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Civil Servant, Machine or Customer?
A Case on the Effects of
the Swedish Government Service Centre

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ABSTRACT

This case is an example of the Swedish Government Service Centre as a political project to rearrange and reinvent the public sector. It is a revelatory case, describing a process which begun quite recently, introducing the importance for researchers and policymakers to follow and be aware of what issues this rearrangement of public administration raises for the Swedish welfare state. It is an embedded unit of analysis within a case. The case concerns the instalment of the Swedish Government Service Centre. The embedded unit of analysis is the consequences for payroll consultants who were transferred from the University of Gothenburg to the Swedish Government Service Centre; how the change has affected them and their work, and effects on the employees at the university. Data has been collected through document reviews and qualitative interviews. The theory used is classical sociological theory on work, the state as a facilitator of neoliberal values and projects, and the digitalisation of public administration. The study shows that the payroll consultant profession is de-professionalised and that important social aspects of work are lost. This causes many challenges for civil servants in general. One of them is that collective agreements, which used to be well known and strictly followed by the payroll consultants, now, are more unknown and thereby lose their position as guiding and regulating agreements.

Keywords

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Introduction

In 2012, a new government agency was implemented in Sweden. Many civil servants have heard of it and/or had contact with it, but outside the field of public administration there has been little or no attention regarding this agency, most Swedes still have not heard of it. It is the Swedish Government Service Centre, with the Swedish name "Statens service-center", which is a kind of sourcing solution within the public administration. They are commissioned to administer all civil servants wages in Sweden.

This is a case study of the University of Gothenburg's transition of its wage unit into the Government Service Centre. The University of Gothenburg was the first university to sign an agreement with them ("Göteborg blir Statens servicecenters första kontorsort med specialistkompetens inom universitets- och högskolesektorn," n.d.). The agreement was for wage-related basic services, it was signed in the summer of 2015 by Pam Fredman (then head of the university) and Thomas Pålsson (head of the Government Service Centre), and entails the administration of about 7300 payroll specifications per month. The wage unit at the university was incorporated into the new agency, and transformed into a new office in Gothenburg with specialized competence for the regulations regarding employments within the higher education sector.

Being employed as an administrator at the University of Gothenburg I was already familiar with the changes to the payroll administration. My colleagues and I experienced new problems when our contacts among the payroll consultants were no longer available for us and payroll related tasks became more complicated than before. Administrators and their work is fundamental for public service existence but is often treated like something unnecessary or unprofessional. It is called support operations, separated from the core operations. Even though administrators are often very knowledgeable about the organisation they work in their expertise is rarely used for planning improvements or to understand important functions or processes within the organisation. I think administrators and their work environment is an underdeveloped research area but an important one. What happens in the support operations affects the core operations, and administration is a large professional field within both private and public sectors employing many people. This is why I wanted to investigate this case and show that administrators and their work is something everyone should care about, it is not only something for managers to continuously try to streamline.

The case turned out to be much more important and interesting than I had expected. As I will show, the changes have implications for all civil servants within Sweden. The Swedish Government Service Centre entails a new organisation and management of all public administration. Wage and personnel administration regarding the own employees are removed from each agency. By 2021, the new agency plans to handle at least 90% of all civil servants personnel and wage errands (Statens servicecenter, 2015b).

The transition of payroll administration has been the main focus for the new agency so far but they also offer other services (Statens servicecenter, 2015b.; Statens servicecenter,

n.d.d.). They have been appointed to investigate how agencies' administration can be organised in more efficient ways, and they have, among other things, suggested that all services to citizens should be handled by the Swedish Government Service Centre (Statens servicecenter, 2017). To begin with, services provided in these centres should be different subsidies, pension errands, taxes, the population register, services to employers and unemployed, video conferences with the Swedish Migration Agency, drivers licence, passport and identity errands, licence for arms, and criminal complaints (Statens servicecenter, 2017).

The Swedish Government Service Centre frames their role within the Swedish public service like this:

> The state administration is a part of Sweden's innovation system. If agencies can make it easier for companies and citizens by investing in their core business, it can affect Sweden's growth and welfare, and Sweden as a country to live in. The Government Service Centre helps optimize the use of tax assets. (Statens servicecenter, n.d.a.)

What is said here is that they are commissioned with transforming the public service in Sweden, with the overall aim to decrease the costs of public service. This is what makes the subject of the thesis important and timely; to study a new phase of public administration as it unfolds.

This study focuses on the first-hand experiences of payroll consultants who were involved in the changes regarding the wage administration for civil servants. I have also researched the background of the new agency; how it came to be and what its commission has been.

Aim and research questions

This investigation will focus on the actual and real consequences for one of the larger agencies in Sweden and its employees.

The overall aim is to explore how this kind of restructuring of the public administration affects the status, responsibilities, or privileges for civil servants. And what type of consequences this has for Swedish citizens.

The research questions are as follow:

➢ What public management trend can the Swedish Government Service Centre be understood as part of?

➢ How has the work situation for payroll consultants changed?

➢ What consequences has the transition of wage administration to the Swedish Government Service Centre had for employees at the University of Gothenburg?

Previous research

There is research on the work situation and strategies of civil servants who work directly with citizens, for example, employees at the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish Migration Agency, within social services or care, and so on, but I have not found research regarding civil servants who work as administrators, serving other civil servants in the back-office functions of the state administration. I have tried to find research regarding Intraservice or Regionservice which are a kind of shared service models within the administration of Gothenburg municipality and the West Swedish Region (Västra Götalandsregionen), but I have not been able to find anything. There is also research on HR-functions in relation to efficacy but it seems to be mostly quantitative research based on surveys and formal measures of efficacy.

The following section will deal with research on the organisational model on which the Swedish Government Service Centre is based.

Shared service models evaluated

The shared service model (SSM) originated in the US in the 80s and was adopted in Sweden by private corporations during the mid/late 90s (Ekonomistyrningsverket, 2006; Westling Palm, 2011; Ulbrich, 2009). SSMs have been present in public sector in many OECD countries for a long time, but since the early 00s, the model has been used strategically in policies for the organisation of government (OECD, 2010; Paagman et al., 2015). However, the ways SSMs has been implemented vary greatly, all depending on each government's constitutional arrangements and long-standing task divisions. What is consistent is the kinds of services they provide (mostly HR and economy administration, IT, and procurements) (OECD, 2010). Many countries have also combined SSMs with other policies, like general cuts or demands on savings.

There are some different names for organisations or units which provide shared services, most commonly referred to as Shared Service Centres or Shared Service Concepts (SSC), they are also often referred to as only Shared Services, and sometimes Centres of Excellence (Janssen and Joha, 2006; Paagman et al., 2015; Ulbrich, 2009). I will follow the example of Paagman et al. (2015) and use Shared Service Models (SSM) for the theoretical idea of, and the general name for organisations providing shared services.

Figure 1 shows the differences between the different ways to organise shared services and how they differ from outsourcing. SSMs entail a kind of sourcing but they are not as autonomous as separate private organisations that are used for outsourcing. SSMs give the government more control compared to outsourcing since they do not include autonomous privately owned businesses (Janssen and Joha, 2006). The wage unit at the University of Gothenburg, which was moved to the Swedish Government Service Centre, would be centralised administration according to Figure 1, and the Government Service Centre would

be an inter-organisationally shared service, separated from the customer organisations but part of the government administration. Some Swedish agencies have internal shared services (as shown later in table 1) they differ from central administration in that they are separated from the organisations administrative management and function as a separate unit or department within the organisation.
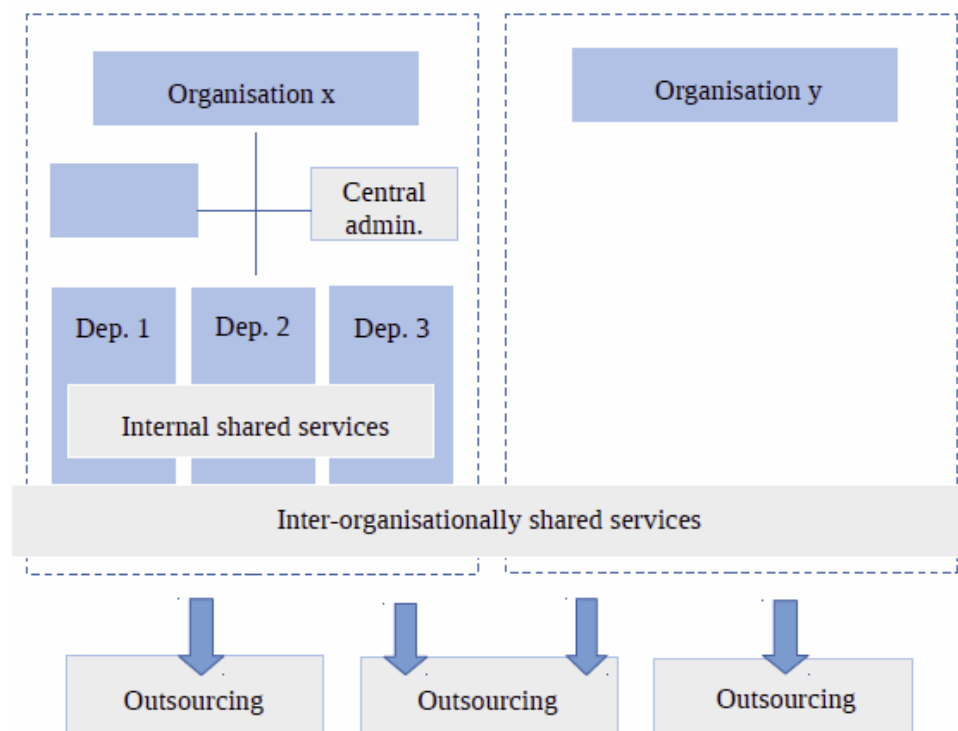
Figure 1: Shows the theoretical differences between organisational models for back-office functions: Centralised administration, Internal shared services, Inter-organisationally shared services, and Outsourcing.

There has been no clear definition of SSMs but the common themes are that they provide services to a group of other units in order to increase efficiency and improve service levels. A literature review on research regarding shared services concludes that it seems necessary with different definitions for SMMs in private and public sector because of the fundamental differences of the models within these sectors (Schulz and Brenner, 2010:217). However, their review resulted in the following general definition:

> […] an SSC is an organizational concept that consolidates processes within the group in order to reduce redundancies; delivers support processes; has cost-cutting as a major driver; that has a clear focus on internal customers; is a separate organizational unit that is aligned with external competitors and is operated like a business.

An important aspect frequently mentioned as part of what defines SSMs is that they only provide well-defined and standardised services (Paagman et al., 2015; Ulbrich, 2009). It is mainly homogenous and transaction-intensive processes, possible to standardise and of small strategic importance, which is redirected to SSMs (Westling Palm, 2011). Most commonly accounting and finance, IT services, HR, customer services, procurements, asset management, and other routinised kinds of administration like archiving, e-commerce, and so on (Paagman et al., 2015).

The expectations of SSMs are often too high with too many motives (Janssen and Joha, 2006). They try to combine centralisation and decentralisation, and these two tendencies are often conflicting with one another: *Centralisation* tries to economise at the expense of customer focus. *Decentralisation* or outsourcing is done to reduce complexity (and costs) but brings risks since much effort is needed to make sure processes work and that policy's and laws are still followed (ibid.).

Research on SSMs has been done mostly from 2010 and forward, and is often focused on the motives behind their implementation and the realisation of these motives (Paagman et al., 2015). The research shows that the real outcomes in public administration seems to be different from those expected or wished for (Janssen and Joha, 2006; Paagman et al., 2015; Ulbrich, 2009). The main aim of SSMs is to reduce costs, improve quality and efficacy, and get better access to resources (Bergeron 2003; Paagman et al., 2015; Schulz and Brenner, 2010; Ulbrich, 2009). Another common idea about how SSMs work is that they are better at managing and making use of competence and that employees within administration feel more satisfied and appreciated when they are part of core activities rather than back-office functions (Ulbrich, 2009). Motives for implementing SSMs in governments are usually (Janssen and Joha, 2006):

➢ To allow a focus on core business and increase productivity,

➢ professionalize service delivery,

➢ lower control and maintenance costs,

➢ better cost predictability,

➢ reduction of overcapacity by the consolidation of systems,

➢ access to high quality IT,

➢ share risks (and rewards),

➢ eliminate local and complicated control and in this way reduce complexity/uncertainty,

➢ and one-stop shop – all in one place.

The evaluation of success or failure of any sourcing alternative is usually very difficult to perform since it depends on an evaluation of the fulfilment of original motives (which are usually difficult to gain access to or analyse), on qualitative factors such as costumers

emotions, and on values which are very difficult to measure (Janssen and Joha, 2006).

SSMs might need decades to develop a good functionality and become accepted (Janssen and Joha, 2006). Those who provide shared services are usually much more positive about the success of the new order than the customers are (Paagman et al., 2015). Trust seems to be a key issue for acceptance, if the SSM initially makes many mistakes the trust of customers can take a lot of time to build up (Janssen and Joha, 2006). In addition, the distance between the user and the SSM has been showed to cause frustration and alienation, for example, to deliver feedback on the user experience is very difficult, and the alienation becomes a problem for both organisations (ibid.).

The true economic costs and savings are often far from obvious (ibid.) Paagman et al. (2015) found that the motive of reducing costs often changed over time when the complex reality made savings very difficult. One aspect of this was the loss of local knowledge that sometimes demanded a lot of time and effort to solve local problems, or resulted in costly mistakes. The focus on cost reductions was therefore often exchanged for other motives in line with New Public Service (NPS) rhetoric. "Improving the quality of service", "exchange of internal capabilities", and "access to external resources" became more important goals.

SSMs are special kinds of sourcing arrangements with long-term and important strategic impacts, implementing one imply significant complexity and risks (Janssen and Joha, 2006). Organisational changes like these entail new policy regimes that usually increase the institutional complexity (Dunleavy et al., 2006). The costs related to the changes become concentrated in the early years before the new order has become routinized, "and administrative actors are required to undertake exceptional levels of policy learning." (Dunleavy et al., 2006:476).

> […] with any public sector management reform agenda, it is normal for initially
> hyped changes, in which high hopes and political capital are invested, to prove
> more patchy in securing substantial improvements than anticipated. (Dunleavy et
> al., 2006:474)

SSMs in Swedish public administration

The first SSMs within Swedish government were centralised units of payroll, personnel and economy administration within very large agencies with several thousand employees, these units also helped small agencies (often with less than 40 employees) to follow all regulations, laws and demands on revision for public administration (Ulbrich, 2009). For small agencies, this was an important help since it is difficult and expensive for small workplaces to maintain the competence needed. Within these SSMs, there were also a flexibility and capacity to handle unforeseen issues and solve problems, and these margins were understood as very important, both for the organisations, the work environment, and for keeping competent employees (Ulbrich, 2009). The people employed there, because they were among professional colleagues and experts in their area, appreciated these larger units of administration (ibid). Some of the largest agencies in Sweden with several different offices

all over the country separated the back-office functions from each office and transformed them into internally shared service centres (ibid.).

Table 1 shows some examples of Swedish agencies which had formed or were preparing to form shared services (Ekonomistyrningsverket, 2006).

Table 1: Agencies in Sweden with SSMs according to ESVs 2006 report.

Agency	Tasks	Kind of SSM
The Swedish Air Transport Agency (Luftfartsverket)	Accounting, payroll, travel and human resources.	Cooperation with other agencies.
The Armed Forces (early 00s)	All logistics (FMLOG).	Internal.
The Swedish Tax Agency (Skatteverket) (2004)	Accounting and payroll.	Internal.
The Swedish Social Insurance Agency (Försäkringskassan) (2005)	Accounting.	Internal.
The Swedish Forest Agency (Skogsstyrelsen)	Accounting and personnel.	Internal.
The Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency (Kammarkollegiet)	Financial administration. Handled 50 small agencies' accounts, and 70 agencies' wage administration.	Inter-organisational.
The Swedish Innovations Agency (Vinnova)	An IT platform to which four other agencies were joined.	Inter-organisational.
The Swedish Police Authority (Polisen) (2006)	Accounting.	Internal.
The Swedish National Financial Management Authority (Ekonomistyrningsverket, ESV) The Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret) Verket för förvaltningsutveckling (VERVA)	An ongoing investigation into cooperation and joint administration. (2006)	Inter-organisational.

Theoretical frame

This thesis positions itself within the field of political sociology; it is a critical study of management of public administration and its impact on civil servants. However, the study also falls within the field of work science due to its concern with organisational functionality and work environment. These aspects are here analysed with traditional sociological theory and some more recent theory on public management in an era of advanced Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Labour and efficacy

In order to be able to analyse the meaning of the changes which this thesis studies I have chosen to use basic Marxist theory about work and its organisation within a capitalist environment, as explained by Harvey. I will here present a few concepts that will later be of great importance for the analysis.

Through a Marxist view, work is a fundamental condition of human existence; through productive force (labour), which is the physical and mental power to transform and appropriate nature, humans produce *use value*; things we use for survival, comfort and social activities (Harvey, 2006). Use value is qualitative, it is how valuable the use of a product or service is, how much it helps to fill a need (ibid.). The use value, therefore, connects to the meaningfulness of the labour; the effort and time put into producing the product or service in relation to its usefulness. In this case, the labourers studied produces a service which enables the state to have employees, they facilitate higher education and science, which is a part of the welfare but also use values which positions Sweden favourably in a global context of knowledge production.

The *technology of the labour*, the way work is done and organized, changes with time (Harvey, 2006). The changes to production that determine the present time in most parts of the world are the capitalist quest for *surplus value* (profit). In order to achieve ever-greater profits, the mode of production needs to be constantly reinvented to be more and more effective in a monetary sense. One example is the ever-expanding use of technology to make organizations more effective. With this perspective, re-organizations of workplaces are mere ways to save money and have greater profits rather than improving the use value. In this case study, the question is if use value for civil servants or citizens is affected in the quest to downsize the state administration.

The formal subjection of labour to capital comes about when people are compelled to sell their labour power in order to live, this also implies more regulated work hours and the economic relationship between supremacy and subordination, but labourers still control their traditional craft and artisan skills and the methods used in the work (Harvey, 2006). *The real subjection of labour to capital* comes about when the work is divided and simplified in order to be performed by workers with little or no skill. This is done by a detailed

division of tasks, instead of having each worker produce whole products, each worker do a specific task within the production, like at the assembly line. Machines help with the division and the simplifying of the work and social relations become more hierarchical and authoritarian in order to control the work. Under the real subjection of labour to capital new skills emerge as the most attractive in a worker; adaptability and flexibility, but most importantly, workers become easily replaceable, they do not possess specific and rare skills which take years to learn (ibid.). These are ways of impoverishing workers because in the end, they do not own anything other than their flexibility, which becomes the only competence to compete with at the labour market (Harvey, 2006). In today's Swedish context formal subjection defines the majority of the population; most people need to work in order to pay rent and buy necessities. However, real subjection is not evenly distributed, it might be connected to class and status, granting for example professions that demand an academic education a certain freedom, whereas professions that do not require an education tend to divide work more and control the mode of production to a higher degree. However, this cannot be said to be general, there are most certainly other factors which dictate the mode of production and the level of subjection. It becomes an interesting and important aspect of this study to see if the level of subjection has changed for the labourers affected.

Since *work is a social activity* in many regards and often require coordination between people who perform different tasks, the relationships between labourers clearly affect the collective productivity. The level of efficiency, the use value and the surplus value produced, is dependent on social relations (Harvey, 2006). It, therefore, becomes interesting to look at how relationships have been affected by the changes caused by moving payroll consultants from the University of Gothenburg to the Swedish Government Service Centre.

In the production, it is necessary with some knowledge about the world, this knowledge is a social product; it is "mental conceptions about the world", *knowledge systems* adapted to the special physical and social needs that the labour is aimed at (ibid.). When the mode of production is changed, the knowledge systems are changed, and social relations change. When our ways of doing things change – our organisation of work, and our understandings of how and why – behaviours and thoughts also change as a consequence. In this case, how has, or how might the knowledge systems, and in the end, behaviours change due to the changes to the labour process?

The State and Neoliberalism

I will here give some political background and context to public management trends that are needed in order to better understand the logic behind the shared service models.

During the 19th century,[1] the European states' methods of ruling subjects start to shift

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[1] In English, one refers to the present century by which century it is leading up to. Therefore, in Swedish the 19th century is "1800-talet".

from a more direct exercise of physical power to more indirect methods that create spheres for subjects to exercise their freedoms within (Hasselbladh, 2001). This has been termed Governmentality and is based on the Foucauldian understanding of power (ibid.). Power exercise, according to Foucault (1982), is when actions modify other previous, present or future actions. The double and elusive nature of the word conduct (to show the way or lead, and the way a person acts in relation to morality and ethics) has the capacity to describe how power relations work. It is not confrontational in its characteristics, it is rather guiding. To govern is to structure the space for others' possible actions. This understanding of the state's way of ruling is relevant to this case in order to analyse changes to power relations within the public administration. To understand this method of governing also makes it easier to understand and analyse modern public management methods and strategies.

The 50s to 70s were defined by rebuilding countries and international relations after WWII, it was also important to avoid a return to the catastrophic economic conditions of the 30s (Harvey, 2005). "A 'class compromise' between capital and labour was generally advocated as the key guarantor of domestic peace and tranquillity" (Harvey, 2005:10). These arrangements created an order that is often referred to as "embedded liberalism" where private interests were embedded in a web of social and political constraints. The idea that labourers, corporations and the state have interests which partly overlap has been central for the formation of the European welfare states after WWII, and has resulted in a string of compromises and agreements between employers and unions, especially in Sweden this model has been the most important for regulating the labour market (Hasselbladh, 2001). The main logic was to strive for large-scale economies and hierarchical coordination of resources through the use of scientific planning and cooperation between labourers, corporations and the state (ibid.). This political idea is usually referred to as Keynesian and the main management trend was Fordism with its main method of division and simplification of tasks in order to increase efficacy and profits. Hasselbladh (2001) writes about the massive scientific knowledge production on work and efficacy that was built, encouraged and steered by the state during this time-period and how important it was in the governing or fostering of employers and employees towards an idea of a common national good.

Neoliberalism, a previously obscure theory, replaced the Keynesian "class compromise" and became the next general idea about the national economies since the late 70s thanks to the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Paul Volcker at the US Federal Reserve (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism is a theory which "proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005:2). The institutional framework is the state administration, and the role of the state in neoliberal theory is to guarantee the quality and integrity of currency, of military, police and legal structures which secure private property rights, and also make sure markets function properly and new markets are created where they have been "missing" (ibid.). Harvey calls these states neoliberal states. Neoliberalism holds that the social good

is maximised when market transactions are maximised and all human action is incorporated in markets (ibid.). This project requires advanced ICT to accumulate, store, transfer and analyse data in order to guide decisions regarding the global marketplace (ibid.). Neoliberalism and the online technology revolution have been parallel processes, more or less dependent on each other. The efforts to maximise market transactions have caused a constant change of technologies of labour, continuously enhancing the division and simplification of work in the quest for profits. Harvey (2005) writes that neoliberalisation has extreme social consequences as it creates "the disposable worker" as the prototype when it submits more and more labourers to the real subjection to capital.

The new public management (NPM) strategies started in influential advanced industrial countries like the US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands (Dunleavy et al., 2006; OECD, 2010; Ulbrich, 2009). Eventually NPM has led to an increase of staff in support services due to government functions being parcelled and sold off during the creation of more markets. This duplicated many functions, and more lately, measures have been taken to readjust this, mainly by three methods; re-concentration of central ministerial support services, *ad hoc* downsizing operations, and sharing support services (Dunleavy et al., 2006; OECD, 2010). Dunleavy et al. (2006) argue that SSMs can be understood as one of the tools used to counteract the economically costly consequences of NPM projects. And in the light of the theory I have here presented one can argue that the SMM is a new neoliberal idea about how to further efficacy. For the private to maximise profits and for the public sector to decrease costs and create new kind of market opportunities where the previous parcelling of public service has not been good enough or cannot be further developed.

As neoinstitutional theory points out the structures of corporations and organisations become more and more homogenous (Hasselbladh, 2001). The identification of problems and formulation of solutions, i.e. the way of organising work, become more and more similar between organisations globally and in both private and public spheres (ibid.). The SSM trend seems to be a great example of this process of homogenisation or the global epidemic characteristics of management trends.

Sweden

Neoliberal ideology influenced the Swedish government in the 80s and was used as a way out of the economic problems of the 70s when inflation and unemployment soured (Harvey, 2005; Larsson et al., 2012). Public administration was said to be slow and rigid due to its large centralised bureaucratic functions (Ulbrich, 2009). To confront these problems public administration was submitted to decentralisation and de-regulation. This trend continued and was developed during the 90s when the government declared a "system shift" (Larsson et al., 2012). Larsson et al. (2012) argue that there has been a re-engineering from the mid-80s; from social governing to advanced liberalism. That is, from the socialist ideas of individual freedom from patriarchy, the family and the market, through the state's provision of basic social security, to the neoliberal idea that the individual had to be liberated from state

regulation, and have free choice within a diverse market. The processes of re-engineering can be seen as forms of "governing at a distance", creating certain conditions and frames for the public through marketization which was supposed to increase efficiency through competition and freedom of choice (ibid.). These rationalities and practices have also been applied in areas that have remained in public sector; regulations of sick leave, labour market measures, health care, and education (ibid.).

Sweden has a special history, the public sector has since WWII been one of the largest and most rapidly growing, but in the mid-80s and again in the late-90s agencies were streamlined or abolished, and major cuts were made in public expenditure and employment (OECD, 2010).

> In 1988 there was an operation in which administrative costs were cut by 10%
> across the board over a three-year period. Paradoxically, this led to the closing
> down of some agencies that provided shared services to the administration as a
> whole. In the late 1990s central government employment was reduced by no less
> than 50%, mostly through privatisation, but also by laying off 20% of staff (50
> 000 employees). (OECD, 2010:63, about Sweden)

According to the OECD report (2010), it was only in the last few years up until 2010 that a certain stability had been present in the public sector in Sweden.

Larsson et al. (2012) have found that the neoliberal transformations of the Swedish public sector have created "new patterns of responsibilization" where citizens have been lead to subject positions of "customer/user" rather than "beneficiary". The citizens have to be in command of their own desires and needs, articulating them as interests and making rational and responsible choices. As long as they do this, the neoliberal idea is that they will not get into trouble, and not need the state. If they do find themselves in a situation where they are unemployed, sick, homeless, or somehow in need of welfare it is a consequence of their previous (bad) choices (ibid.). The individual freedom comes with tremendous individual responsibilities, demands to self-discipline, and it leaves little or no consideration for unexpected events or the whims of Miss Fortuna. The over-emphasis on the autonomous responsible individual takes away the citizen's agency rather than promotes it (ibid.). It over-burdens the citizens with tasks that they lack the economic, cultural or psychological resources to handle.

Digital-Era Governance

This section introduces the role of ICT in the developments of public management strategies.

Dunleavy et al. (2006) introduces a theory of Digital-Era Governance (DEG) and argues that ICT radically changes the range of options and the demands on governments. The authors want to highlight the central role that ICT has to how public service is organised and

how governments communicate with citizens. With the help of ICT, the Digital-Era Governance trend tries to pick up the government pieces and offer better and more holistic services to citizens (ibid.).

> What is different in the current period is the growth of the Internet, e-mail, and the Web and the generalization of IT systems from only affecting back-office processes to conditioning in important ways the whole terms of relations between government agencies and civil society.
> (Dunleavy et al., 2006:478)

However, NPM is not dead, it has raised a whole generation of managers and politicians, and its logic is in many ways imprinted in people and institutions (Dunleavy et al., 2006). NPM has become a broad concept; its practices have travelled over the globe and been adapted and transformed. In scientific literature the definitions also vary, Dunleavy et al. (2006) define NPM as a diverse range of models and solutions that fall under three over-arching themes or characteristics:

- ➢ **Disaggregation** – Flattening hierarchies by disintegration, by breaking up large organisations into smaller autonomous units.

- ➢ **Competition** – Creating room for competing providers, selling off parts of the government to private actors, and transforming citizens into purchasers with "free choice".

- ➢ **Incentivisation** – Emphasis on performance in relation to monetary goals.

One of the trends of DEG is directly contradictory to the disaggregation under NPM, by integrating systems and processes governments try to reintegrate government functions and create a more coherent public sector (Dunleavy et al., 2006). This is not so much due to a problematic organisation and functionality as to the fact that the disintegration has duplicated many back-office functions and hence, costs have duplicated, and often at the expense of front-office functions (Dunleavy et al., 2006). The reintegration is mainly aimed at centralising and streamlining government functions, and to save through large-scale economies and single big contracts with suppliers of ICT (ibid.).

Dunleavy et al. (2006) argue that DEG includes a "needs-based holism" with reforms seeking to simplify the relationship between agencies and citizens by collecting tasks and processes required to give citizens and end-to-end service. It is also an effort to reduce the need to gather the same information from the same person several times and rather work according to an "ask once method" where the government agencies can save and exchange information through "data warehousing". As an example, Canada was able to abolish a 30-page state pension form by pulling together information from existing IT systems and replace the form with a welcome letter and a statement of entitlement (ibid.).

The digitalisation of public service is so fundamental that it truly transforms agencies, they move towards a state where they "become their websites"; where all errands are done through the web and all contact through ICT systems (Dunleavy et al., 2006). Examples of

this are the Swedish "Kivra" where we receive most of our mail from agencies; this is a typical electronic services delivery (ESD). At the University of Gothenburg, the face-to-face contact with students is continuously decreased for administrators and teachers through Ladok3, GUL/Canvas, and technology for electronic lectures and meetings. The perfect example is the zero-touch technology (ZTT) pioneered by companies like Cisco and used by governments for the financing of public transportation (where you charge your card online and then just swipe it in the metro station or at the bus/tram) or for collecting congestion taxes (cameras photographing your licence plate and a system counting and creating an invoice which is sent to you) (ibid.).

Many voice a belief that technology used right by governments will abolish bureaucracy and/or result in a more just and equal society due to an isocratic administration (a computer system will not discriminate like a civil servant may do) (Dunleavy et al., 2006). The ICT revolution certainly puts the user or the customer in a central role, but it is a role that demands initiative and a great capacity to understand one's own situation and the laws, policies and practices that affects it (ibid.). It is a self-administration concept. Besides the demands to be active, it also demands compliance and acceptance (ibid.).

The SSM trend is connected to the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) that creates new possibilities of making information electronic, organised with software, and accessible on the web (Ekonomistyrningsverket, 2006; Ulbrich, 2009). With ICT, information can easily be handled and accessible over physical distance, and this creates new possibilities for organisational models in the public service sector, models often referred to as e-government (Bergström and Lapsley, 2017). Today, in Sweden, you can do almost any state-related errand online if you have a digital ID. This has changed how agencies in Sweden handle the contact with the public. With ICT, "customer" support can be removed from the front office, and back-office processes and information systems can be centralised and handled more efficiently through shared services (Ulbrich, 2009).

> Administrative reform has been one of the few growth industries in an era otherwise characterised by a declining concern with the public sector.
> (Peters 1997, p.71, cited by Bergström and Lapsley, 2017)

Methodology

The "truth" or the ability to know something about anything lies within understanding its complexity and history. In my view, what happens and exists today is the result of human action within and upon the materialistic world, and the knowledge structures and social relations that has been used to make sense of and organise the human experience. Research without an analysis of the basic relations on which humans organise lose much of its meaning, importance and applicability. I have incorporated this ontological and epistemological perspective in this study in a way that has also allowed me to limit the scope, and focus the

aim. It is mainly an exploratory study that aims at raising further critical questions about the social relations that dictate the positions of and expectations on civil servants in Sweden. The design of the study has been highly adaptive in the regard that the findings in the material have been given a high importance for the focus of the study.

Case study

According to Yin (2014) case studies are defined by two aspects: (1) They are "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context" (ibid.:16), which is exactly what this study does. And (2) they cope "with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis." (ibid.:17). I have used multiple sources of evidence for this study, they are described in further detail in the next section, and I have developed most of the theoretical perspectives in advance to data collection and analysis. It is true that this case has had many variables of interest, unfortunately, I have had to choose selectively which to proceed with and I have chosen to work with the variables which point to issues concerning broader groups of civil servants.

As mentioned before, a thorough literature review has been difficult, and the research I have found on SSMs is relatively young and mostly focuses on more measurable consequences of SSMs, evaluating the organisational model as such. However, the literature review was done before and parallel to the collection of material (Yin, 2014). The formulation of the aim and research questions was a process and were set quite late since I felt the need to process the material to some degree before I was able to decide what aspects in the data to focus on (ibid.). The case includes a very wide set of aspects to study. Because of this, the design has also been developed throughout the process (ibid.). According to Marshall & Rossman (2016), high-quality research is dependent on the readiness to adapt one's research design.

Data collection

This case contains many actors that have been affected and had different levels of influence:

> The government; through its assignments to the University of Gothenburg and the Government Service Centre.

> Managers at the university and service centre, whom cannot be considered as one actor but must be understood as many different actors who have had different agendas and levels of influence depending on their positions, tasks, and during what period they were involved.

> The union for civil servants at central and local level.

- ➢ The payroll consultants who were moved to the service centre.
- ➢ Local administrators at the university whose work processes and resources have changed.
- ➢ Employees at the university who has been affected differently depending on what kinds of employment contracts they have and benefits they need to use.

In order for the study to get a varied enough perspective reflecting the case aspects fairly I have chosen to use data from government documents and reports regarding (or produced by) the Swedish Government Service Centre and its role within the Swedish public administration (the material is specified in the reference section). I have also used some information from the Swedish Government Service Centre's web pages. When googling the Swedish Government Service Centre most results were articles from Publikt, a magazine by the union for civil servants (ST), which is logical since they are the union that organise most civil servants in Sweden and therefore have a special interest in the case of the Swedish Government Service Centre. I reviewed all articles in Publikt, they were all published between 2011 and 2017, however only a few were relevant to use in this study (see list in reference section). When I started to read about the new agency, it became apparent that the University of Gothenburg did not have much of a choice about whether or not to join them; it was only a matter of when. This is why I prioritised to do a document review rather than more interviews; I wanted to be able to present a study with a complex understanding of the case and its different actors, their options, and their motives. Regarding whom to interview payroll consultants seemed most important since they have been most involved in the changes and have very good knowledge about the payroll administration within both organisations. I had one personal contact with the payroll consultants, and then the selection of further interviewees was done through snowball method. I also interviewed one local union representative and finally one person in a management position at the university. I felt these people could give me different and complementing perspectives.

The interviews have been quite open in order to let the participants define the most important aspects of the case. The interview guides varied a bit depending on whom I interviewed but they contained general questions such as: Can you tell me about the transfer of the wage unit to the service centre? What did you think and feel when you understood that the wage unit were to be transferred? Did you have any influence on how the transfer was made? What was, and what is your impression of the service centre? Has anything changed to the better? Is there anything else you think I should know and consider in my work with this study? All participants spoke freely and answered the questions exhaustively. At occasions I followed up with more specific questions of aspects they did not mention themselves or when they talked about something interesting. In total it was five interviews, they varied in time from half an hour to one and a half hour, three were done in person and I met the interviewees at locations within the university which they had chosen. The other two were done over phone. The first interview was not taped since the interview person felt

uncomfortable. This was the most open interview and gave me a better knowledge of the case and how to proceed with the collection of material. I took notes during the interview, which lasted 1,5 hours, and afterwards, I rewrote and organized the information in very broad and basic categories (chain of events and key people, how the transition was handled, how the work changed, the physical work environment, psychosocial aspects of organisational change). The other interviews were taped and transcribed. I kept my notes about interviews in a notebook. The files of recorded and transcribed interviews I kept in a folder on my private computer, locally backed up on an extra hard-drive.

Analysis of material

As Marshall and Rossman (2016) notes the processing of data is usually messy, differs from study to study and researcher to researcher, and analysis and data collection is difficult to clearly separate in the process of building a coherent interpretation.

I collected a lot of material on the development of the service centre in order to get a better understanding of the case for my own sake. The data from this was first meant to be used in the background section of this study but turned out to be too large. When I had done the five interviews and, with my supervisor, were to decide on whether to do more interviews or not we decided to use the material from articles and reports as collected material instead of doing more interviews, this turned out to be useful since it contrasts agains the interviews and enables a comparative perspective: what was aimed for and what was the actual result. It was also difficult to do more interviews within the time limit for the study.

I begun with a review of the documents, web pages and news articles. I looked for motives and goals with the Swedish Government Service Centre, how it has developed and been criticised. The information was also organised in a timeline in order to understand the process of the service centre and when different actors were engaged. It is more of a descriptive material explaining the case rather than a material which benefits from a thorough coding and analysis. However, knowing the motives and rationales for installing the service centre helps answering the first research question on what public management trend it can be understood as part of.

The transcript of the interviews were read through each at a time, important narratives were identified and broadly themed, creating "in vivo codes", as Marshall and Rossman (2016) refers to them. This was the initial or open coding; a large set of codes are suggested by the data itself (Massengill, n.d.). In the focused coding, the codes of each interview were compared and a set of themes that could be shared were constructed (ibid.). What guided me, to begin with, was what the interviewees talked most about and expressed most feelings about, what seemed to had been affected them the most. The codes revolved a lot around deskilling, loss of relations and experiences of maltreatment. I had so much material I have not been able to use even half of it, and the underlying political and broader issues which make up the result section now seemed to me to be the most timely and important. They

appeared more clearly in the memoing part of the analysis where the relationship between codes, themes and research questions become more apparent (ibid.). I have used the theory section as a frame for the results of this study, as a context which enables an analysis which is not only focused on the participants of the study but can facilitate an understanding of the meaning of the findings for civil servants and citizens in a more general perspective. And show how this change within the public sector points towards changes in society.

The material from the documents and articles is used as an introduction in the result section and then used to start a basic analysis while presenting the results from the interviews. The material from document reviews and the material from the interviews are contradictory and I felt this way of presenting the material was the most useful.

The discussion and conclusions have been developed by relating the findings to the sections on previous research and theory while focusing on the research questions and the aim of the study.

Quality criteria

I have aspired to describe the study well in order to have a high level of transparency (Marshall & Rossman 2016). I have also aspired to make the focus and logic of the study coherent, to align all parts, especially the theoretical framework and the results, in order to make the study clear, clean and understandable (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009, p. 98). For any critical study one quality criteria should be whether it challenges the reader and brings up important but usually hidden aspects, I hope this study does (ibid.).

Tracy (2010) use the Eight Big-Tent Criteria for excellent research; worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical and meaningful coherence. I consider the topic to be worthy and have had this confirmed by a big interest and much surprise when I have described it to others, especially other civil servants. I have documented all procedures, findings, and analyses in a neat and rigorous way that makes the study easy to review (Marshall & Rossman 2016). I have also been rigorous in the choice of theory and material. I believe I have been able to express a sincerity, also mentioning my ontological and epistemological views. The material used and the way I have described my process should make the study very credible. I believe the contribution is significant and relevant for all civil servants in Sweden and maybe also other countries, the focus of the study as well as the contact with interviewees and the handling of the material implies conscious consideration of ethical aspects and meaningful coherence.

According to Yin (2014), an exploratory study should state the criteria by which the exploration is judged successful or not. In this case, I would argue that success would be associated with exposing a timely and acute problem and to open for further investigations and an awareness among those concerned.

Ethical considerations

I have used the form, which was distributed by the course leader for this thesis course, for information to participants about the study and the ethical considerations. I have followed the Code of Conduct and Ethical Guidelines for Social Science by UNESCO, and "Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning" by the Swedish Research Council.

The interviewees were all more or less known people within the university, which has been something that has made it even more important to think about anonymization. I have been cautious about how I use quotes and I think the translation of quotes has helped to anonymize the participants.

Limitations

With this thesis I strive to introduce new questions regarding the public administration in Sweden which needs to be further studied, the ambition is not an exhaustive mapping of issues related to the case. Because of this, there are themes within the material that have not been addressed in this thesis but could be used for further studies.

It would have been ideal to interview one or two more people working at the Gothenburg office of the Swedish Government Service Centre, but it has been difficult to contact them in an ethical and sensitive manner since it is impossible to find direct contact information to any single person working at the service centre.

A more extensive research with more interviews with people working within the Swedish Government Service Centre and within its different costumer organisations would be useful in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of the issues that have been detected by this quite small study with a limited amount of interviews. It is not possible to generalise based on this study, it is rather to understand as a first investigation pointing to questions that are important to investigate further. This study also looks at a particular situation of transition; it has given me the opportunity to compare how the payroll administration changed for a particular organisation. However, for other agencies there might be other issues of high importance, for example at the Swedish Transport Administration were they had problems with the service centre systems not being able to handle their shift work organisation.

My position as administrator at the University of Gothenburg I believe has been helpful when contacting payroll consultants and interviewing them. I believe they experienced that they could be more frank with me because I was familiar with their work, experiences and positions within the organisation. I have been careful about leaving my own experiences and feeling out by strictly focusing on the data I was given and being meticulous about not adding to it, changing it or adding what I thought they meant when the data was unclear to me in some way.

Results

The document review is presented first and will provide an understanding of the motives and expected results behind the instalment of the Swedish Government Service Centre. The results from interviews will then contrast this and point to a set of issues that can be identified.

Document review

The Swedish National Financial Management Authority (ESV) has since 2003 pushed for a focus on the administrative costs within public service (Riksrevisionen, 2016). This is one of the forces that has resulted in a string of reports, investigations and government decisions leading up to the instalment of the Swedish Government Service Centre. The first government report with obvious relevance was the ESV report 2006:16, a product of a direct assignment from the government to suggest how the public administration could be made more efficient by either shared services, resource cooperation or outsourcing (Ekonomistyrningsverket, 2006). In 2007 ESV concluded there was an annual savings potential of 650-900 million SKR (Westling Palm, 2011). As a result, a new government regulation (2007:515) was produced which provisioned agencies to ensure that their operations would be conducted efficiently and that the state's resources be used carefully (ibid.). This regulation later became the basic principle used to steer agencies into the new service centre; if they could not prove their own administration was more efficient they had to connect. In 2009, the government made the assessment that pressure and control would be needed in order to realise streamlining of public administration, this was initiated by demanding agencies with centralised administration to further develop their units' efficacy (Westling Palm, 2011). In 2009, the saving potential of shared services was estimated at 500-1200 million/year, which corresponded to approximately 30% in efficiency improvement for the state as a whole (ibid.).

The year 2010 can be seen as the year of the official start of the investigation, and preparations for the Swedish Government Service Centre, this is the year when the government ordered the planning of shared services for personnel and economy administration (Regeringen, 2010). It resulted in the SOU 2011:38 – A Common Service Centre for Agencies: Considerations on the Service Centre Investigation (referred here to as Westling Palm, 2011) – which, in much detail, planned for the realisation of a shared service centre for Swedish agencies. The aim was to investigate how it could be up and running by the 1st of January 2012. The SOU was produced with support from the private multinational consultant corporations PwC and Accenture, as well as agencies, unions and other Swedish state functions and networks (Westling Palm, 2011).

The interviewees informed me that the agreement between the university and the service centre was signed in February 2015, the Swedish Government Service Centre was to supply

services for wage administration and travel and other reimbursements, about 7300 payroll specifications per month. It was agreed that payroll consultants at the university would be transferred to the service centre in order to secure their jobs and the quality of the services provided to the university. The actual complete transition was done in March 2017.

Motives, rationales and goals

According to Westling Palm (2011), a potential benefit with a service centre would be that the administrative support within the state would be more effective and qualitative in general. Revision and control of processes and methods would be simplified, and flaws would be more easily solved. Costs would be more transparent and easily comparable over time and with other suppliers. Another potential benefit was said to be that management and resource efforts could be devoted to core activities rather than administrative support, which would increase quality and clarify responsibilities.

The Swedish Government Service Centre themselves formulates their main strategy like this:

> Our business logic focuses on cost-effective deliveries of services our customers need. Operational superiority means competitive advantages through high effectivity and low unit prices. (Statens servicecenter, n.d.c.)

The language used seems more in line with private sector logic rather than public service logic: They say it is a business logic and not an assignment or commission[2], which is typically used to describe agencies' purposes and goals. They want to have operational superiority and competitive advantage. By this statement, they create other agencies as competitors, but they are not competing for customers, they are competing for governmental approval of being the most efficient and most streamlined unit within public service. This creates a shift in focus from the main assignments for agencies (different kinds of public service and good) to becoming the cheapest agency. The service centre also formulates a set of supportive strategies; one of the more important is "closeness to customers" which they explain as good dialogue and proactive delivery of services in close cooperation with the costumers (ibid.).

Besides their main task of absorbing all agencies' wage-related administration, they were also tasked with keeping an eye on the market and if possible procure parts of the services instead of offering services themselves (Westling Palm, 2011). This is a task assigned to all agencies, and it assigns them with the task of being as cheap as possible. It is exemplified by two of the interviewees when they speak about the University of Gothenburg:

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[2] In Swedish, one usually speaks of agencies operating on "statligt uppdrag" which means they have a special purpose of regulating social relations and conditions in society.

> […] It is included within our commission to review our costs and our quality. I mean, we always monitor the tendencies around us and monitor the development of the Swedish Government Service Centre, and we always have to evaluate how, what we do, except education, science and collaboration, where it is done best, where it is best placed in regard to quality and costs. (Interviewee 2)

> […] I mean, there is a pronounced goal here to test two to three functions every year within the administration, to compare them to sourcing solutions. And the question is then; what will be left here eventually? I mean, this local connection is very important, […]. (Interviewee 3)

For the future, the Swedish Government Service Centre has been appointed to investigate how agencies' administration can be organised in more efficient ways, and they have, among other things, suggested that the service centre incorporate all services to citizens (Statens servicecenter, 2017). They suggest common physical service centres where citizens can come to handle errands with all agencies. These centres would provide computers where citizens can submit their errands electronically and were civil servants could meet citizens in cases when this is necessary. There will be some regular staff in these centres and they will help with the use of the computers and the online forms for submission of errands, "help to self-help" (Statens servicecenter, 2017).

These quotes hint about the ideology and the visions for the future, the completely digitalised government seems to be the end game. Unfortunately, the population needs to become more digitally competent before that is possible:

> The Swedish Government Service Centre, therefore, estimates that local government services in the foreseeable future need to also include certain physical direct services and personal meetings to ensure an equivalent service to audiences with poorer ability to use digital services.
> (Statens servicecenter, 2017:41)

> Visitors who for various reasons cannot be persuaded to use digital self-service should, to a certain extent, be able to obtain oral direct service of a simpler nature. (Statens servicecenter, 2017:43)

To begin with, services provided in these centres should be; different subsidies (for housing, activities, parental leave, sick leave, "etableringsersättning"), issues regarding pensions, taxes and declaration of taxes for citizens and companies, services connected to the population register, services to employers and unemployed, video conferences with the Swedish Migration Agency, drivers licence, passport and identity errands, licence for arms and criminal complaints (Statens servicecenter, 2017).

Risks, critique and reported issues

In the documents regarding the preparations of the Swedish Government Service Centre, I have not seen critical considerations of risks. What was mentioned was a disapproval from

the Swedish Competition Authority which argued that market competition would be restricted when all agencies use the same ICT-systems and that some agencies had expressed worries about the effects on their core operations if support-functions were removed from their own organisation (Regeringen, 2010; Westling Palm, 2011). However, no other possible risks or issues were identified during the planning of a shared service centre.

The main aim was to reduce administration and save money, but many agencies experience the administrative burden has increased after connection to the Swedish Government Service Centre (Publikt, 2016). Most agencies' costs are unchanged after connection, much because the service centre has higher fees than expected and adaptive changes have been more expensive than calculated (Riksrevisionen, 2016). Common problems are double work and controls, and that the service centre does not do some tasks (ibid.). 42% of administrative managers at 98 agencies report that the administrative burden has increased, and 36% that there has been no change in the amount of administrative work (ibid.).

The Swedish Transport Administration did not want to connect to the Swedish Government Service Centre and one of their arguments was that the service centre's payroll system conflicts with their collective agreement since it cannot handle shift work (Publikt, 2015b). This, however, is not a valid reason according to the service centre (Statens servicecenter, 2015b). By January 2015 or earlier, the University of Gothenburg had signed an agreement to join the 1st of May 2016 (Statens servicecenter, 2015a). According to the local civil servant union's (ST's) representatives at the University of Gothenburg, the agreement was signed without any information or negotiations with the unions which means the university broke the law (Publikt, 2015b). However, ST did not follow up on this, even though the Swedish law clearly supports unions in these kind of cases.

ST has been against a forced connection of all agencies, especially universities (Publikt, 2015a). In general, they have argued that the separation of pure administration from strategic personnel issues (for example recruiting, rehabilitation, work environment) is too unclear. They doubted that the administration would be more effective at the service centre since local agreements and circumstances make standardisation difficult and that forcing connection would indirectly put pressure to change and standardise local agreements (ibid.). The local agreements are those that contain much of the rights and benefits for civil servants such as work environment procedures, regulation of work hours, salary revisions and agreements, pension rights, reimbursement and agreements on for healthcare, reasons for paid leave, and so on. A standardisation of these agreements would change the current status quo between employer and employees. ST also argued that the following values would be demolished (Publikt, 2011):

➢ Problems with integrity and security might arise when large amounts of data on civil servants are centralised.

➢ One aspiration of the government was a large set of private subcontractors and this will increase vulnerability for all agencies.

➢ The government should be a role model for other employers but the change will increase insecurity for employees.

However, in 2018, the union seems to have shifted their attitude, in a correspondence with ST central administration I asked how they view the Swedish Government Service Centre and received the following answer:

> Initially, the union considers the expansion of the agency's responsibilities as good. We have good insight into the work of the commission and possibilities to influence. Additional functions and tasks are moved to the Swedish Government Service Centre, despite this, we think there are conditions for synergy. However, we have lodged that it is important that the Swedish Government Service Centre is granted guarantees for a stable and lasting organisation into the future, and that this will not be affected by, for example, a shift of government. The transfer of resources and staff must be done in an orderly fashion, and in addition, budget and money must be transferred from the agencies that are handing over functions to the Swedish Government Service Centre. The union has also pointed to the importance of a good work environment and that there must be possibilities for the employees to develop skills and have a career.
> Regarding the immediate or future effects, we have not been able to evaluate these yet, but we follow the commission's work and will be able to present considerations.

Results from interviews

There have been several important themes brought up by interviewees, however, I will only present those that appear specific to this case, I have defined them as the listed themes below. I will leave out aspects of conflicts associated with organisational change, and aspects regarding the complexity caused by the increasing use of more and more complex ICT-systems. The overarching themes I have settled on are:

➢ Deskilling of the payroll consultant profession

➢ Loss of relations

➢ Extraction of knowledge from the University of Gothenburg

Deskilling of the payroll consultant profession

Interviewees explain that the simplification of the work and reduction of tasks begun when the university centralised the payroll administration in 2009. Before this, each faculty had its own local payroll consultant, and interviewees describe that this is when they had most diverse tasks, and those who experienced it says this is when the work was most enjoyable. They were close to and knew local administrators and employees, they helped solve problems, they had to be updated and knowledgeable about laws, agreements and policies, they arranged monthly meetings, and produced educational material for local administrators. They felt they were very appreciated for their expertise and high level of service. One interviewee describes the payroll consultants as key people within the organisation. It was

demanding but also rewarding positions they had. It was vulnerable since the workload was high and most of the faculties only had one payroll consultant each. When all payroll consultants were centralised they lost some of the diversity of the job because the tasks for payroll administration and personnel administration was separated more. Interviewees describe that they did not need to think as much as before. They were not involved as much in local problem solving, they lost their role as educators, and they were not allowed to arrange regular meetings with local administrators.

> […] if we helped the local administrators then we had fewer things to correct and people could understand better what was right and wrong. And I have always felt that it has been incredibly important to support those who work in the periphery of the organisation. (Interviewee 4)

The simplification and reduction of tasks were experienced as much more significant and radical with the transition to the Swedish Government Service Centre. One of the interviewees said: it is only the final product we receive now, and that is not what I wanted to work with. Interviewees also said that the general director of the service centre motivated the payroll consultants by arguing that they would be professionalised within the service centre, they would be part of the core operations and not the support operations, and they would be prioritised.

Interviewees describe how they experienced that the management at the university avoided advice about possible problems and issues that would arise with the changes. They disregarded their knowledge about their work and about the organisation. One of the interviewees said: When you work with salaries you have to do it right, we should have been more involved in transferring our knowledge. However, when it was time to make the transition to the service centre and the new systems interviewees felt like they were given too much responsibility and no, or very little, support. They had to learn two new systems and tackle all the issues that occurred in the transition. Since the University of Gothenburg was the first university to outsource their payroll administration to the Swedish Government Service Centre, new functions were needed that no one at the new agency had worked with before. The period during the transition and the first months after interviewees describe as very difficult and with a very high workload. They worked long days but were not granted overtime, only "flex"[3], until the situation became chaotic, then three people were chosen to work overtime. These ways of disregarding their knowledge and importance but then at the next turn placing all responsibility in their hands in a completely unknown situation made them feel used and disrespected. And from the planning of the transition this seems to have been, and to still be, a theme; they are not allowed to use their knowledge and skills to

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[3] When you have flexible working hours you can work more than 8 hours one day, and then use those extra hours to shorten another workday. However, when the employer orders you to stay longer days you should be given overtime which compensates you with a higher salary and/or Time for recovery. The amount of overtime also has a yearly limit.

improve or correct handling of payroll errands, and at the same time they are left alone, under time pressure and high workload, to solve technical issues they do not have experience or knowledge for. Their expertise is made redundant and their time and effort are used to finish faulty payroll errands and solving technical issues.

> We didn't receive any support I can tell you, that is a very important thing. The opposite; we have had to invent the wheel completely, we had to learn two new systems, we had to bring all of GU in, as I said, we drudged like, I don't know what. Without any kind of support. (Interviewee 4)

> No one says: Yes, we understand that you were sick, so it's okay that I will not receive my salary until next month. That doesn't work. […], they have done an amazing job, every employee at the wage-unit. I mean, during this whole process which proceeded quite fast we had no big wreckage […]. They did everything. Despite it being such, such a difficult time. And that they were also under-staffed at some points. They should have never been transferred to the Swedish Government Service Centre. They were experts, they were placed, they were a part of a community in the organisation from the beginning and was more and more marginalised in their own work here. And despite that, they drudged and they did such an amazing work always. (Interviewee 3)

Two of the interviewees describe the work at the Swedish Government Service Centre as "stansoperativ" referring to work with punched card machines used to create punched cards for data storage mainly during 1900-1970. This was to work with a manual machine to punch holes in paper cards according to a specific system.

> […] I guess the tasks became just what I expected in any case. (Laughter) Quite monotone, quite boring. Almost real punch-tasks. (Interviewee 5)

Figure 2: A worker producing punched cards.

> […] everything comes in ready and then you are to correct the errors and then review, and it is a ton load of lists to control after each processing of wages[4] and it has become worse than before, I mean this, it's even more to control […]. It's not much by your own head and these development potentials they promised, there were to be such good development potentials, that, at least I haven't felt that there is. That's how it was. But you felt mostly that you lost competence, that's my opinion, from working with wages and personnel you lost very big parts. (Interviewee 4)

> The Swedish Government Service Centre is as if it's made for work injuries. No development what so ever. […] Some of the younger might have had some assignments where they had a little development but… It's a very boring workplace […]. (Interviewee 4)

One of the interviewees describe the work routine; when you come to work you open the case management system and pick out one errand at a time, if necessary an errand can be postponed but has to be solved within 24 hours, at the end of the day you report how much time you have spent for each kind of task. The interviewee describes how the feeling of having accomplished something or finished a task has disappeared. At the university you could be working with one errand, helping someone for a week, solving a problem or answering a series of questions, afterwards you would get a reward in the feeling of having helped someone and you would receive their gratitude. Even if the errand was difficult, demanded a lot of attention and energy there would be a good feeling of having done something meaningful for someone in the end.

Another interviewee says they have a pain in their neck and shoulders that they have not experienced before, and says it comes from the tasks they perform; submitting information into Primula or answering cases in the case management system in a very strict "professional" language stripped of familiarity or helpful information.

> […] I'm not allowed to think any more. I'm only allowed, I'm only allowed to type at a computer […]. (Interviewee 4)

> […] you become so tired after a day like that. (Interviewee 4)

One of them give an example from a day when they helped a colleague with a complex and long case of sick leave where they had to pick up pen and paper and do calculations and map the history of the case, and the colleague said at the end of the day how energized they felt and how joyful it had been because they had been allowed to think. Another example is a colleague who had previously worked in the private sector and who said that the work at the Swedish Government Service Centre was too boring, and a couple of extra vacation days did not compensate for that. They also quote a colleague who describes how

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[4] Processing of wages is here a translation of "lönekörning".

they experience a new kind of insecurity arising from the prohibition to use their expert knowledge within their professional roles:

> […] I have never felt so uncertain about anything as of specifically this feeling that I don't have a qualified job any more. We have been so meticulous with this because it's money being transferred, and now, it's like, don't care about it, never mind. (Interviewee 4)

One of the interviewees said that they had realized after a while that the Swedish Government Service Centre had many problems with overworked employees, at all units there seemed to have quite serious psychosocial work environment issues and many sick leaves related to stress. They said it is unpleasant to realize you have been transferred to a place where people regularly crash and burn. They also spoke about many internal restrictions, mostly the impossibility of contacting colleagues at other units, and if they were allowed, there was no support or help to be found. They also expressed how it would have been valuable for them to meet other colleagues in order to feel like they were part of an organisation.

> No, so I have no, absolutely no good impression of the Swedish Government Service Centre. Not at all. Rather I see it as a factory, with ignorance and lost people. Unprofessional. And we actually sometimes say when we talk about that, that; imagine if the customers knew what an unprofessional organisation this is […]. (Interviewee 4)

> […] however long you work within the profession you want to learn and develop, that's how it is, and if you work with personnel, with, with other people, then you actually have to be alert and up to date. (Interviewee 5)

Loss of relations

At the payroll unit at the university, the consultants still had a close contact with local administrators and employees, even if physical meetings were not common direct and personal contact and relations were maintained through phone and e-mail, or even chats in messenger. Employees could visit when they needed help. One interviewee said they felt they achieved more and received more back, and gave examples of being mentioned in doctoral thesis's, watching PhD' dissertations, and being invited to dissertation parties. They were part of the "main operations", they facilitated education and science and were appreciated for their support. As showed by this quote there has been a radical change:

> From working at an office at GU where we had, as you also know, a very good contact with administrators, with the employees, and we had so much fun, you received positive appraisal, you solved problems easily with a phone call or, yeah anything, you had your little part of the organisation, I mean you had, yeah, you knew where there could be weakness and what worked fine, what to look for. And now the work, we just sit by the computer and pick out errands from Primula, answer errands in the case management system, without any personal

knowledge what so ever. And what do we receive? What have we had since we came here? I'll tell you, that people are so disappointed, which I can understand. […] We have become so boring. You only use your standardised answers. You do this and you make errors and you do that, and you do this. We only get brittle feedback. (Interviewee 4)

[…] these kinds of things they are hard, they wear down your energy. (Interviewee 4)

They experience that they are missed by employees and local administrators and that it becomes problematic when the help and support they used to provide is no longer available.

[…] the administrators were very sad; but who can I call now? How should we do now? Well, I don't know. You will have to solve that at GU, and that was not exactly the kind of answer we have usually given them, contrary, we have really turned ourselves inside-out to solve those problems at GU. (Interviewee 4)

The possibilities of contact are now strictly regulated, when someone at the university calls the service centre they always reach the main customer support in Östersund, if the issue can not be solved by them within 15 minutes you are connected to someone at the Gothenburg office or asked to upload information and documents through the case management system.
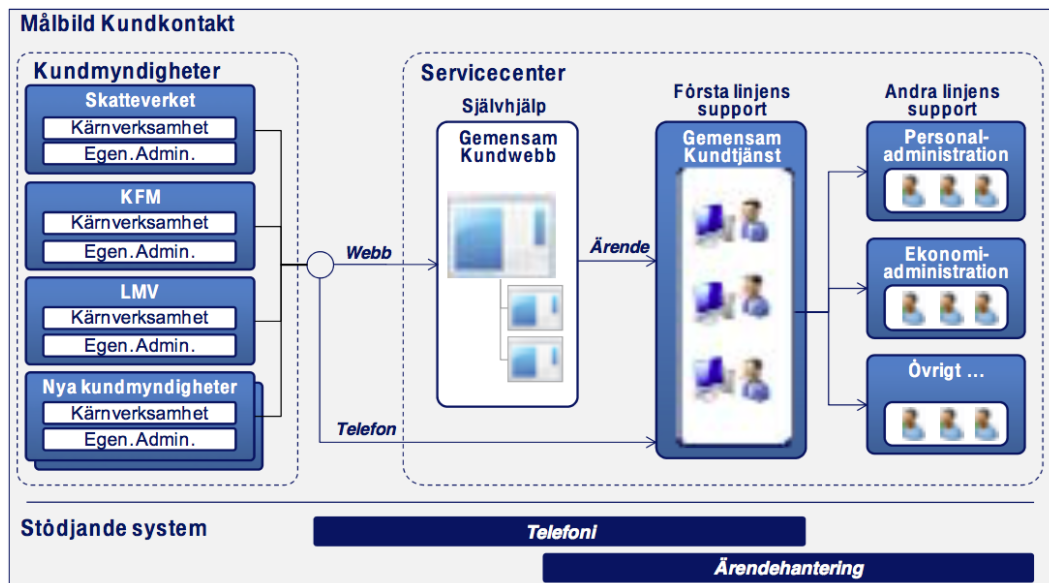

Figure 3: A description of how the communication for customers is organised. In the left column a set of customers is shown, they can chose to make contact through the web or phone. If they chose the web they arrive at the first instance of customer support online with FAQ (called "Självhjälp"=self help). If their errand can not be solved there it will be picked up by the first line of customer support, this is also where phone calls are received. The second line of support (the box to the right) is organised according to subjects; personnel, economy, and so on. (Source: Westling Palm, K., 2011:212)

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The interviewees explain how they were taught to be formal over the phone and written messages, there are certain phrases they are supposed to use. Their way of describing this makes it clear that they experienced this as emotionally difficult; they had to disconnect emotionally and leave old habits of offering their best help and support.

> Contrary, we were to be brief, we weren't allowed to be polite, we weren't allowed to be nice, we were to answer as short as possible. (Interviewee 4)

> […] now, I mean, it was thumbscrews over the throat. […] And we can absolutely not give our phone number, people can only call the gov... ah, to the service desk. (Interviewee 4)

> Not call to say; well hello, I can see that you have made a correction here, you have recalled all of your parental leave, that's not what you wanted is it? No, Oh no, I only wanted to recall 14 days because I worked there. (Interviewee 4)

They are not allowed to call anyone at the university either. One of the interviewees said they sometimes do anyway because they feel they need to explain why they cannot help someone. They also describe the difficulty of handling complex cases of for example long time sick leave when they cannot talk to the person the case belongs to or their closest administrator who often does not have competence or experience to know enough about rules, regulations and agreements. At the University of Gothenburg, there are about 7 000 employees with some kind of contract or reimbursements to be paid and all their errands and cases are distributed randomly among the payroll consultants at the Swedish Government Service Centre, along with errands from other universities which has now also been incorporated into the service centre.

> […] in my opinion that is what is worst, that you are so far from the organisation. That, absolutely, that's what's worst. (Interviewee 5)

They were promised professional development and offered to belong in a collegial and professional organisation. However, what the interviewees speak of is none of these promises being fulfilled.

> I guess it's not really what I had believed it would be. […] a lot of talk but no action, that's how I feel. (Interviewee 5)

> I probably lean more towards GU, it was more, it was more friendly when you are close to the organisation, or, you're not only an employment number, rather you can actually become both a name and a face. So that you can meet people. And that's something, you don't have that when you're here, you are a bit far from the organisation in my opinion. (Interviewee 5)

The relation between the university and the service centre is for some reason also very guarded and limited. There is only one person at the university and one at the service centre

who are allowed to have contact daily or as often as needed. According to one interviewee, other universities has 2-3 contact persons even though they have only a tenth of the employees.

Extraction of knowledge from the university

Roles and responsibilities have changed a lot within the university and this has resulted in serious, and seemingly unaddressed, issues regarding the division of responsibility and replacement of lost knowledge.

One of the first measures to handle this was to have a fee of 500 SKR for each case that needed correction by staff at the service centre. This was supposed to make employees, administrators and managers more careful, but the issue was not that people were careless, but that they lacked knowledge. Interviewees confirm that many mistakes are made due to lack of knowledge, time and resources.

> […] suddenly all these poor administrators who, I mean, they weren't without work before. […] it wasn't that you had nothing to do. And suddenly you have so much more and new tasks which you just have to take care of. (Interviewee 4)

> […] one of them told me, she said that we are completely in despair, we feel that we have had a department at GU which have handled all this, […], and suddenly we have to know everything, we have meetings, people don't sleep at night, they cry, their despairing. And we are supposed to take all of this when we have had so very little education. Yes, I said, I understand and that's what we said all the time, it's not a question of us being negative spirits who want to kill this in any way, but we know that knowledge is needed. If they had been a little smarter they had chosen a few of us and employed us at the departments or at least during a period in order to help with the most important things; what needs to be known? (Interviewee 4)

> […] we receive so much crap […]. And now it's more and more that we are not even allowed to question it. If the manager has approved it, then it's good, even if it is wrong according to contracts and everything. (Interviewee 4)

When the payroll consultants were transferred, the supportive function they had at the university was not replaced. Maybe most importantly they interpreted collective agreements that they are not allowed to do now, it would even be illegal. It is a work environment problem for both administrators at the university and for the payroll consultants at the service centre. They often receive questions they are not allowed to answer and they have to make the judgment in each case about how much information and help they are allowed to offer.

> […] when we were at GU we knew a lot about workers rights, collective agreements, so they didn't have to take care of that. And then we had this support phone 4040, and HR at GU was supposed to take over that. Two months ago I discovered that they hadn't: No, it's directly forwarded to ours, to the Swedish Government Service Centre in Östersund. There is nothing at GU. Because then

> I had, within a short time period, talked to three people at GU who were beside themselves […]. (Interviewee 4)

> Because it can be that we receive a lot of questions which should be answered by GUs personnel department, but since they are so, ah, apparently it doesn't work and then these questions come to us through service desk, and we are not allowed to answer, and that's where I feel then that I have to call out and tell them about that at least, […]. (Interviewee 4)

> But to make that judgment, that is also very difficult. Is this our question, or is it GU's question? No, this is related to contracts and there we are not allowed to, even if we can. (Interviewee 4)

Administrators at the university control some kinds of errands before management approves them and they are sent to the service centre, but some errands are not controlled, for example vacation.

> […] when you are to reimburse vacation days to people who had left their employment, and you could see that, well he hasn't submitted any vacation day during 2017, and now it's 2018, and he has 70 days left, is it reasonable to reimburse or did he miss to report his days? (Interviewee 4)

Another issue is when administrators and managers do not know the right processes and the right division of responsibility. For example, complicated cases with long time sick leave where also other agencies are involved increases the risk that cases are not handled properly and employees at the university experience very difficult financial and emotional times as a consequence.

> All these misunderstandings. And we had done nothing wrong anywhere but she had had that perception then, yeah, in many different ways that it was we who were the root of all evil because we hadn't reported her sick leave after a certain date of a certain month. And we had no information about that. (Interviewee 4)

The interviewees describe that when they worked at the university they had better control, they knew their faculties and even many of the employees personally, they knew common mistakes, and they could even predict issues in advance. This resulted in fewer mistakes, fewer corrections and more equality. Employees could depend on someone to follow up their sick leave, part-time, parental leave, and so on. This has been lost and not replaced. Some control has been passed down in the organisation to local administrators, and some things are not controlled. The manager I interviewed said:

> […] it has clearly been very big challenges. There still are challenges. And control functions which have been pushed out in the system and sometimes is non-existent. (Interviewee 2)

One important aspect of the division of responsibility is a more general issue, not directly connected to this case, but it becomes a more apparent issue when much of the

knowledgeable control has been lost. It is the mismatch between those who know and those who decide; managers have the last say, they decide and have to answer to their decisions, however, when it comes to payroll issues and employee rights and responsibilities it is often payroll consultants, HR-staff or administrators who have the knowledge of what is correct and also of how the processes work and what needs to be done when.

> […] managers at GU, they want to be managers, they don't want to know, […]. I had one now a while ago, a person resigned […], I called up the administrator at that department and said that, I said, we have sent a closure for this person six times to this manager and nothing happens, she just sends it back. Nothing. Because we only need the final date of the employment, because we have to submit that. And then she said that; no, I will call her, I know, because she doesn't like to be an administrator. She is a very capable researcher but she doesn't like being an administrator. (Interviewee 4)

The union at the University of Gothenburg and all their members have also been affected by the change. One union representative said that confirmed salaries were not possible to transfer to Primula during 2017 that meant employees had to wait several extra months for their annual raise. There is a system for negotiations of salaries and Primula was not able to receive the extent of employment[5] for each employee that meant that when the money for raises was divided to each faculty the wrong amounts were transferred. All of these complications demand a lot of time and effort to be corrected and hence costs the organisation a lot. In addition, the union's negotiations regarding salaries have to be done even earlier now in order to secure that new salaries will be paid in time.

Discussion

I believe the previous sections have already made certain points about this case. However, here I will discuss theory and results and make analytical observations. In the conclusions section I will answer the research questions and the aim.

Motives for a service centre

Like previous research on shared service models, this study also shows that the real outcomes of the instalment of the Swedish Government Service Centre do not answer to what was pronounced as expectations and motives. It seems questionable that costs were cut, and the calculated 30% improvement of efficacy seems to be far away. The results of this study suggest that the quality has decreased rather than increased, that there are more errors, less transparency, and more complexity. It is also doubtful that management and resource

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[5] Extent of employment is a translation of "tjänstgöringsgrad", if you work full or part time, and to what extent.

efforts at the university has been freed of administrative support and made more available to core operations such as education and science. The new systems seem to demand more active work from managers, and the removal of the last expert control at the university, the payroll consultants, means managers are expected to take a greater responsibility than before. Responsibilities regarding the wage administration within the university have not been clarified but rather appear to be quite confusing. The service centre was supposed to be close to their "customers" and to have a good dialogue, this material however, points to great issues and drastically decreased quality regarding relations and communication. This is also in line with previous research (Dunleavy et al., 2006, Janssen and Joha, 2006). The payroll consultants do not experience that they have come to an organisation where they can make use of their competence or develop professionally, they experience the exact opposite. And they do not feel connected to their new employer, they do not feel like part of an organisation, which is something they experienced at the university.

Another pronounced aim for the Swedish Government Service Centre was to procure services rather than offering their own, I have found no evidence in this study of active plans for procurement of wage-related administration, however, this is an important issue which should be followed up and further studied. If the service centre were to procure services it would entail laying off their own staff, which is by now a considerably big workforce. It would also entail a new period of policy learning for the new staff. There are also other issues connected: Would the complete public administration have to change computer systems again? If there have already been issues respecting collective agreements, would not that become even a bigger problem if private corporations were to handle civil servants' wages? Private corporations have no incentive to adapt to the needs within public administration, it would be agencies and unions that would have to adapt to the services offered.

As the section on previous research shows, it might take decades for SMMs to develop a good functionality since they entail exceptional levels of policy learning for their own employees and for "costumer" organisations. However, the Swedish Government Service Centre is in constant expansion mode, at what point in time might it be able to develop a good functionality?

Labour and efficacy

As stated in the theory section, the payroll consultants produce a service that enables the University of Gothenburg to have employees and to produce higher education and science that is the use value for both employees at the university, citizens and the state. (Employees at the university can be employed and can do the kind of work they do, citizens can be educated and use the results of research, and the state can position itself favourably in the global knowledge production that gives status and creates business.) The technology of the payroll consultants labour has changed due to a new division of labour (supported by new ICT-systems), where the task of personalised and specialised services has been removed

altogether from payroll consultants profession. The payroll consultants' work has been re-arranged from a direct and proactive service to a distant and restricted service. The use value of the service has decreased, the amount of work seems unchanged but the quality is reduced. The reduction of quality is closely connected to the loss of relations; the exchange of information has been reduced to a bare minimum. No wonder the payroll consultants experience that the meaningfulness within their job has been reduced and questioned. The results of this study suggest that their jobs and the expert personalised support they used to offer was more valuable for the university employees. More responsibility is now placed on each employee and this potentially competes for time and efforts that should be directed towards qualitative education and science production. And teachers and researchers might also become exposed by issues regarding their employment privileges and rights due to the fact that the payroll consultants no longer can control, correct or prevent errors to the extent they used to do.

The payroll consultants worked with the overarching mental conception that laws, agreements, policies and regulations should be adhered to. Each employee should be reim-bursed for his or her labour according to the same principles. They should receive what has been agreed upon, not more, not less. And this responsibility was at the end placed upon them, the payroll consultants, as well as making sure everyone receives their correct wages each month. With the transition to the Swedish Government Service Centre, this conception has rather been removed than changed; now the correctness is not considered important anymore. No one is responsible, except maybe the individual employee, if he/she is able to know. The ruling mental conception for payroll consultants now seem to be reduced to: Do only what is asked of you by the computer systems, do not ask questions, do not think independently, the less you know or ask the easier for you to do your job. How this affects the situation for civil servants is something I think should be studied further.

It seems like a situation where both the state and its employees lose, so who benefits? I think one has to look at the long-term benefits for private interests when the public sector is decreased and weakened. When the state is not able to offer jobs that are more interesting or better employment conditions than private corporations want to do, the private market can grow. It all falls back on the mechanism of formal subjection of labour to capital; one has to sell one's labour in order to live a decent life, and most people will search for oppor-tunities that will grant as much decency as possible. The state has offered relatively good jobs within its administration, jobs with relatively good benefits and salaries. With the transfer to the Swedish Government Service Centre, I would argue that the payroll consult-ants have been submitted to real subjectification to capital. The work has been divided and simplified, their expert knowledge has been made redundant, and this will open up the profession for workers with less skill and training. The profession has been impoverished, and each payroll consultant now has become more easily replaceable. Their position in the labour market has been weakened, which is a good preparation for privatisation.

The Swedish Government Service Centre explicitly opens up for private competition

within this field that is something that might affect the "core operations" of agencies even further. Today the Swedish state has monopoly regarding higher education and production of science, the turn to the Swedish Government Service Centre might weaken the argument for this because it might decrease the working conditions and maybe eventually the quality. If higher education and science were to be privatised, it is likely the range and focus of education and science would be aligned with private interests and areas of investment.

The responsibility of the state

Many of the consequences related to the transition to the Swedish Government Service Centre have a governing nature; the changes have structured the space for possible actions, most apparently for the payroll consultants who describe that they have found themselves in a situation where they experience an extremely limited space for action compared to what they were used to. They also had to learn new social interaction practices, a new and specific conduct in their interaction with others or the "costumer" which used to be a colleague. In addition, those who were previously colleagues have been governed by new practices and systems to the position of "costumer". This completely changes the social relations and governs both parties further into subject positions. It appears to me to be a twisted example of what Larsson et al. (2012) define as "new patterns of responsibilization" where civil servants are led to subject positions of "customer/user" rather than employee. It is a new level of neoliberalism and governing aimed at the internal relations of the public administration. Employees who have complicated payroll errands or who needs to correct something now have to be much more active in solving the issue, there is no one who will actively help them like there was before. The levels of self-discipline needed have increased for both payroll consultants and for the university employees, and it is not just discipline, it is also compliance and acceptance of the conditions offered by computer systems.

When the responsibility is placed on individual employees who are not able to individually comprehend collective agreements regulating their conditions, it might be experienced as better for the individual to negotiate his or her own conditions instead of having people employed to work full time with collective agreements that are not followed. The changes related to the Swedish Government Service Centre might weaken the unions and the privileges for civil servants that historically has been negotiated and build on collectively.

In the theory section, I wrote about the state and neoliberalism and how they work together. The neoliberal state's main purpose is to guard private interests and to maximise market transactions and incorporate all human action in markets. The Swedish Government Service Centre is a project where the internal relations of public administration is turned into a market; it is transformed and prepared for marketization and privatisation. It is a typical neoliberal project that, as Dunleavy et al. (2006) define as characteristics of neolib-

eral projects; disintegrates organisations, creates competition and new customers, and emphasises monetary goals and economic efficacy. It also creates more disposable workers within the public sector.

The project of the Swedish Government Service Centre has the aim of integrating systems and processes, of creating a more coherent public sector, like typical digital era-governance (DEG) projects. Moreover, as I wrote in the theory chapter "The reintegration is mainly aimed at centralising and streamlining government functions, and also to save through large-scale economies and single big contracts with suppliers of ICT". The Swedish Government Service Centre has also truly become its website due to the restricted means of contacting or interacting with them. It really seems to be a perfect example of a neoliberal state's governing in a digital-era.

This study gives evidence which strongly challenges the beliefs that technology will abolish bureaucracy, or create a more just and equal society, it rather points towards the contrary. The Swedish Government Service Centre should be further studied within this contextualisation, also its new physical service centres and other services for citizens.

Public administration values
This quote comes from a document that defines the commissions and values which should be adhered to by Swedish agencies.

> Thereby the agencies are part of a political system and function as the last instance in the chain of commissions and responsibilities from the parliament and are responsible for the realisation of the government's politics. The agencies have, in this realisation, a position of obedience in relation to the government. […] The operations should be conducted with departure in the basic values of democracy, rule of law, and efficacy. (Finansdepartementet, 2016:8)

The quote clearly states that agencies should obey the government and realise its politics. However, in the light of this study one might question all of the three values that are supposed to be guiding public administration. Democracy and rule of law are not adhered to when collective agreements and other rights are not guarded by anyone and they lose their power and meaning. And efficacy regarding the use value created with tax-payers money and the rule of law with which tax-payers money is distributed among civil servants is questionable. I do think an important question is to what degree agencies should obey? Should they do it blindly, or is the knowledge and experiences of civil servants worth something in the protection of the guiding values for public administration? Is compliance the most important value in a democratic society?

Conclusions

I will here answer the research questions first and then the main aim of the thesis.

As shown in the discussion, the Swedish Government Service Centre is clearly a ne-oliberal project aimed at opening new markets for private actors. The marketization is possible to further with the help of ICT, and the public administration and service can be further and further transformed to digital tools through which each and every one handles their own errands.

The work situation for payroll consultants has changed in several ways: Their profession has been submitted to real subjectification to capital, it has been impoverished, and its position at the labour market weakened. The work situation was radically worsened and most of the meaningfulness and joy of their work were lost for them. The loss of relations was experienced as the worst part of the change. Work is a social activity and social interaction is needed both for the efficiency of the work and for the feeling of being part of something, of a group, of an organisation, of being included and appreciated. When solitude is forced and relations are forbidden (no calling to "costumers") or strictly regulated (certain lines to repeat and no personalised interaction allowed) it is perceived as a punishment and a torture.

The consequences for employees at the university that I have found evidence of are several, and listed below, unfortunately, I have not been able to explore them in further depth in this study. However, I believe that it needs to be done.

> ➢ Unequal treatment due to lack of control and knowledge regarding collective agreements at the university.

> ➢ A need to be more active in guarding one's rights and errands. Especially for those who have complicated errands.

> ➢ Difficulties to find help and advice, especially for the administrators employed at the university who now have to take more responsibility than before. The changes also entail an increase in workload and it affects the work environment in a negative way, mostly for administrators, but maybe also for managers and other employees.

> ➢ Delayed raises due to limitations of the new ICT.

Effects on the status, responsibilities, or privileges for civil servants in general?

The rearrangement of public administration that the Swedish Government Service Centre entails does change the status and responsibilities for labourers within the payroll consultant profession as explained above. All civil servants are positioned as customers of the service centre rather than state employees. What consequence this will have in the long run, and what further privatisation might give cause to has to be followed up by the unions and by researchers.

Rearrangements of this size and scope are bound to have a wide variety of consequences that cannot be calculated in advance. It is logical to assume that conditions for citizens will change when conditions for civil servants change. The incorporation of all direct public service into the Swedish Government Service Centre will most probably also affect citizens. This also needs to be monitored, and a big responsibility falls on social scientists who have the best resources for this.

Further research

An important focus for further research on the Swedish Government Service Centre would be how unions' work locally at agencies has been affected. This study has touched upon the subject but there seems to be several problems arising for the union representatives in connection to the university becoming a customer of the service centre. Especially for the union, this would be very relevant to look into since members might easily assume that the union is not doing what it should when in reality new systems and routines appear as new obstacles. But it also seems to me to be very relevant for civil servants to understand how their rights and employment terms might be diminishing. An aspect of this is how many and serious errors are submitted and accepted now. What are the implications for employees at the university? And how are the collective agreements now interpreted and used when they payroll consultants expertise has disappeared?

Another interesting aspect is the role of private corporations and influences from international actors. PwC and Accenture helped prepare for the Swedish Government Service Centre, they are two big international corporations who specialise in the management of large organisations. It is briefly mentioned by Westling Palm (2011) that Norway has already implemented the functions that are now being commissioned to the Swedish Government Service Centre. What are the future aims of this project and what actors are involved or have interests? When the same ICT-systems are bought by states to handle their complete public administration, huge amounts of capital are involved, and the private market within public administration expands.

I also believe administrators work environment and the importance of their work should be studied further, and conditions and implications compared between "regular" agencies and the Swedish Government Service Centre. Administrative work is a cornerstone of any organisation, but it is an underdeveloped research field. Now there is a great opportunity to learn more about the importance of these functions and the conditions of this kind of work and to theorise about its role for management and organisational development.

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