EXPLORING BARRIERS TO THE DIGITALIZATION OF SCHOOLS: A MANAGERIAL BLAME-GAME WITH FOUR DIMENSIONS

L. Svensson, S.M. Babaheidari

University West (SWEDEN)

Abstract

Schools are digitalized in many ways, by many actors and from many different directions. In this paper we focus on understanding how schools are digitalized top down, i.e. as the result of initiatives from school principals, and managers in the municipality. Six principals and managers were interviewed, and the results show a set of social, technical and organizational barriers between municipality and schools that are framed in four different ways: Upward blame, Downward blame, Mutual blame and Internal blame. The paper concludes by suggesting four different approaches to reducing the risk of these barriers to obstruct the integration of digital technologies into schools.

Existing research on the “Digitalization of schools” deals with a wide variety of perspectives and issues. For instance, teachers’ and students’ attitudes and beliefs (e.g. Ertmer et al. 2012, Tallvid et al. 2014), design of educational technology (e.g. ref). How technology can enhance students learning (e.g. ref), and teachers’ and students’ actual use of it (Tallvid et al. 2014). However, there are surprisingly few studies that explore the role of decision-makers in this context, i.e. how to manage a school with a well-functioning Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure. It entails not only close coordination between ICT managers and school staff, it must also facilitate all the school’s ICT-based activities. How to manage the school-related potential capabilities of ICT-related investments is of importance, especially when organizations demand that the initial anticipated educational benefits of all ICT heavy-cost investments must be justified. However, digitalization of a school is an ongoing process involving multiple stakeholder groups and actors, each with its own concerns and interests. On a global level, it is affected and framed by local, national and international policies as well as a growing body of research on the potential merits and pitfalls of IT-related educational resources. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that deans and principals also have to consider the expectations of students, parents, teachers and other professional categories that are involved in the school setting. All in all, managing the effective diffusion of ICT into school setting/context is a complex multifaceted managerial task which need to be further researched.

In this paper we explore the attitudes, beliefs and experiences from three school principals (K-12) and three IT managers at the department of education, in a municipality in Sweden.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, and analyzed in two cycles. Firstly, by using the core constructs of the technology acceptance model (TAM), and secondly by using a framework by Ertmer (1999) concerning barriers for technology integration.

The overall research question is:
How are barriers to the digitalization of schools manifested between different levels of school management?

Keywords: Digitalization of schools.