implement the system to fulfill the requirements of the funding agency. They were a definitive stakeholder and consequently emerged as the most influential stakeholder group at the development stage. However, administrators had little or no technical knowhow. This allowed the vendor to attain high saliency. Contractually, they had only two attributes: legitimacy (since they were contracted to develop the system) and had urgency (because they wanted to use DemokratiTorget as a springboard for future eGovernment projects). Lacking the third attribute, power, they were a “dependent” stakeholder and had to enlist another stakeholder group to become salient. This they did because they had technical knowledge which the definitive stakeholder, administrators, lacked. This gave them power and they attained influence much beyond their purported role which should have been to simply develop and implement the technology.

While the other stakeholder entities, politicians and citizens (specifically the target group of the young) were not completely ignored, they were not involved directly and their purported interests were represented by the administrators’ perception. This can be described as “shallow stakeholder analysis”. Thus at the development stage, politicians had little meaningful power (they were funding only a very minor part of the project) and lacked legitimacy (since they were excluded from the project team). It is interesting to note that they also did not have any urgency despite realizing the importance of the system in helping them

to broadcast their message, specifically their election manifesto, to the electorate (Rose & Sæbø, 2008). All political parties were kept informed about the progress of the project. Perhaps the lack of urgency can be attributed to the fact that each political party had its own website. Moreover, many politicians were skeptical about the project dismissing it as a “media driven” project: *“it is challenging for us politicians to use the forum the way they (the project group) have decided, requiring politicians to give immediate and simplified answers to complicated questions. As a politician I find that difficult”* (Interviewed politician).

Within the citizen entity, the target of the project was young citizens, specifically those who had not participated in public debates and shown any interest in the democratic discourse. Yet, this group was not involved in any way in the development or administration of the system. Their “interests” were represented by the vendor who viewed all young citizens as *“blasé and demanding, uninterested, dissociated to the political system.... with no moral commitment to vote”*. The administrators took the vendor’s word and did not involve or even ask the young citizens. In summary, the administrators and the vendors were the most salient stakeholders at this stage.

Insights from the use stage

At a gross level, the only users of the system were citizens and politicians. The picture however is more nuanced. While we could not determine whether the “young citizen” target group actually participated in the discussions, we identified activists as making the vast majority of postings (see also Rose & Sæbø, 2008). Similar to other stakeholder groups, they were most active in the pre-election period (around 240 postings in 26 days) and less active later on (around 60 postings in 269 days). Activists are precisely the stakeholders who would find a forum such as DemokratiTorget appropriate. As citizens, they had power and legitimacy to participate. As activists, they had the urgency to influence decision making. By acquiring all three attributes, they become definitive stakeholders and hence salient. Such activists actually comprise a very small segment of citizenry. Seen in this light, the system may well have been a success if those who participated constituted a significant portion of the activists in the specific community.

Consumer citizens were mainly absent. This is not surprising given that while they constitute the majority of citizens, they are not particularly interested in the public debate. Although this group had the same level of power and legitimacy as activists, their sense of urgency was low

to non-existing. Moreover, there was nothing in the system itself to attract such citizens or to arouse their interest. With two attributes, they remained “dominant” without becoming definitive.

The picture is equally nuanced when we look at politicians. The activity and number of contribution is revealing. The peak activity was around election time. Politicians were most active during the pre-election days (292 postings in 26 days) and virtually disappeared after election (2 postings in 269 days). This is understandable since they had urgency in the pre-election period. After all, they wanted to be elected (or re-elected as the case maybe). After the election, this urgency disappeared – irrespective of whether they won or lost the election. Genre analysis sheds further light on this finding. Contributions before the election were of the “informing their stance” type. These are the expected under election campaigning. Obviously this was not needed after the election. Of course, politicians had power (to participate in discussion) and legitimacy (the system was meant for them) throughout.

In summary, the key stakeholders with the highest salience at the use stage were politicians and activist citizens. The key stakeholders at the development stage – administrators and vendors – had little or no role at this stage. They had no urgency and unless we consider them also as citizens, power and legitimacy were rather meaningless terms.

Insights on the dynamics of salience

The application of our analytic framework enables us to get detailed snapshots of the dynamic nature of eParticipation projects at different phases.. The salience of stakeholders changed over time. In the development phase, the administrators and vendor were salient while in the use phase salience had been transferred to the politicians and activists. This lasted until the election. After the election, only the activists remained somewhat salient. There is a clear link between use and the presence of a salient stakeholder. When salience disappeared, so did use.

One specific attribute, urgency, contributed mainly to this variance in salience. The sense of urgency among key stakeholders (i.e. politicians and activists) ties to important events that occurred during lifetime of the DemokratiTorget. Moreover, the same stakeholder can have different levels of salience at different stages. Consider consumer citizens as an example. Normally, this group is rather indifferent to political debates. However, when a political decision has the potential to influence their lives, their interest is roused. This could be a

decision on building an overpass near a neighborhood or placing a garbage disposing dump. At such moments, consumer citizens may turn to activists. Once this discussion is over and a decision made, these citizens are likely to go back to being consumers. From definitive stakeholders, they slide to “dominant” with just legitimacy and power. Moreover, the power itself may not be exercised making them simply “discretionary stakeholders”.

Therefore, a dip in salience is not necessarily an undesirable outcome. It may well be a natural occurrence. For example, administrators in our case need not be salient at the use stage although they were highly salient at the development stage.

Figure 4 captures the dynamics of salience.

[Insert Figure 4 here]

Note: The figure is not drawn to scale along either axis. It simply illustrates the relative positioning of salience.

Insights on the analytical lens

Our analysis indicates that while each of the two theoretical premises by themselves provide a good lens to understand the complex dynamics surrounding an eParticipation initiative, applying them together synergistically gives us a far richer picture. Elements of each mutually inform elements of the other. We have already shown how the “Who” element from GT is enhanced by ST. The “Why” element is enhanced in the same way. As shown in Table 1, Why refers to the reason or expectations of a communicative action. What it does not tell us is what lies behind such expectations. Adding ST to this gives us one such reason. Urgency leads to expectations as the politicians demonstrated. Before the election, they had urgency and hence they communicated. After the election the urgency disappeared and hence they stopped communicating. This also shows the link between “When” and urgency – clearly urgency is a function of when the communication takes place.

“What” refers to the content of the communication. This element is also influenced by ST, specifically “power” and “legitimacy”. “What” is influenced by “when” in that the content of communication depends to a large extent on when it takes place. For example, before the elections, the politicians were simply re-iterating their election manifesto. Our case provides

some insights into the inter-relationship between the elements of ST we used here, namely power, legitimacy and urgency. Urgency appears to be the most important contributor to salience in an eParticipation context. Power and legitimacy appears to be more of a “structural” or “institutional” character in that these can be regulated through rules and procedures. Legally or socially, one can have power and/or legitimacy. However, both of them are enacted only if the actor appropriates them. This means that one may have legal power (or legitimacy) but may not perceive that one has that and hence not exhibit it. This was amply demonstrated by the inactivity of the “consumer” citizens – or for that matter the majority of the citizens.

The other side of the coin is when actors “over” appropriate these structures. The vendor in our case demonstrated this. They had no real power in the project beyond what was stipulated in the contract – building and implementing the system. Yet, because administrators had no technical know-how, the vendor attained power. They used this to circumvent their legitimacy to go beyond their purported role. They rapidly asserted their own conceptualizations of the politicians and citizens on the project group and later attempted to shape the municipality’s eGovernment policy and strategy.

Our lens provides another intriguing insight. Taken together, our findings suggest that evaluating an eParticipation project may not be possible using “conventional” measures of “use” and attracting users. Our evidence clearly suggests that use occurs when a sense of urgency is triggered among key stakeholders. In our case, a particular event (the election) triggered the sense of urgency among politicians and activists. The expectations need to be adjusted based on a deeper understanding of the key stakeholders, their needs and their genres of communication.

Implications for Practice

Our analysis has illustrated the usefulness of conducting a stakeholder analysis in eParticipation projects. A number of techniques and toolsets exist to conduct such an analysis. The simplest example is a high level stakeholder map that lists the key stakeholders in any project. Once such a map is drawn, a more detailed analysis of the relationship is conducted for collecting information about stakeholders. Examples of such analysis tools include a framework proposed by Klieschewski & Scholl (2006). Then an assessment is made

about the degree of salience (for example, in the DemokratiTorget project, politicians will be assessed to have a high degree of salience especially before election.) Stakeholder analysis can be enhanced if it also contains information about the communication needs and preferences of specific stakeholder groups.

The dynamic nature of salience has important implications for practice. As described, stakeholders' salience change over time and is tied to important events related to a project. This illustrates the importance of updating the stakeholder analysis regularly and most usefully in conjunction with specific events that are likely to alter the attitudes or salience of the stakeholders. Salience is tied to use of the system. Hence, it is important that salience – specifically urgency – needs to be high for one or another key stakeholder at each stage of a project. We therefore stress the need for “salience transfer” if a key stakeholder's salience is lower at a subsequent stage. Our findings strongly indicate that the key to transferring salience is to trigger a sense of urgency and further that urgency can be triggered by specific events. Our findings also provide insights into the need to go beyond simply doing a stakeholder analysis. What is needed is stakeholder involvement.

From the above we derive five propositions that practitioners and policymakers should keep in mind when working with eParticipation efforts:

Proposition 1: Participation occurs when one or a few key stakeholders perceives a sense of urgency.

Proposition 2: eParticipation systems will only be used by stakeholders whose sense of urgency is triggered.

Proposition 3: The sense of urgency among stakeholders is triggered by specific events.

Proposition 4: eParticipation systems should be implemented in conjunction with a specific event.

Proposition 5: Success criteria can only be realistic when they are developed based on a thorough stakeholder analysis and linked to particular events.

Implications for Research

The case we presented is strictly an eParticipation system whose objective is to draw in citizens to the democratic process through discussions. As such, it is quite different from “typical” eGovernment systems whose objective is providing services (e.g., registering births, handling applications for building permits to name a few). Such systems may have a more even usage pattern than DemokratiTorget. Whether our lens is applicable to such systems is in itself an interesting research question.

Nevertheless, our lens is useful for researchers to analyze eGovernment initiatives. The emerging eGovernment domain has been criticized for its limited theoretical developments and for failing to develop a cumulative research tradition (Flak, Sein & Sæbø, 2007). The theoretical premises in this paper can be seen as a response to that criticism. We used a well-established theory in the information systems domain, genre theory, and enhanced its analytic power by adding elements from stakeholder theory. This is an important contribution because all too often stakeholder complexity is ignored and complex groups are treated as homogenous entities often resulting in oversight of key interests. Such oversight can prevent researchers from obtaining the necessary understanding when analyzing eGovernment efforts.

In applying the 5W1H framework from the GT to analyze our data, we have stressed some elements more than others because these elements were more essential to the lens. By contrast, the “How” element had a limited contribution to the analysis of our specific case. However, concepts related to this element, specifically *expectations about the media*, *structuring devices*, and *linguistic elements*, have bearing on the design of eGovernment systems.

Our paper addresses Mitchel, Agle & Wood’s (1997) call for further investigation of the usefulness of their work on stakeholder salience and the appropriateness of the salience attributes. Our analysis clearly confirms and illustrates the usefulness of investigating stakeholder salience. Equally important, though, is it that our findings suggest that the relative importance of the three salience attributes seems to be context dependent. While Mitchell, Agle & Wood (1997) appear to consider power, legitimacy and urgency to be of equal importance in assessing salience, our findings suggest that at least in the context of eParticipation, urgency is relatively more important than the other attributes. More studies are

needed to investigate the contextual sensitivity of the salience concept to shed further light of possible variations in the relative importance of the three attributes in different contexts.

Our analytic lens extends the discourse on Stakeholder theory in that traditional Management literature views the relationship between an organization and its stakeholder in a more or less from the organization's perspective. As Mitchel et al. (1997) pointed out from their extensive review of prior work, the aim of stakeholder analysis is to enable managers to identify key stakeholders whose interests need to be met in order for the organization to prosper or even survive. This was the perspective of our lens at the development stage of the project.

However, the literature on stakeholder theory generally ignores the stakeholder's perspective, viz, why should a stakeholder act? At the use stage, our lens takes precisely this perspective. We use the same attributes, power, legitimacy and urgency, to gain insight to the stakeholders' behaviour.

Our theoretical premises, with enhanced details such as described above on the "How" element, can be useful to develop a method to design eGovernment systems. Individually, both premises have been used as such already. ST has been applied by Scholl (2004) to develop an "eGovernment system" in the US. GT has been used to develop the requirements of an eGovernment system in a municipality in Norway (Haraldsen et. al., 2005). In a similar vein, both premises have also been applied at initial phases of eGovernment initiatives in Norway (Flak & Nordheim, 2006; Sæbø, 2006a, 2006b) using an Action Case approach. Applying both perspectives together and at different stages of the project can be a fruitful avenue of research. An appropriate approach to do so will be to use Action Design Research (Sein et al., forthcoming).

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Why	Expectations about socially recognized purpose, which is the central identifying characteristics of the genre system
What	The content of the genre systems and constituent genres, including expectations about which genres typically appear and potential sequences.
Who/m	The participants involved in the communicative interaction and their roles, e.g. who initiates and whom are addressed by the genres involved.
How	Expectations about the form including expectations on media, structuring devices and linguistic elements.
When	Temporal expectations, like deadlines or expectations (explicitly or implicitly stated) on timeline for performing the communicative actions.
Where	Location and time expectations, physical or virtual.

Table 1: 5W1H framework from Genre perspective (adapted from (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002))

Power	Defined as “...the ability of those who possess power to bring about the outcomes they desire” (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974, p. 3). Sources of power can be coercive (physical force, violence or restraint), utilitarian (material or financial resources) and normative (based on symbolic resources). Power is variable, meaning it can be acquired and lost, and it may or maynot be exercised.
Legitimacy	Defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Legitimacy is evaluative, cognitive, socially constructed and may be defined and negotiated differently at different levels of social organization (typically individual, organizational and societal) (Mitchell et al., 1997)
Urgency	Defined as “the degree to which stakeholder claims calls for immediate attention” and is something “calling for immediate attention”. It consists of two attributes: “(1) time sensitivity – the degree to which managerial delay in attending to the claim or relationship is unacceptable to the stakeholder, and (2) criticality – the importance of the claim or the relationship to the stakeholder” (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 867).

Table 2: Attributes determining a stakeholder’s salience

Basic entity	Sub-categories	Description	Interest
Government (G)	Politician (GP)	Publicly elected decision and policy maker (e.g. mayor, councilor, parliament member)	Develop and implement own policies. Ensure re-election.
	Administrator (GA)	Middle and higher level salaried career employees executing politicians' policies (city manager, health department head)	Ensure policy implementation effectively and efficiently.
	Service provider (GS)	Lower level salaried career employees carrying out day to day government jobs directly or indirectly interacting with citizens (e.g., case officers in school department, advisors and information providers in taxation office)	Ensure meaningful and secure work situation. Provide good quality service.
Citizen (C)	Consumer (CCon)	Uses services offered by the government	Easy access to information and services.
	Activist (CAct)	Citizens involved in efforts to effect specific government policies and decisions through civil action often individually or in groups (e.g., Amnesty International)	Impact policy development and public decision making processes.
Business (B)	Vendor	Companies mostly private who provide systems (software, hardware, infrastructure) and/or consulting services in e-Government projects	Apart from commercial interest, they attempt to influence government policies in such areas as procurement, standards and even strategy

Table 3. Entities of eGovernment (adapted from Flak et al., 2007)

Phases	Activities	Participants	Documentation
Development of the DemokratiTorget	Initial meetings with project coordinator	Project coordinator	Audio-recorded and transcribed
	Observing project meeting	Project group	Agenda, minutes and notes from 6 half-day project- meetings
	Documentation collection	Project group	- objectives for the project -Initial ideas and application for funding -Requirement analyses -Vendors' suggested solution -Press cuttings
	Observing demonstration of the suggested solution	Project group and steering committee	Personal notes, screen shots
	E-mail conversation	Project group	E-mails
	Interviews with politicians	Three politicians	Audio-taped interviews transcribed and sent back to politicians for validation
Use of the DemokratiTorget	Observing postings added in the discussion forum	All contributors at the DemokratiTorget	593 postings documented
	Observing system in use		Notes and screen shots
	Participation at an evaluation seminar	Project group	Agenda, minutes and notes
	Presenting an evaluation report	Project group and steering committee	Observing researchers' written summary
	E-mail conversation	Project group	E-mails
	Validation meeting: preliminary results presented	Project coordinator	Draft version of content analysis sent to stakeholders

Table 4: Summary of data collection activities

Who	Politicians	<p>Power: Low, project was funded by a central agency and local politicians provided limited funding.</p> <p>Legitimacy: Legitimate as potential future users, made the resolution to carry out the project.</p> <p>Urgency: Low, little indications of urgency. Expressed scepticism towards “experimental” media, initiated by the administration.</p>
	Administrators	<p>Power: High, initiated the project, headed the project group that was responsible for the development, marketing and implementation of the system.</p> <p>Legitimacy: Legitimate as buyer, future system owners, and in defining the functions the systems should support.</p> <p>Urgency: High, urgency to develop a system according to funding specifications.</p>
	Consumers	<p>Power: Non existent, since they were not asked to participate.</p> <p>Legitimacy: Legitimate as potential future users.</p> <p>Urgency: Not assessed.</p>
	Activists	<p>Power: Non existent, since they were not asked to participate.</p> <p>Legitimacy: Legitimate as potential future users.</p> <p>Urgency: Not assessed.</p>
	Vendor	<p>Power: Contractually low, acquired high, owned and understood the technology. Actually designed the system.</p> <p>Legitimacy: Legitimate as contractor for the development of the system. Limited legitimacy in defining the functions the systems should support.</p> <p>Urgency: High, urgent need to develop and demonstrate their product for further commercial purposes.</p>
Why	The objective was to establish an electronic meeting place for politicians and citizens to mutually inform each other through discussions. Thus increase citizen participation in political discourse especially among young citizens between 18 and 22. To increase voter participation in local elections.	
What	Planned functionality included the discussion forum, presentation of politicians and political parties, opportunity to send e-mails directly to the politicians, news session, background information on eDemocracy, and “five on the street” (short interviews with citizens on a weekly basis).	
How	To attract young citizens the project group acknowledged the importance of arranging for less formal communication, utilizing online technologies that support quick and short messaging.	
When	The system designed as anytime, anyplace and asynchronous. Developed in time for the local elections.	
Where	The project group initially planned to combine online and offline activities, e.g. by initiating online activities in relation to local council meetings.	

Table 5: Findings of the development phase

Who	Politicians	Power: <i>High</i> , their participation was vital for the success of the system. Legitimacy: Legitimate as elected representatives. Urgency: <i>High</i> up to election, low to non-existing after election.
	Administrators	Power: Medium, some control of content by moderating the discussions. Legitimacy: Legitimate as moderators. Urgency: Low, their only role was to observe and summarize.
	Consumers	Power: High, their participation was vital for the success of the system. Legitimacy: Legitimate as part of the political system. Urgency: Low to non-existent, only some very few contributions requested information from politicians.
	Activists	Power: High, their participation was vital for the success of the system. Legitimacy: Legitimate as part of the political system. Urgency: High up to election, medium after election.
	Vendor	Power: Low, their role effectively ended once the system was launched. Legitimacy: Non existent, except for maintenance. Urgency: Medium, needed to demonstrate the usefulness of their system.
Why	The opening page of the DemokratiTorget marketed the system as a forum for influencing politics, a place to discuss with politicians, and a forum to connect to other citizens interested in political issues.	
What	The discussion board remained the principle part but the system also included a notice board and textual information about e-democracy as well as links to many local and national political parties.	
How	A question and answer convention was built into the site, where the first contribution was labeled "question", and following contribution "answers", irrespective of the active role in the dialogue.	
When	Discussions were organized for asynchronous communication, without any support of synchronous discussions. From opening day to the election day (26 days), 525 contributions were posted. In the next 269 days after the election 68 contributions were recorded. At this point, the forum was closed down due to inactivity.	
Where	Online. No initiatives were made to relate online and offline activities.	

Table 6: Findings of the use phase

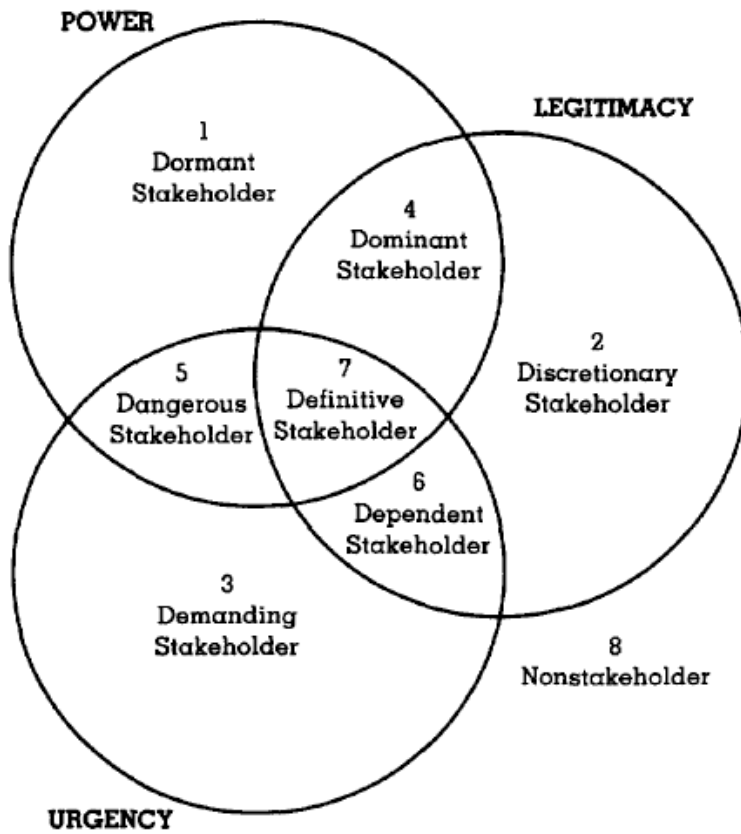


Fig. 1. Stakeholder typology; One, two or three attributes present (Mitchell et al., 1997).

Understanding phases of eGovernment projects			
Who	Identified entity 1	Entities of eGov Table 3	Saliency (Power, Legitimacy and Urgency)
	Identified entity 2 ..		Saliency (Power, Legitimacy and Urgency) ...
	5W1H, Table 1		Saliency Table 2
Why			
What			
How			
When			
Where			

Fig. 2. Analytical lens based on GT and ST.

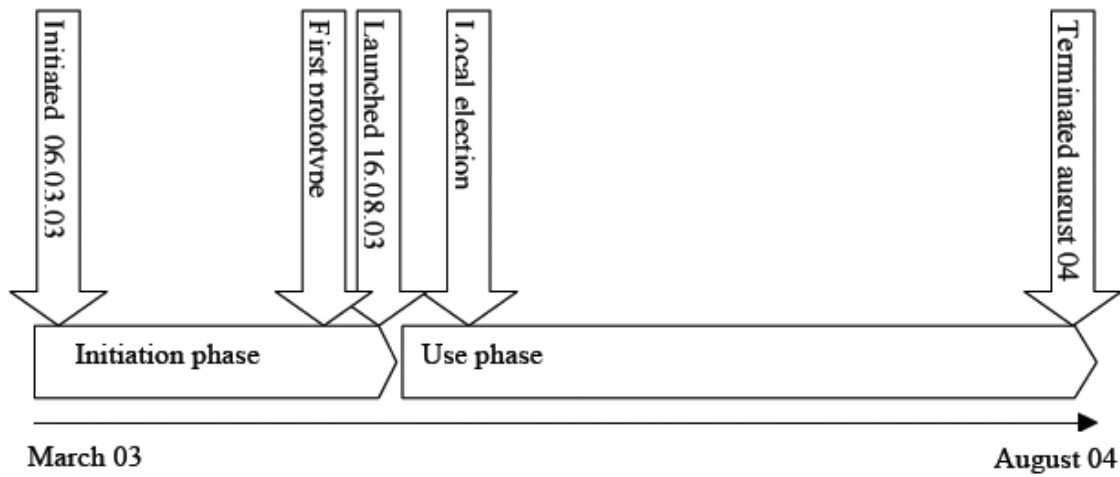


Fig. 3. Timeline for Demokratitorget.

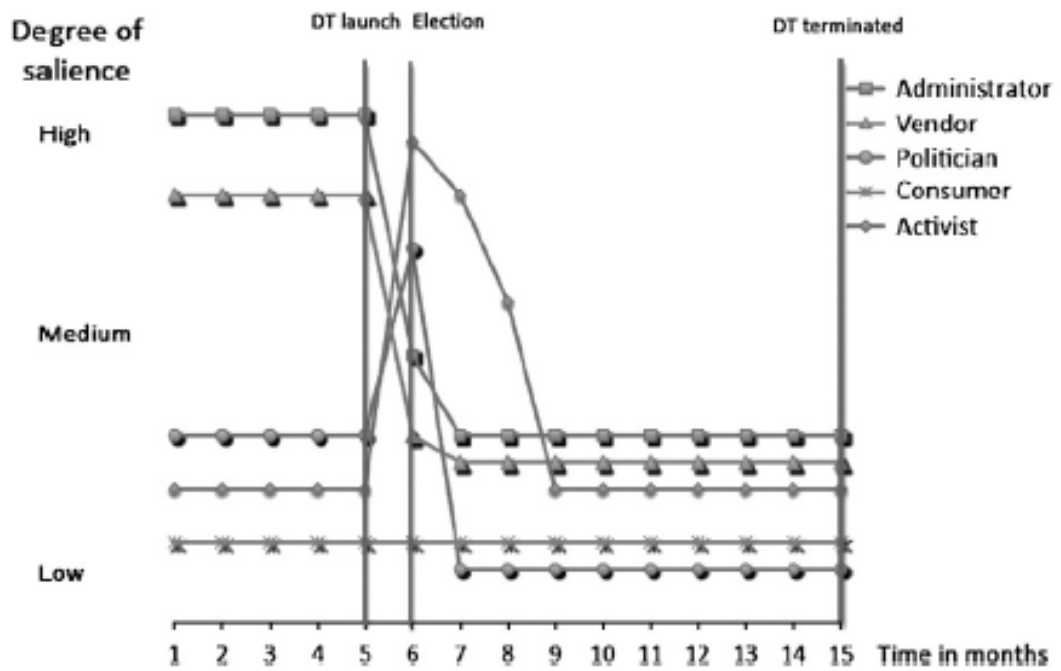


Fig. 4. Dynamics of Salience.