

Abstract

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Author: Bertil Rolandsson.

Doctoral Dissertation at the Department of Sociology,
Göteborg University.

Box 720, SE-40530 Göteborg, Sweden.

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This thesis analyses how the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) dealt with its concerns regarding IT-development in the period 1976 to 1996, how it framed the socio-political importance of IT and how it sought to reformulate internal and external relationships in order to sustain its identity as a progressive and responsible political force. We can follow how political concepts of technology, established in the age of industrialisation by the union, state and employers' organisation, were challenged as a result of IT development, institutional change, international competition and the growing importance of knowledge and education for productivity and personal development.

By using concepts like logic of membership and logic of influence, the study describes how LO delegates seek to address their members, other social groups and influential actors that recognise the union's influence. These policy-oriented strategies are analysed as framing processes, where symbols are amplified, or relations with influential actors are over-bridged, in order to legitimise and reproduce established frames of interpretation. Furthermore, discussions about contemporary problems of political legitimacy have implied that political organisations are forced to take account of a constantly broader range of social groups and influential actors. LO delegates would then also be driven to extend their framing of IT and related issues. This can give rise to controversies that threaten to fragment political unity. In this study, however, cohesion within the LO were sustained through its adoption of alternative interpretations of IT and loose ties between heterogeneous actors and social groups. The political agenda and the concern for IT became less limited to work and intrinsic logics of technological developments, and more dependent on knowledge and education generally.

As the problems of legitimacy, IT development and the increasing importance of knowledge, are not only of concern to trade unions, but rather are issues generally associated with the transition to an information society, these results may also reflect a more general shift in the political framing of information technology.

The author uses records of proceedings and reports from LO central congresses as well as extensive secondary sources to reconstruct the evolution of delegates' framing of IT development and its political significance.

Keywords: information technology, the union, framing strategies, legitimacy, modernisation dilemma, logic of membership, logic of influence, information society.