Making it work. Institutionalizing digitalization in Danish local administrations

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Abstract
Digitalization is held to be a key component in transforming the public administration into a reflexive, flexible and dynamic organization. For this to be realized, digitalization, i.e. the strategic use of Information Technology (IT) in innovating workflows, needs to become a part of the organizational identity. Drawing on the concepts of institutional logics and institutional work this paper uses a qualitative case study of two Danish local administrations to explore the institutionalization of digitalization. The paper describes the intra-organizational presence of diverging perceptions of the role of IT in digitalization and illustrates how institutional work within the organizations was loosely organized around specific characters – the Mediators, the Preachers and the Gatekeepers – with the purpose of bridging these differences into a nuanced institution of digitalization. By showing that the organization of institutional work within an organization is not only shaped by but also a strategic response to diverging institutional logics, the paper makes an important contribution to the debate on the relation between institutional work and institutional logics. The findings make the paper urge the local administrations to accept a more nuanced institutionalization of digitalization, and to highlight the key role, the mid-level manager as a Mediator plays in this regard.

Introduction

For more than a decade, digitalization has been a key ingredient in transforming Danish public administration into a reflexive, flexible and dynamic organization (Greve, 2012). Digitalization, i.e. the strategic use of Information Technology (IT) in innovating workflows, has been positioned as an important means for public administration to meet the demands of improving services while cutting costs (Den Digitale Taskforce, 2002: 5). In 2010, the local administrations even supplemented the ongoing national strategies and legislations with a joint municipal digitalization strategy, thus stressing their commitment to use digitalization as a driver of re-inventing public administration (KL, 2010).

Yet, while statistics document a steady increase in the spread of digital solutions across the public administration (Danmarks Statistik 2012), only little knowledge exists on the organizational processes that are related to *institutionalizing* digitalization, i.e. making digitalization a "*(…) more-or-less taken-for-granted repetitive social behavior that is underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understandings*" (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin & Suddaby, 2008: 4). However, previous study results on IT, actors and organizations indicate a need to explore this institutionalization process in relation to the perception of the materiality on which it is based: IT (Baldersheim, Haug & Øgård, 2008; Bijker, 1997; Fountain, 2001). For example, as Wanda Orlikowski and Debra Gash (1994) outline, diverging perceptions of IT are likely to exist within organizations, and if not taken into account this may restrict an organization from benef-

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itting from digitalization. Therefore, it is necessary to describe how the role of IT in digitalization is perceived in Danish local administrations, and to study how the organizational efforts to institutionalize digitalization are shaped and organized to handle these perceptions.

Within neo-institutionalism, two diverging concepts offer different insights into these matters: *The concept of institutional logics* is concerned with structures and describes how material practices and symbolic aspects influence how actors relate to their institutional environment (Friedland & Alford, 1991: 248; Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012: 2). It thereby provides a theoretical framework in understanding how material practices related to digitalization influence the perception of IT's role in digitalization. In addition, it clarifies the extent to which it is possible to change these perceptions. In contrast, *the concept of institutional work* is oriented towards actions as it describes intentional effort that is carried out to influence an institutional environment (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 215). As such, it constitutes a framework for assessing the actions taken towards institutionalizing digitalization. While institutional logics and institutional work thus represent two very different approaches to institutions, scholars have recently suggested that new knowledge on institutions may be derived by exploring the relation between the concepts further (Gawer & Phillips, 2013; Lawrence, Leca & Zilber, 2013; Zilber, 2013). In this paper, exploring the empirical interplay between institutional logics and institutional work makes it possible to study the organization of labor within institutional work as a response to existing logics. Such knowledge would furthermore be a welcome addition to the limited literature on the organization and orchestration of institutional work (Perkmann & Spicer, 2008; Westenholz, 2012b).

Hence, based on a case study of two Danish local administrations, this paper explores how the institutional work, that was carried out to institutionalize digitalization in Danish local administrations, responded to and was influenced by the organizational perception(s) of IT's role in digitalization. Doing so, the paper not only adds to our knowledge of the empirical interplay between institutional logics and institutional work, but also contributes with important insights into the process of institutionalizing digitalization in the Danish local administration.

In the following, I introduce the digitalization of the Danish local administrations and address the need for a closer assessment of the institutionalization of digitalization. Next, the theoretical concepts of the paper are presented, followed by a section on the methods and data applied in the paper. The analysis firstly documents the presence of two diverging institutional logics within the organizations, and secondly reveals how institutional work, that was carried out to institutionalize digitalization, was restricted by and strategically targeted these logics in order to push for a less uniform institutionalization of digitalization. The paper ends with a concluding discussion.

IT, digitalization and the Danish local administration

Since the emergence of the Internet, interest in digitalization of the public administration has been rapidly increasing (Bekkers & Homburg, 2007; Kræmmergaard & Schlichter, 2011; Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013). Digitalization, defined as the strategic use of IT to innovate workflows, has been positioned as a way to increase service quality while cutting costs (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow & Tinkler, 2006; Homburg, 2008). By this, digitalization also signifies a radical transformation of the public administration, forcing it to be reflexive, flexible and dynamic. As such, the digitalization process can be described as a process of creating an institution, i.e. social structures based on norms and values (Greenwood et al. 2008: 4-5).

Also in Denmark the promise of digitalization has gained influence, resulting in a consistent effort to digitalize public administration; what scholars have termed a 'digitalization reformation' (Greve, 2012): For more than a decade, the Danish public administration has been subjected to a series of national digitalization strategies and related legislations (Den Digitale Taskforce, 2002; Regeringen, Danske Regioner & KL, 2007; Regeringen, KL, Amtsrådsforeningen, Københavns Kommune & Frederiksberg Kommune, 2004; Regeringen, KL & Danske Regioner, 2007, 2011). As a result, Denmark is by international peers regarded as a highly digitalized nation (UN Public Administration Program 2014; United Nations, 2012).

While the digitalization reformation has been setting out guidelines for the *entire* Danish public administration, it was not until the late 2000s that IT and digitalization became concrete topics on the management agenda of *local* administrations. Prior to this, IT had been used in the day-to-day activities of local administrations, with no common master plan for the development and use of IT in the local administrations (Johansson, 2004; KMD, 2013). IT was in this period widely viewed as a technical tool with no direct link to strategic management, and was therefore not a matter for managerial attention. However, the Local Government Reform of 2007 and the sale of the local administrations' software company KMD in 2009 made it evident, that digitalization could not be realized without the local administrations taking charge of the process (Erhvervs- og Vækstministeriet, 2006; Indenrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet, 2005; KL, 2009). Therefore, in 2010, the first joint municipal digitalization strategy was published (KL, 2010); a manifesto for local administrations to commit themselves to actively link strategic management and IT into a process of organizational transformation.

In the years following, statistics, empirical analysis and academic research projects have evaluated the 'digital maturity' of local administrations, i.e. the ability to master digitalization as a strategic, organizational and technical issue. While this has documented e.g. increasing managerial attention and involvement in organizational digitalization and a growing number of local digitalization strategies (Danmarks Statistik 2012; KL & Devoteam, 2012; Kræmmergaard & Nielsen, 2012), there is a remarkable absence of focused information on the

organizational *institutionalization* of digitalization. However, such knowledge is important to retrieve as the expected transformation through digitalization is closely linked to the organizational institutionalization of digitalization.

While the institutionalization process can be studied from many different aspects, it is essential to gain greater insights into how *the organizational members' perception of the role of IT in digitalization* affects the institutionalization process and how the organization copes with this. I point to this specific issue while taking inspiration from a variety of scholars who have argued that actors' understanding and handling of technologies like IT may differ (Baldersheim, Haug & Øgård, 2008; Bijker, 1997; Fountain, 2001). Wanda Orlikowski and Debra Gash's work (1994) demonstrates in particular how the perception of (and therefore relation to) IT might vary within an organization – something '(…) which could lead to difficulties around technological use and change' (1994: 203). By using the concept of technological frames, i.e. '(…) that subset of member's organizational frames that concern the assumptions, expectations, and knowledge they use to understand technology in organizations' (1994: 178), they connect these variations to the enactment of specific sets of social cognition. As technological frames are rooted in social structures, Orlikowski and Gash by making reference to organization institutionalism argue that they are difficult to alter (1994: 200).

By relating these perspectives to the current institutionalization of digitalization in local administrations, it indicates that diverging perceptions of IT's role in digitalization are likely to exist in the organizations. How organizations handle these differences may be crucial to the institutionalization process. However, the guidelines within the concept of technological frames for exploring these dynamics are poor. I therefore draw on the concepts of institutional work and institutional logics. Together, these concepts make it possible to explore how the interplay between social structures, material practices and agencies shape institutions.

Studying the microdynamics of institutional change

What constrains or enables institutional transformation has been a recurring topic within the tradition of organizational institutionalism (Campbell, 2004; DiMaggio, 1988; Powell, 1991; Battilana, Leca & Boxembaum, 2009). Two particular approaches to this phenomenon have been highlighted recently: The concept of institutional logics and the concept of institutional work (Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca 2009b; Lounsbury & Boxenbaum, 2013; Thornton et al., 2012; Zilber 2013). Traditionally, these appeal to different kinds of institutional analysis: The former approaching institutions from a structural perspective; the latter from an action perspective (Zilber, 2013: 90). However, recently scholars have suggested that new insights into the microprocesses of institutional transformation can be gained by letting these perspectives supplement each other (Thornton et al, 2012: 180; Gawer & Philips, 2013: 1060; Zilber, 2013: 91).

Institutional logics

Institutional logics originate from organizational neo-institutionalism, but instead of approaching institutions as something objectively 'out there' to be defined and debated, the institutional logics perspective highlights the social and organizational context in which institutions exist and thereby constrain and enable social behavior (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008: 102). Institutional logics are filters through which we see the world, '(…) a metatheoretical framework for analyzing the interrelationships among institutions, individuals and organizations in social systems' (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012: 2). They are shared by groups of actors, and legitimize their actions. An institutional logic consists of both material and symbolic elements (Friedland & Alford, 1991: 253; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999: 804). As Patricia Thornton, William Ocasio and Michael Lounsbury explain: 'By material aspects of institutions, we refer to structures and practices; by symbolic aspects, we refer to ideation and meaning, recognizing that the symbolic and the material are intertwined and constitutive of one another' (Thornton et al., 2012: 10). Thus, the material practices, i.e. the link between material objects and how they are enacted, are strongly positioned in the construction of an institutional logic (Thornton & Ocasio 2008: 105). To this study, institutional logics provide what is absent from the notion of technological frames: A *specific* account of the premise on which IT's role in digitalization is established by the organizational members, and thereby a clarification of what must be changed in order for the perception of IT to be changed – the material practices. Changing material practices can be an organizational challenge, not only because material practices are a basic structure of labor division, but also because it can be difficult to alter symbolic aspects such as ideas and meaning, which are intertwined with the material practices (Friedland & Alford, 1991: 254; Thornton & Ocasio 2008: 105, 115).

A number of studies have addressed the co-existence and transformation of institutional logics (Lounsbury & Boxenbaum, 2013; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Westenholz, 2012a). This shows that situations with multiple institutional logics can co-exist peacefully, but it could also result in conflict and struggles. The important thing is how situations of multiple logics are handled. Since the concept of institutional logics does not provide a toolbox for describing the actions of such processes, I draw on the concept of institutional work.

Institutional work

Introducing the concept of *institutional work,* Thomas B. Lawrence and Roy Suddaby sought to describe '(…) the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions' (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 215). Institutional work is an instrument to analyze the micro-foundations of institutions – to attend '(…) more closely to practice and process than outcome – asking "why" and "how" rather than "what" and "when"' (Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2011: 57). What is essential to institutional work is to acknowledge that institutional environment is not static, but that constant work is required and done in order to create, maintain or disrupt the construction (Law-

rence, Suddaby & Leca, 2009: 1). As the definition indicates, institutional work is characterized by purposive actions, i.e. actions that are meant to affect an institutional arrangement. Therefore, *intentionality* and *effort* are core characteristics of institutional work (Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2011: 53). Despite being controversial and complex concepts to work with (Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2009: 11-17), such defining characteristics help to single out acts of institutional work from actions in general and by this enable us to understand how enacted intentionality is an important part of institutional life.

When Lawrence and Suddaby originally suggested the concept of institutional work, they did so by piecing together a preliminary catalogue of categories of types of institutional work – like theorizing, educating and mythologizing (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 220-238). Since then, studies of institutional work have mostly complied with this approach, yet a few studies have stepped outside the original framing, exploring new ways of categorizing institutional work (Lawrence, Leca & Zilber, 2013; Westenholz, 2012b). In particular, the study on the institutionalization of management fashions by Markus Perkmann & André Spicer (2008) offers interesting avenues in this respect, as it groups institutional work by *topics*, i.e. political, technical and cultural work, showing how specific groups of actors within a field were linked to specific topics of institutional work. Furthermore, Perkmann and Spicer adopt the notion of 'partaking' to describe how this work '(…) emerges as the result of the collective yet uncoordinated actions of distributed actors' (2008: 836). While Perkmann and Spicer's study explores an institutionalization process on *field* level, I find that it indicates that new insights into *organizational* institutionalization processes could be gained from focusing on the different characters involved in institutional work and how these characters initiate and organize their efforts.

Institutional logics and institutional work

While institutional logics and institutional work operate on different analytical levels and with different analytical purposes, each concept contributes to the understanding of institutional transformation. By drawing on both concepts in the same analysis, it becomes possible to generate more specific and holistic perceptions of how structure and agency intertwine – how actors are structured by and intentionally engage in changing structures that restrict institutional change (Gawer & Phillips, 2013; Zilber, 2013). The number of studies that explore the interplay between institutional logics and institutional work are limited, and have either from a theoretical point of view addressed the possibilities of letting the two concepts inform each other or focused on an empirical study of how institutional work is initiated to transform or respond to transformations of institutional logics on a field level (Gawer & Phillips, 2013; Lawrence, Leca & Zilber, 2013; Zilber 2013). This study will add to the literature by empirically exploring the organization of institutional work within an organization as a response to existing institutional logics.

Studying these microfoundations of institutional change within organizations calls for in-depth qualitative case studies. I will elaborate on the study's methods and data in the following section.

Method, data and analytical strategy

Studying how material practices within Danish local administrations influence the institutionalization of digitalization, it was useful to draw on empirical data from different levels and units of local administrations – a so-called 'embedded case study' (Yin, 2009: 50). Since the topic calls for neither unique nor extreme cases, I based the study on local administrations that were said to be *typical cases* (Yin, 2009: 48) in at least two significant ways: Firstly, each case had approximately 55,000 inhabitants, which was the average number of inhabitants in local administrations throughout Denmark (Indenrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet, 2005: 15). This figure was an important measurement as it was an indicator of the average level of resources available to engage in public service, organizational processes and the digitalization of the organization. Secondly, the selected cases were average in terms of their level of digitalization. This refers to the spread and use of digital solutions across the organization, and the engagement of the organization in local and national initiatives to further digitalization. Due to the absence of an official ranking of the local administrations' digitalization levels, I relied on a variety of sources to create an impression of the state of the art – separating extreme cases from the typical ones. Thus, I compared reports, news articles and public administration competitions related to digital maturity amongst the local governments (Barfod, 2011; Digitaliseringsstyrelsen, 2011; NNIT, 2006) with testimonies from practitioners (local CIOs, software vendors and representatives from Local Government Denmark) and my own observations from national conferences on digitalization.

This led to the study of two local administrations selected for literal replication (Fitzgerald & Dopson, 2009: 473; Yin, 2009: 54). Due to an agreement of confidentiality, the cases are in this paper labeled 'Bisborg' and 'Solhavn'. Analyzing their data with the focus on the embedded cases revealed such a high degree of similarity between the two cases that the results are presented as one case to make room for the analysis to focus on the embedded units of the organization. This indicates that these findings may be reoccurring across the (typical) local administrations. Hence, the study provides a solid platform for further investigation into the subject.

The case data used for this article consists of interviews, observations and documents. By combining these data collection methods, I obtained a nuanced perspective of the topic under investigation (Denzin, 1989: 244). Each method was subjected to specific data criteria to ensure relevant variation within the data (Denzin, 1989: 237-239): Firstly, organizational members across all main levels of each organization were interviewed on topics such as the definition of digitalization, the role of digitalization within the organization and how digitalization affected day-to-day practices. Secondly, the observations focused on organiza-

tional meetings about digitalization involving different configurations of staff. Finally, variation within the documents describing the organizations and their digitalization process were obtained through acquiring both public accessible documents, such as material from the Internet, flyers and organizational charts, and internal documents such as unfinished strategies, meeting minutes, meeting material and statements circulated within each organization by email and through intranet posts. In total, 19 organizational members were interviewed, 7 meetings were observed and 1,371 pages of organizational documents were analyzed (See Table 1). The data was collected during the first half of 2012.

Table 1: Data overview

	Number of interviewees (Bisborg/Solhavn)	Number of meeting observations in order of main focus of the meeting (Bisborg/Solhavn)	Number of documents (Bisborg/Solhavn)
Top managers (Chief executive, director of administration)	2 (1/1)	1 (1/0)	
Mid-level managers (Head of department, head of office)	8 (4/4)	3 (2/1)	
Operating sore (Caseworker, administrative staff)	5 (3/2)	-	
IT/Digitalization staff	4 (2/2)	3 (1/2)	
			92 (60/32)

As empirical knowledge and a preliminary theoretical framework had contributed to the construction of the data selection criteria and the semi-structured interview guide, a rough sketch of coding categories were already available when approaching the data for analysis. Hence, to engage in a *conversation* with the data, I took inspiration from grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and coded all the primary data and relevant selections of the secondary data – first by different forms of initial coding, and then as focused coding. This resulted in three main analytical themes: defining digitalization, relating to digitalization and working on institutionalization.

By analyzing the data through the lens of these themes, and making comparisons within and between the different organizational units, significant patterns appeared. Three main points were concluded that needed further elaboration

through the use of theoretical concepts: Firstly, although the organizational members generally had the same overall definition of digitalization, they positioned IT's role in this context very differently – either as an object or a non-human agent. The poles of perception of IT followed the poles of the organization, i.e. the top management and the operating core. Secondly, intensive work was taking place in the organization to keep this polarization from becoming an issue, which could prevent digitalization from being institutionalized. Different groups of actors, spread across the organization, took part in this work, seemingly carrying out specific tasks. Thirdly, the work aimed at preserving the diverging perceptions of digitalization by bridging between them, thus creating digitalization as a non-uniform, organizational phenomenon. In the following sections, I will use the concepts of institutional logics and institutional work to unfold these patterns and clarify how they contribute to our knowledge of the dynamics of institutional change.

Analysis part 1: Material practices matter!

What we do and how we do it influences our perception of the world. This section shows *how* it takes place.

At first glance, both local administrations of the study seemed to be in a positive and uni-directional flow of institutionalizing digitalization. By the frequent appearance of the concept in newsletters, strategies, job titles and meeting topics, digitalization was in the process of becoming an integrated part of the organizational rhetoric. Throughout the organization, organizational members associated digitalization with words like processes, IT, efficiency, innovation and cost savings. Yet, exploring this in depth, it became clear that diverging perceptions of the role of IT in digitalization existed within the organizations: One positioning IT strongly within the perception of digitalization, the other giving IT a more neutral, less dominant position. The cause of these dissimilarities was differences in material practices. Relating to the perspective of institutional logics, this indicated the presence of two diverging institutional logics: The logic of operating and the logic of strategizing.

Logic of operating

Shaped by the experiences of the everyday work linked to digitalized processes, the operating core (i.e. caseworkers and administrative staff) of the local administrations had developed what I term *the logic of operating*. This logic informed the operating core to attend to digitalization with specific attention to the practical aspect of digitalization: IT. IT was in this regard positioned as a non-human agent[1], i.e. something with significant yet unpredictable influence on digitalization, equally capable of enabling and constraining concrete digitalized workflows.

For example, while members of the operating core loudly praised digitalization, they were also highly aware of the increasing dependency on IT in relation to digitalization. As one caseworker said: 'It [the software systems] just has to

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work!' When a system produced system errors or broke down, the consequences could be severe, as many digital processes were interlinked or impossible to transform into analogue processes without further notice. This was for instance the case during an interview with a caseworker, where the full package of specialized software systems broke down for one and a half hours:

> 'IP: It's actually quite rare for the system to break down. But if it does, we can't do much because everything is tied to the system.
>
> (…)
>
> Interviewer: So if a member of the public called you up right now, you'd just have to ask them to call back later?
>
> IP: Yes, or take a message and call the person later. It varies.'

Other members of the operating core gave similar examples of how the unanticipated behavior of IT systems annoyed and frustrated them, as it slowed down or even hindered their work. When describing such situations, there was a general trend to approach the technology as someone who could be understood and reasoned with, if only you knew how. One caseworker explained how she had taught herself basic coding in order to "speak" the language of the software, thus becoming able to identify and solve IT-related problems. At other times, she engaged verbally with the software: For example, when a window popped up on the screen asking if she wanted to save changes in a document, she loudly replied: 'No, 'cause I haven't made any, okay?!' When dialogue with the systems seemed impossible, employees used workarounds to trick the system into creating a workflow, such as shifting between files within the systems or using different commands to make a specific function work.

All together, these material experiences shaped a logic of operating, which when used to attend the institutionalization of digitalization put a strong emphasis on IT as a significant, non-human actor.

Logic of strategizing

Opposing the logic of operating, the top management of the local administrations followed a logic based on their distinctive material practices; a logic which I term *the logic of strategizing*. In relation to digitalization, this logic informed the top management to perceive IT as an object, fully subjected to the human will and thus somewhat of a trivial matter.

Attending the material practices of the top management related to digitalization more closely, this perception is not surprising. In general, the top managers did engage with digitalized processes on a daily basis, like reading and writing electronic documents, emailing and using an online calendar. But a great deal of their assignments required physical interaction with stakeholders within or outside the organization. Therefore, they did not have the same kind of direct dependence on IT and digitalized processes as the operating core. This difference clearly reflected in the way the top management related to digitalization. Words

like 'efficiency', 'innovation', 'cost savings' and 'service improvement' appeared frequently in their vocabulary, and they consistently referred to digitalization from an organizational and strategic point of view: 'If you accept that digitalization could play a key role in that [the challenges of the welfare state], we need to address: What do we want to do with digitalization and how do we ensure that goal is achieved?' said one top manager. Another explained how he insisted on basing digitalization projects and the purchase of IT systems on business cases: 'Business cases, that's something you can understand.'

This did not mean that top management was unaware of the technological dimensions of digitalization: They specifically referred to it from time to time, albeit linking it to the strategic development of the organization. For example, when a top manager in an interview explained about digitalizing local government meeting material, he focused on the process-oriented and economic gains. Another top manager proclaimed: '(…) in the old days [before talking about digitalization], we might have implemented Single Sign On without being aware of it and without anybody harvesting the gains of efficiency it might bring. Today, I think we would at least base it on a qualified discussion: What are the gains and do we want to harvest them?'

When top managers practiced digitalization, it was in other words through talk and planning. Very few of their personal workflows were strictly dependent on digitalized processes, and this limited their interaction with the technological dimensions of digitalization. Thus, the institutional logic guiding their attention towards digitalization gave no grounds for stressing IT as something to be specifically attended. This allowed the top managers to perceive IT as an object of the digitalization process, subjected to the will of the organization.

On the edge of conflict

While the differences in the perception of the role of IT in digitalization may seem trivial, applying the lens of institutional logics provides a framework for understanding the origins of these differences and by this gives important insight into the solidity of the perceptions: It was the different material practices in relation to digitalization that generated diverging perceptions of IT's role in digitalization, which resulted in a logic of operating and a logic of strategizing. As there were very few overlaps in material practices between the two logics, it was very difficult for organizational members using opposing logics to relate to each other's approach to digitalization – simply because they did not understand the material practices shaping it. For instance, members of the operating core seldom related to the main strategic goals of the ongoing digitalization processes, and some even felt offended when forced to by top management. As a finance staff member said: 'If you are at a meeting and they talk about it, I think "Come on! When will we get to something that I can relate to reality and actually use?"' She claimed this view was commonly held amongst the operating core and added that when management referred to digitalization in a strategic context, it made her feel stupid. On the other hand, top managers seemed unaware of this

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gap as they continuously toned down the material and practical aspects in favor of talking about strategy and economy.

It would have been natural if such differences had resulted in open conflict between the institutional logics at play, as the diverging perceptions of IT could not avoid influencing the transformative potential of digitalization. However, this was not the case. Instead, the definitions existed side by side, with no sign of significant conflict, decoupling or hybridization. A core reason for this was the organization of the institutional work carried out to institutionalize digitalization within each organization.

Analysis part 2: Making it work

As shown above, many and recurring actions were taken by top management and the operating core to support the institutionalization of digitalization in the local administrations. This section is concerned with the institutional work carried out to build and coordinate such activities, so that they despite diverging perceptions of IT's role in digitalization would enforce the institutionalization process rather than result in conflicts. While many different kinds of institutional work were undertaken to make this happen, it is by understanding *the organization* of this work that we learn how the organizations moved from potential conflict towards a stronger institutionalization of digitalization.

Analyzing the data from Bisborg and Solhavn, I deduced three main characters related to this organization. I conceptualized these as the Mediators, Preachers and Gatekeepers. The characters were distinguished by their different tasks in relation to the institutionalization process, structured by but also actively making use of the prevailing institutional logics within the organizations to generate an institutionalization of digitalization, which *embraced* rather than *opposed* diverging perceptions of the role of IT in digitalization.

The Mediators

One of the three key characters I came across when exploring the work carried out to institutionalize digitalization in both cases was *the Mediators*. These organizational members worked to bridge the top and the bottom of the organization, translating the diverging points of view on IT in digitalization into comprehensible messages to the opposing institutional logic. Therefore, mediating from the top of the organization to the bottom meant framing the top management's strategic approach to digitalization within a practice-oriented framework, and making the approach recognizable and relevant to the operating core. A common way of doing this was to include the operating core in shaping the digitalization process locally: 'It's not just something that is forced upon us. It's a process. We regularly discuss how we do things with our manager,'explained a caseworker about the process of strategy implementation. The mid-level managers who were interviewed all pointed to the necessity of involving staff in making digitalization happen:

> 'When we get a new system, we [the department] sit down together and sort out what this system can do and how we can make it fit to this workflow,' explained a mid-level manager. She added: 'It [the digitalization process] can be exhausting for staff. But making them part of the process is key. We must always include them when making changes.'

Likewise, mediating from the bottom to the top of the organization involved presenting the action-oriented, material-based issues of the operating core to top management by framing it in relation to the logic of strategy. For instance, when attending a meeting with other managers a mid-level manager problematized the missing link between strategy and practice as experienced by the operating core:

> '(…) There is a disconnect from top management through the system, all the way down to end-users. There needs to be stronger awareness that it is also part of the manager's responsibility to engage more proactively, to know more about the IT-related part of their work, you might say.'

Likewise, the Mediators addressed the top management's need to reconsider how to articulate digitalization, as the focus on cost efficiency had a tendency to create an interpretation of human staff being replaced by IT. As one mid-level manager explained to her colleagues: 'We need to arrange it so that it is a matter of increasing efficiency without making oneself superfluous, as much as possible.'

Not surprisingly, the Mediators were mostly mid-level managers: Organizational members whose daily material practices involved strategizing, which meant they were capable of understanding digitalization from an organizational and long-term perspective, *and* operating specialized IT systems, which provided them with firsthand knowledge on the complexity of relying on digitalized workflows. Therefore, mid-level managers had not one dominant material practice that tied them to a specific institutional logic, but several material practices related to digitalization, which were linked to different institutional logics. This duality of material practices made them capable of juggling the two logics in their organizational behavior. They used this ability strategically. So, when discussing digitalization, they shaped their argumentation within the frames of what they considered to be the most appropriate and beneficial logic to be used with regards to the particular audience they wanted to address.

The Preachers

Another group of institutional workers had the more proactive role of agenda-setting digitalization and directly pushing for its institutionalization within the organization. I have labeled this group of institutional workers *the Preachers* as preaching is about spreading the word of a belief and converting disbelievers into believers. I observed this taking place across the organizations in two differ-

ent ways: One kind of preaching took its point of departure in concrete digitalized work processes. This kind of preaching focused on making technology function properly and helping organizational members make the most of IT systems. 'We try to inspire [the organization] to make the most of the tools at hand or to rearrange the work processes. Like when we're helping a user [with a specific problem] and then add: 'You know, maybe you could also do it like this",' explained an IT worker. His CIO similarly described the strategy in this way: 'It's about meeting you in your office and helping you transform your great ideas into reality. It's the small-scale projects.' He labeled this 'grassroots digitalization', referring to the fact that it grew from the bottom of the organization rather than following the usual top-down flow of strategy. Likewise, in one of the cases, a strategy of demystifying IT was initiated because '(…) IT often becomes something that doesn't work or is insufficient etc.' By communicating new or recurring IT issues in a humorous way, the aim was to relate the connection between strategy and IT to users' everyday activities. Therefore, this kind of preaching worked not to alter, but to bring the understanding of IT based on the logic of operating *closer* to the understanding of IT based on the logic of strategizing.

While grassroots digitalization dealt with organizational members drawing on the institutional logic of operating, another group of preachers dedicated their institutional work of preaching to the organizational members drawing on the institutional logic of strategy. This preaching used strategic planning and processes as its point of departure, as it was concerned with making the organizational members understand digitalization as a way of improving workflows for the benefit of the individual organizational member, the organization and the general public. As one digitalization worker explained: 'You have to use business arguments to make people understand. Talking about standards [for software] doesn't sell tickets.' A similar reflection was linked to the concept of 'digital leadership', which was used to relate digitalization to both cost-efficiency and innovation, thereby stressing digitalization as the manager's responsibility: 'I've spent loads of time talking to managers and telling them what this is all about, and turning staff managers into my ambassadors in their respective sections,' explained a head of section who was responsible for IT and digitalization. An important part of preaching digitalization to the managers was to make them embrace the basic complexity of strategizing over IT, therefore underlining the need for a close relationship between managerial decisions and the Digitalization/IT department staff. As one CIO pointed out to a group of mid-level managers:

> 'The problem is, the less you know [with regards how IT systems are connected], the greater the chance that you'll make an unwise decision. (…) And this is why you should use the competencies available in the Digitalization/IT department before you purchase new IT systems.'

The Preachers were the organizational members in charge of digitalization and IT, mainly located within or on the periphery of the Digitalization/IT department. It is no coincidence that grassroots digitalization was mainly carried out by the IT workers while the digitalization staff mainly took care of preaching digitalization to the management, as it reflects the main institutional logic used by these organizational members. IT workers primarily relied on the logic of operating, approaching digitalization from a more practical, technical-oriented perspective. Digitalization staff mainly relied on the logic of strategizing, approaching digitalization from a strategic and instrumental perspective. Although the two groups of organizational members to some degree interacted in their preaching efforts, it was the orchestration done by the CIOs that kept the preaching a coherent effort of making digitalization an institutionalized phenomenon within the organizations. This orchestration was possible, since the CIOs just as mid-level managers as the Mediators mastered both the logic of operating and the logic of strategizing.

The Gatekeepers

Sometimes the Mediators and the Preachers needed help in getting their audience's attention. *The Gatekeepers* helped them out. The Gatekeepers were organizational members who functioned as an entry point for engaging a specific group of organizational members in reflecting on their perception of IT and digitalization. The Gatekeepers helped the Mediators and Preachers in two ways: Firstly, they loyally passed messages from Preachers and Mediators to their peers. Secondly, they prepared the foundations for Preachers and Mediators to engage more directly with specific groups of organizational members. For instance, a caseworker carried out gatekeeping when she persuaded her co-workers to enter into a dialogue with the IT department about malfunctioning software: '[I] try to push them by saying: "Hey, it isn't dangerous to report a malfunction to the IT department",' thereby making way for the IT workers to preach grassroots digitalization to her co-workers. Gatekeeping also occurred when a top manager used his chair in the organizational Board of Digitalization to ensure that digitalization appeared on the top management's agenda: '(…) I think it [chairing the board] matters, also with regards to how the top management views the topic.'Furthermore, organizational functions like 'Digitalization Coordinators', 'Super Users' and 'IT Champions' were actively infused in the organizations by their IT department, with a view to assisting with preaching.

> 'The IT Champions take care of some of the easy issues concerning IT. We meet with them once or twice a year and tell them what's going on in the organization with regards to digitalization. This means that they become our extended arm in the organization,'

explained one IT worker. A CIO described the role of Digitalization Coordinators in the following way: 'Your job is to go out there in the organization and

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advocate a holistic approach [to digitalization].' However, the mere presence of a specific function did not automatically result in acts of gatekeeping. As one IT worker stated:

> 'We have some Super Users and IT Champions scattered around the organization, and they clearly diverge in relation to knowledge, interest and time allocated to tasks. And that influences our job: In some cases, they do such a great job that the users never contact us. In other cases, we get a call every time a comma is incorrect or there's a malfunction in Word.'

What was especially characteristic about the Gatekeepers was their enthusiasm about digitalization and their desire to participate in the ongoing transformation. As one caseworker, who was also a Super User and a representative of her department in a variety of digitalization projects, put it: 'I'm really fascinated about the technical development. (…) I'm interested in exploring how to make workflows easier through standardizing etc. That's exciting!'

Organizing to preserve and bridge differences

All together, this analysis shows that the institutional work related to the institutionalization of digitalization unfolded around a complex labor division between three main characters, which I have conceptualized as the Mediators, the Preachers and the Gatekeepers. The labor division was formed by the prevailing institutional logics in the organization and only to a varying degree officially and directly coordinated. Still, it is clear that the institutional work was organized as to build the institution of digitalization on both the prevailing institutional logics and ease their co-existence by bridging between them. Thus, while the top management had visions of a uniform institution of digitalization (shaped by the logic of strategizing), the institutional work taking place within the organization pushed for a nuanced institution of digitalization. Through this work, the potential organizational conflict related to the introduction of digitalization as an institution was turned into a strategic advantage for the institutionalization process.

Concluding discussion

This paper has explored how the institutionalization of digitalization in two Danish local administrations was shaped by different perceptions of IT's role in digitalization. By drawing on the concept of institutional logics and the concept of institutional work, it has been revealed how the presence of two different institutional logics – the logic of operating and the logic of strategizing – worked as a frame for the institutional work carried out to institutionalize digitalization. This influenced important matters such as *what* kind of institutional work was needed, *who* could conduct it, *how* it was organized and, not least, *what* was

being institutionalized. In this section, I will elaborate on these findings by discussing their theoretical and empirical implications.

Firstly, the analysis pointed to three different characters within the institutional work carried out in the organization: The Mediators, the Preachers and the Gatekeepers. The finding of these characters confirms that there are other ways of describing institutional work than the typology originally presented by Thomas B. Lawrence and Roy Suddaby which focused more on types of action than on the division of labor amongst participants in institutional work processes. Moreover, the finding demonstrates that these characters are distributed amongst the institutional workers in accordance with the institutional logics guiding their actions. Therefore, it is the material practices of the organizational member that constitute what kind of institutional work can be practiced. This information is relevant because it adds a new perspective to the literature concerned with *who* takes up institutional work. As this literature focuses on *skills* as a determining factor, the results of the present paper indicate that new perspectives on who carries out institutional work can be derived by further exploring the connection between skills, institutional logics and institutional work. For example, how skills acquired in previous or non-related settings influence the institutional logics enacted in the situation of institutional work, and how the enactment of institutional logics interplays with phenomena such as interest and fascination. Empirically, the description of the three characters and the clarification of the connection between material practices and institutional work are important, as they increase the knowledge on what kind of effort to institutionalize digitalization can be expected from various groups within the public organization.

Secondly, the analysis demonstrated how the organization and orchestration of the institutional work carried out in the organizations was not uniform, but was characterized by formal and informal coordination as well as non-verbalized communication. For example, the Preachers were strongly orchestrated by their CIO who guided their institutional work, while the Mediators' actions were less explicitly orchestrated, and were to a greater extent dependent on the manager choosing the engagement. The Gatekeepers sometimes followed the instructions of the Preachers and Mediators, and sometimes followed their own intuition. Two interesting conclusions can be drawn from this: Firstly, although the CIO played an important part in certain aspects of the orchestration of the institutional work, there was not *one* mastermind controlling the work. Secondly, there was not one formal structure of the organization of the work, but a combination of hierarchies and flat organizations, consisting of a conglomerate of strong and weak connections between actors. These findings indicate that the previous definition of the organization of institutional work as *partaking* (Perkmann & Spicer, 2008) is not a universal description. Therefore, there is a need for further investigation into how and why the organization of institutional work varies, e.g. the role of the level of the institutionalization process or organizational context. Empirically, the description of these blurred lines of the organization of institutional work is important, as it highlights the institutionalization of digitalization

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as a conglomeration of process that does not follow the conventional organizational decision structure.

Thirdly, the analysis showed how institutional work aimed to preserve the institutional logics to exist harmonically by what could be referred to as *bridging*. Bridging implied two specific processes: 1) Creating a mutual acknowledgement of the existence of the other institutional logic; and 2) Preventing the two logics from communicating with each other, and using institutional workers such as the Mediators to translate messages between the two groups instead. The combination of these two processes makes bridging different from models such as *co-existing* (as it uses Mediators to communicate between the logics) or *hybridization* (as the purpose is to preserve the existing logics rather than form new ones). The consequence of bridging seems to be that the presence of the Mediator is not limited to the phase of creating the institution; it spreads into the maintenance phase. Mediating is crucial to ensuring that the diverging perceptions of digitalization persist over time. Empirically, this is important knowledge: While studies in digitalization have so far stressed the need to include the organizational members in the change or to make top management take the lead on digitalization, this result points to mid-level management as a key figure in the *institutionalization* of digitalization.

This paper has demonstrated how new and intriguing knowledge on the process of institutional change can be derived from analytically embracing rather than ignoring the intertwinement of institutional work and institutional logics as empirical phenomena. Furthermore, it has contributed to the understanding of the process of institutionalizing digitalization in Danish local administrations by suggesting that it may be more fruitful to assess the institution of digitalization as a heterogeneous rather than a uniform phenomenon, and by this paying closer attention to the role of the mid-level management as the organizational glue.

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NOTE

[1] I borrow this concept from Actor-Network Theory: '(…) An actant [here: agent] can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action' (Latour, 1996: 7).