The Consensing Approach to Strategizing
The Dynamics of Dialogue in Public Sector Digital Transformation

Kristian Norling

Department of Applied Information Technology

The thesis will be defended in public in
Torg Grön (4th floor), Patricia Building on May 3rd at 13.00,
at the Department of Applied Information Technology
Forskningsgången 6, Gothenburg

Faculty opponent: Associate Professor Egil Øvrelid,
Department of Informatics, University of Oslo

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

ABSTRACT:

This thesis explores the role of consensing, a process of cognitive consensus-building through the mechanisms of sensing and synthesizing, in digital transformation strategy formulation within the Swedish public sector. It introduces the novel concepts of consensus surplus (a shared understanding that exceeds the requirements for action), deficit (insufficient shared understanding to support strategy implementation), and debt (the accumulation of unresolved issues due to a lack of consensus-building). The study argues that consensing plays a critical role in aligning strategic intent and shared understanding among stakeholders, leading to these varied outcomes. This process is enabled by the organizational infrastructure of dialogue, which encompasses generative, diagnostic, and integrative dialogue types that facilitate the development of shared understanding.

Drawing upon a critical realist stance and an abductive and retroductive research approach, this study offers a nuanced perspective on the cognitive dynamics of consensing based on an in-depth analysis of qualitative data from interviews, surveys, and document analysis. It challenges prevailing notions and encourages a more collaborative approach to strategy formulation. The thesis conceptualizes consensing as a mechanism for aligning strategic intent with shared understanding, a novel approach in the formulation of digital transformation strategies.

The thesis contributes to digital strategizing literature by highlighting the role of consensing in bridging the gap between intended and realized strategies. It proposes actionable strategies for fostering effective dialogue and mitigating status quo bias, thereby facilitating more dynamic and inclusive strategy formulation processes. The research also outlines potential avenues for future inquiry, such as exploring the impact of organizational culture on consensing processes and examining the role of digital platforms in facilitating consensus-building.

By presenting consensing as a vital tool for organizations navigating digital transformation, this research enriches the discourse in digital strategizing and organizational practice. It advocates for a deeper understanding and application of consensing to enhance the efficacy of strategy formulation in the public sector, with implications for both theory and practice.