

CLIENT DATA SYSTEMS AS POLICY-INGRAINED IT-ARTIFACTS IN FINNISH SOCIAL WELFARE - THEORIZING THE IMPACT ON MULTILAYERED PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

A profound transformation of practice has taken place due to a systematic work to develop information management of the client data in Finnish social welfare for over two decades. The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare has coordinated the work in terms of the requirements for the data systems utilized in the field to be interoperable with the National Kanta Services. Kanta Services are a set of digital services that store citizens' social welfare and health care data. The basis of Kanta Services was created through legislation in 2007. In stages, different functionalities have been deployed. These societal decisions have had an inescapable impact in the practice of social welfare.

In this study, these developments were theorized drawing from the work of two scholars: Göran Goldkuhl and Andrew Pickering. In the context of Swedish e-government Goldkuhl has launched the conceptualizing of policy-ingrained it-artifact, that catches the nature of the client data systems when utilized in the realm of public authority. The Mangle of Practice approach introduced by Pickering provides understanding of practice as a continuous process of multilayered dance of agency.

In this study the agency of the client data systems as policy-ingrained IT-artifacts in the goal-oriented performance in the layers of Finnish social welfare practice was analysed. As methodological approach the mangle perspective was applied in the content analysis of the focal policy documents related to the developments since 2007.

The results indicate that the responsibilities of professionals in social welfare and their space of agency for discretion may be either supported or challenged by the client data systems utilized in the organizational work performance. To conclude, the client data systems capable of taking agency as policy-ingrained IT artifacts in the layers of social welfare practice should be of interest in organizational and political responsibilities.

Keywords: client data system, content analysis, mangle of practice, policy-ingrained IT artifact, professional discretion, social welfare

INTRODUCTION

In Finland, systematic work to develop information management of the client data systems utilised in social welfare has been on the agenda for over two decades. Based on various developmental initiatives of the focal organisations, the responsibility for co-ordinating the work in the national level was designated to The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) shortly after the organisation began operating at the