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Innovation in the chain

Chain-computerisation for Work and Income in motion: Where is it headed?

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Abstract: The Work and Income chain (SUWI) is based on the principle 'work before benefits' and has developed an information-infrastructure for this that serves both objectives. Here, the focus is primarily on the co-operation among the various groups of professionals within the government, while private employment agencies, job seekers and employers have virtually remained out of the picture. Recently, the political decision has been made that, once again, the citizen himself must be responsible for finding a new job and that the Unemployment Insurance Agency (UWV) – integrated with the Centre for Work and Income (CWI) – again must primarily function as a 'benefits factory'. It is explained that the information-infrastructure is less suited for this new arrangement. Moreover, three points for improvement are indicated for the theory of Chain-computerisation.

Keywords: SUWI, BKWI (Bureau of chain-computerisation for Work and Income), chain-computerisation, digital client file (DCF), employment agency, income support

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1 The computerisation of the national government

ICT is penetrating to an increasing degree into the primary processes of governmental organisations. Many government organisations are experiencing a great deal of pressure to digitalise their services as quickly as possible. To this end, large ICT projects are started regularly with the primary goal of improving service to the private citizen and/or increasing efficiency. Unfortunately, too many large, governmental ICT projects still get out of hand. This was also apparent from the 'Evaluatie Maatregelen grote ICT-projecten', [Evaluation Measures for large ICT projects] that Minister Donner sent to the Lower Chamber on 3 February 2011 (TK, 2011a).

In the social security sector, as well, the demand for better service has been a recurring phenomenon for years. In May 2005, the expert commission for information and electronic services for Work and Income (SUWI,) produced the report *De Burger Bediend!* [Serving the Citizens!] (Keller, Groen and Van Lunteren, 2005). In this report, a number of recommendations are made on the manner in which ICT can play a role in making service provision within the Work and Income chain more accessible, user-friendly and efficient. One of the recommendations is the realisation of a common SUWI file for all chain partners: the Digital Client File (DCF). Through better ICT support, the most important bottlenecks in the Work and Income chain, such as the extensive intake, the necessity of providing data multiple

times and the lack of chain-sized status information can be solved. By extension, the Once-only Data Request Act [Wet op de Eenmalige Gegevensuitvraag (WEU)] played a role here. Based on this Act, since 1 January 2008 there has been a prohibition in the Work and Income chain on re-requesting data that is already known.

2 Complexity of the SUWI chains

The use of ICT has far-reaching consequences for the design and functioning of government organisations, certainly with government organisations belonging to a social chain in which various parties with divergent interests takes part in the process. According to Jan Grijpink (2000, p. 161), chains can be seen as temporary patterns of co-operation around a dominant chain problem. A dominant chain problem is a persistent problem throughout the chain that a chain partner cannot solve on his own and that, in case of repeated failure, brings the chain into disrepute (Grijpink 1997). In order to be able to solve a dominant chain problem, structural co-operation is essential among the involved parties. The presence of a dominant chain problem can ensure the necessary cohesion in the chain and is important for sufficient support to realise large-scale cooperation and information exchange.

Many efforts in social chains go wrong due to the complexity and limited manageability of chain co-operation (Grijpink, 2007, p. 11). Due to the contradictory objectives of the parties and the lack of coordinating authority in the chain, the chain environment has a high degree of irrationality, which makes the chain processes unpredictable. The collective policy and decision-making processes that are of major influence on the ultimate outcome, work differently in chains than within organisations. Jan Grijpink argues that a specific system concept can only be successful if it fits within the mission of a specific chain and contributes to the solution of the chain's dominant chain problem. Moreover, chain parties see the usefulness of the common results primarily in terms of their own objectives and sub-objectives and their own costs and benefits. These personal objectives may be related to the dominant chain problem but could also focus on completely different problems. This can be partially explained by the fact that actors generally operate in several chains at the same time and, therefore, must deal with more than one dominant chain problem.

The organisations within the SUWI domain are linked in the Work and Income chain (or: the SUWI chain). However, closer inspection of the work processes shows that, in fact, there is no question of only one chain; there are two separate chains: a Work guidance chain that focuses on job-seekers and an Income support chain that focuses on welfare recipients (Leijser & Ghosh, 2007; Plomp, 2007, p. 255). Leijser and Ghosh describe, as the mission of the work guidance chain: "*find as many jobs for as many people as possible as quickly as possible*" and call attention to the fact that employers and reintegration companies – important chain partners – barely play a role in the chain-computerisation of the work guidance chain (Leijser & Ghosh, 2007). Plomp reported in the Chain Landscape Research that the mission of the Income support chain "*trustworthy and legitimate benefits*" is different than that of the Work guidance chain and also has a different dominant chain problem (identity fraud). On the basis of the theory of Chain-computerisation, he questions the policy to develop one and the same information-infrastructure for the SUWI chain because, according to the theory of Chain-computerisation, a unique, chain-specific information-infrastructure is necessary for tackling each dominant chain problem (Plomp, 2007, p. 255). Thus, using the theoretical framework of Chain-computerisation, it can be predicted that, for example, the Digital Client File cannot

– or only with great difficulty – be realised and that it will not be used chain-wide in the combined SUWI chains. Although 'work before benefits' is an excellent policy, Chain-computerisation warns us about developing one common information-infrastructure for it.

3 Decision-making in the SUWI chain(s)

In her Master's thesis, Fleur Pullen (Pullen, 2008) focuses primarily on how the administrative decision-making process with respect to the DCF developed. Using the arena model for decision-making (Koppenjan, 1993) and the Chain-computerisation assessment tools (Grijpink, 1997), she analyses the factors that have influenced the decision-making in the realisation of the DCF. She concludes that:

1. the DCF, during the period studied, was elevated step by step from a means to an end and that the focus in five decision-making rounds was shifted from the improvement of the service – the original goal – to the realisation of a chain-wide information system. The success of the Digital Client File appeared, moreover, to be guaranteed because the necessary information provisions were already available (SUWInet-Inkijk and the SUWI Data Register);
2. it is primarily the degree of organisation of the chain and the dominant chain problem that are the determining factors in the decision-making arenas. In addition to this, chain parties appear to employ different (sometimes contradictory) strategic options and to focus on different arguments to influence the decision-making in the chain.

The complexity and the limited controllability of chains were confirmed by her SUWI analysis. In five decision-making rounds, a political success was achieved with the DCF, although the Digital Client File is more a pipeline of technique and infrastructure which the chain parties can use in their work. The use of the Digital Client File in the work processes still proved, however, not to be sufficiently well developed and the goals of the Once-only Data Request Act still appear to have been insufficiently realised. (in the year 2008).

4 The situation with DCF in 2011

At the moment, the SUWI chain 'Work and Income' looks substantially different. The CWI has been incorporated into the UWV [Unemployment Insurance Agency] and the UWV is being confronted with severe cutbacks. During the previous financial crisis, a great many (temporary) job coaches were hired. For these co-workers, their term of employment is now coming to an end. In his New Year's speech, Joop Linthorst announced to the UWV that there would be cutbacks in its *work guidance programme*. The number of job centres which the UWV participates in would be cut from around 130 to around 30. Legislation is in the making to transfer the tasks of sheltered workshops (WSW), disabled-youth benefits (Wajong) and the mentoring of those who cannot find a job to the municipalities. The UWV will then, once again, become a "benefits factory." These developments will also influence chain-computerisation for the years to come. Through the restriction of the number of government agencies and the cutbacks on work guidance programmes, the necessity for developing and using chain facilities could fade into the background.

From the evaluation of the previously-mentioned Once-only Data Request Act Work and Income (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment [SZW], 2010), it appears that the principle of once-only data request is beginning to work within the chain. In particular, SUWInet-Inkijk causes this. This chain service ensures that chain

partners can consult each other's data and data from other sources. Every month, more than 5 million messages are requested via the infrastructure of BKWI [Bureau chain-computerisation for Work and Income], over 1.1 million clients. Of these requests, 650,000 are unique (Klapwijk, 2011). An increasing number of sources are being added and new customers with new needs are also coming in. Thus, alongside of municipalities and UWV, sources such as Land Registry, RDW, SVB, DUO, Nibud – and soon the Inland Revenue Service – will be connected. The tendency is to strengthen the information position of government agencies which co-operate in chains within the domain of Work and Income. Alongside of this, services are being developed within the framework of the DCF: various modules for professionals and, in part, also for private citizens and entrepreneurs.

What is striking is that the private citizen and the employer are not systematically involved in the development and the use of the chain facility, so that not all chain partners in the work guidance chain are supported equally well. A comparison with the initiative by MantelPlan is relevant here (Zorgvisie, 2011). MantelPlan is a service that helps the care-giving relative organise the care that he or she provides. He or she can assign friends and relatives and/or care providers and -- via a website -- ensure that the offer for help is geared to the need for care. If no 'match' for specific type of care is found within the first circle of friends and relatives, then a home care organisation is approached. The home care organisation guarantees that, ultimately, the care will be provided if no 'match' is found. This example shows that changing the perspective and involving the private citizen and the home care organisation leads to other solutions: solutions in which the citizen – and not the government organisation -- is more central. In the Work and Income chain, specific services for specific target groups could also be developed. An example of this could be: offering a platform between job seekers and reintegration companies in order to provide specific support at the right moment to the job-seekers and to link this to an action plan that is monitored via the calendar function on the job seeker's mobile phone. Administrative aspects and the monitoring of the success of reintegration are hidden in the background and reported to the government agencies in question.

5 Conclusions

These developments in the SUWI chains show, -- in our opinion -- the following:

1. The decision-making, realisation and use of chain facilities is strongly influenced by politics and the legislature;
2. Job-seekers and employers have a strong interest in a well-functioning work guidance chain, but the chain facilities are not focused on bringing them together; in the SUWI chains, they are primarily designed to create a good information position for the government agencies in the chain;
3. Politics is shifting the responsibility for work more and more in the direction of the private citizen and his support environment. Increasing self-reliance is being required of them. A good information position is, therefore, an important condition for success. This is in line with the recent letter from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment to the Lower Chamber (TK, 2011b);
4. The reduction of the number of government organisations in the chain and the emphasis on economising per chain partner may lead to the development of chain services being curtailed. On the other hand, there is, increasingly, a strong need to give job seekers and employers a degree of responsibility in the chain. This can lead to a deadlock in the development of chain services in the Work guidance chain;

5. The presence of a chain facility and a chain organisation could lead to the development of new services for chain partners or individual organisations in the chain. This can cause a 'function creep' that, in the light of the theoretical framework of Chain-computerisation, cannot be characterised as chain facility and that could possibly also fall outside the scope of the chain. Then, for example, services would be developed and managed by the chain organisation while the service's primary goal is to support only one party in the chain. This raises administrative and legal issues.

6 A look at the theory of Chain-computerisation

The first important insight with respect to the theory of Chain-computerisation is that the degree of organisation of the chain and the dominant chain problem in the chain are the factors that most often influence the composition and results of the decision arenas.
A second important insight is that chain parties try to influence the course of the process in many different ways. In particular, the arguments 'solution' and 'participation' are often used by the actors. It emerges that chain parties employ conflicting strategic options and focus on divergent arguments. This underlines the irrationality of chain decision-making and makes chain solutions vulnerable. It appears that important actors – private citizens and businesses – are systematically excluded from the decision-making, even if they must assume an increasing amount of responsibility for the issues at hand.

With the developments described in this article in the back of our minds, we could, in the future, improve the Theory of Chain-computerisation on three points:

1. The chain theory focuses on positions and interests of organisations and professionals within the chain. The growing importance and the increasing influence of private citizens on the decision-making and co-operation process in the chains deserves more attention;
2. The dominant chain problem functions as the driving force for the chain co-operation but shifts over the course of time. This is also the consequence of the influencing strategies of the chain parties themselves who use the dominant chain problem as an argument for influencing the process.
3. The picture emerges that a chain facility and a chain organisation could lead to the tendency for autonomous growth and improvement for the provisions. Further research on the role that chain organisations could play in the chain decision-making and chain co-operation process is recommended.

Biography: André Leijser, MA has a degree in Business Administration from the University of Groningen. Over the past fifteen years, he has gathered extensive experience in ICT and management consultancy in the area of e-government. He specialises in key registers, chain-computerisation, sharing, sourcing and ICT enabled innovation of public organisations. As of 1 April, he has his own company focusing on the empowerment of private citizens and entrepreneurs through the use of new technologies, including location-based services, dynamic planning and on-line collaboration.

Fleur Pullen, *MscBA, MPIM* (1980) has a degree in Business Administration. As a trainee, at Het Expertise Centrum (HEC) she explored both policy formation and policy implementation at the Ministry of OCW [Education, Cultural Affairs and Science], the Ministry of SZW [Social Affairs and Employment] and the Office of chain-computerisation Work and Income (BKWI).
Her Master's thesis in Public Information Management focused on decision-making with regard to the Digital Client File (DCF) and the encompassing shifts in objectives and results. At the moment, she is employed at the RDW [Government Road Transport Agency]. She is co-founder and board member of Jong RDW, chairman of the alumni organisation of HEC-trainees and a member of HYPE (Hartman Young Professionals for Europe).

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