



DISSERTATION BRIEF SERIES 2018:02  
**THE RISE AND FALL OF 'RESULTS INITIATIVES'  
IN SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT AID**

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The Rise and Fall of ‘Results Initiatives’ in Swedish Development  
Aid

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Development Dissertation Brief 2018:02

Expertgruppen för biståndsanalys

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Please refer to the present report as:

Vähämäki, J. (2018), *The Rise and Fall of 'Results Initiatives' in Swedish Development Aid*, EBA Development Dissertation Brief 2018:02, Expert Group for Aid Studies, Sweden.

The Expert Group for Aid Studies - EBA - is a Government committee analysing and evaluating Swedish international development aid. This report can be downloaded free of charge at [www.eba.se](http://www.eba.se)

Printed by Elanders Sverige AB

Stockholm 2018

Cover design by Julia Demchenko

## 1. Introduction

The search for results or effectiveness of aid has been of major concern for Sida and Swedish public aid since the “birth” of public development aid in the 1960s. As early as 1962, the first Government Bill for Development Cooperation declared the efforts for effectiveness a “major task, which also ought to lie in the interest of the recipient” and which “would require a mutual cooperation between the donor and the recipient” (Gov 1962:100:8). Ever since 1965, Sida<sup>1</sup>, the main government public agency for development aid, has sought to operationalize these political ambitions.

One way in which Sida (Swedish International Development Agency) has tried to operationalize this political ambition has been by launching and implementing so-called “results initiatives”<sup>2</sup>. This was done in 1971, 1981, 1998 and 2012. What is interesting about these four “results initiatives” is that they have all been introduced with the intention to “systematize results” from Sida-financed aid projects and programmes *in addition* to already established results measurement and management routines within the agency. So, the launching of the initiatives could be understood as occasions when Sida felt it necessary to further specify its answers to the questions of “whether aid works” or “whether aid produces results”, which probably are the most common question posed to a development aid worker. However, all four results initiatives have had lifespans of only about 3–10 years. So, it seems that they have served the purpose for a while, but that they have all fallen out of favor after some time in implementation. Why is this so?

In literature on management reforms it has been argued that different political reform ideas typically come and go in different “tides of reforms” (Ferlie et al. 2009; Light 2006; Light 2011). A predominant explanation for “tides of reforms” in previous literature is that people tend to continue believing in rationality and rational models (see for example Abrahamsson 1996; Brunsson 2006; Ferlie et al. 2009; Sundström 2003), this despite the fact that they might fail to achieve their objective. Ferlie et al. (2009) for example argues

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<sup>1</sup> The organization SIDA (Swedish International Development Authority) was formed in 1965. In 1995, four development organizations, including SIDA, merged to form Sida (Swedish International Development Agency). Although SIDA and Sida have different organizational set ups, in this thesis I will use the term Sida in my general discussions and conclusions about the organization studied.

<sup>2</sup> I use the concept “results initiatives” for the four initiatives studied launched at Sida in 1971, 1981, 1998 and 2012.

that since political parties in modern democracies continuously need to demonstrate how they are beneficial to their voters the quest for “performance” or “results” remains a permanent feature. However, since there is an intrinsic “attribution problem” with the fact of actually knowing what has caused positive or negative changes in society one might expect that there will always be a new quest for new models and techniques that can actually deliver measures and knowledge about “results” (Ferlie et al. 2009).

Brunsson (2009) has argued that the rise and fall of reforms could be seen as a routinized and stable element in organizations. Brunsson (2006) explains the rise of new reforms with “mechanisms of hope”, i.e. that organizations and people continue hoping that reforms will this time succeed, despite previous efforts to do so. The continuous hope explains why new reforms are continuously being launched. The rise in new reforms is also possible due to mechanisms of forgetfulness, which ensures, according to Brunsson and Olsen (1993) that experience of the past will not interfere with the reform; it supports the fact that reform interest is always in the future rather than the present. Also, since implementation often creates new problems, new solutions are always attractive for organizational members (Brunsson and Olsen 1993). Subsequently, it has been argued that government officials responsible for designing new information and control systems ignore history (Sundström 2006). Only single-loop learning, i.e. a repeated attempt to solve the same problem with the same solution, takes place and mistakes from the previous attempt seldom occur when new reforms are introduced (Sundström 2006). A proposition is thus that management reforms seldom, if ever, lead to changed practice.

Scholars have also explained the fact that different management technologies during certain times become objects of great attention and that there exists a supply-and-demand market for these types of technologies (see for example Abrahamsson and Eisenman 2008; Gill and Whittle 1993). It is argued that there is a market for certain types of management models, often set and planned by, for example, a “fashion-setting community”, such as consultants, business and media. Ideas and management models are then on certain occasions, occasions on which they reach the status of a fashion, seen by managers in organizations as being useful for the organization (Abrahamsson 1996; Abrahamsson and Eisenman 2008; Røvik 2011; Gill and Whittle 1993).

A criticism of earlier studies on “tides of reforms” is that many of these studies have been done mainly on the “surface level”, focusing only on “talk” and “headlines” (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). Studies have mainly focused on how actors in an organization’s environment behave when they try to convince others to follow rational reform ideas. In Brunsson’s (2006, 2009) studies, for example, reforms are often invented by “reformers”, who are typically politicians or government officials, whereas state agencies are the “reformees” who are to implement the reforms. Previous literature has thus mainly explained organizational behavior as well as the tides of reforms from the point of view of different mechanisms that drive organizations to be seen as effective. Focus in research has been to discuss how and why organizations tend to continuously need to demonstrate that they are rational. It has to a lesser extent taken into account mechanisms that drive people and organizations to, for example, show solidarity, actions that people and organizations simply do because of, for example, feelings and emotions.

Moreover, few studies have been conducted to capture the whole life cycle of the reforms and demonstrate what happens with reform ideas over a longer time period (Røvik 2007; Tomson 2008). Also, few studies have focused on what actually happens *within* organizations when the reforms are implemented (Clark 2004; Williams 2004). A continuous call, has thus been to study in-depth what happens and how reforms and technologies in fact are implemented in organizational day-to-day practices (Burchell et al. 1980; DiMaggio 1988; Hopwood 1983; Kurunmäki et al. 2011; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011; Zucker 1987) as well as understanding how the intraorganizational behavior of organizational members and conflicting demands actually affect what organizations are doing (Greenwood et al. 2008).

The purpose of the study is to increase our understanding of tides of reforms by identifying and discussing mechanisms that drive the rise, as well as the fall, of management reforms. This is done by studying four so-called ‘results initiatives’ launched at Sida in 1971, 1981, 1998 and 2012. The following key questions are asked to the four empirical cases, i.e. the four results initiatives:

- What influences public sector aid organizations to initiate results initiatives?
- What happens when the results initiatives are launched, and what happens thereafter? How do different groups of people act and react?
- And, what happens when the initiatives fall out of favor?

It is argued there being two rationales in aid: the solidarity rationale and the effectiveness rationale. The solidarity rationale is based on motives altruism and doing something good for someone else (Ramalingam 2013; Riddell 2007; Lumsdaine 1993). The act of giving or providing aid can thus be viewed as something that for many people has a value of its own. The effectiveness rationale is in turn based on making visible how inputs are transformed to outputs or outcomes or 'results', i.e. demonstrating a causal change process. The optimal scenario for development aid would be that aid supports both the solidarity and the effectiveness rationales, and that measures taken to increase and show effectiveness also lead to increased effectiveness as well as increased trust and solidarity. However, scholars have shown that this has not always been the case (see for example Adcroft and Willis 2005; Behn 1995; Jacobsson and Sundström 2006; Smith 1993), and that there might be so-called "unintended consequences" or "perverse effects" (see, for example Adcroft and Willis 2005; Natsios 2010; Smith 1993) occurring from implementation of results measurement and management. Unintended consequences might be that management only focuses on the quantified aspects that are part of the performance measurement scheme, at the expense of unquantified aspects of performance, or that only short-term targets are pursued at the expense of legitimate long-term objectives (Smith 1993) or that staff spend increasing amounts of time collecting data and monitoring their activities and not enough time on managing (Diefenbach 2009; Forssell and Westerberg 2014; Johansson and Lindgren 2013; Meyer and Gupta 1994; Natsios 2010). Natsios (2010) has argued that results measurement has led to "counter-bureaucracy" and an "obsessive measurement disorder" within the aid donor agency USAID and, similarly, Diefenbach (2009:986) has claimed that the unintended consequences of the widespread "efficiency and measurement fever" have led to a "whole range of negative psycho-social and organizational effects". However, there are also studies proposing that there might not need to be a conflict or a tension between different rationales. Wällstedt (2015) has for e.g. shown that staff most often learnt to adjust to the multiple demands placed on them. The study aims at discussing how the tension between the solidarity and effectiveness rationale can be understood as leading to "tides of reforms" and the consequent re-introduction of similar reform ideas.

A main contribution of the study is to provide insights as to what happens *within* an organization and over a longer time perspective when an organization is faced with conflicting demands from two rationales. I believe that the fact that similar results initiatives have all risen and fallen tells us a great deal, not only concerning the actual possibility to report on results and which types or results are “reportable,” but also concerning the institutionalization processes, in addition to what development aid practice is all about.

Theoretically, the study is primarily based on ideas developed within organizational institutionalism on what we know about mechanisms that contribute to the rise and fall of management reforms. Within organizational institutionalism it is typically perceived that organizational action is shaped by ideas and interactions taking place in the broader environment of organizations. As organizations need to be legitimate in order to survive, they act in line with institutionalized ideas and expectations (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Greenwood et al. 2008). The processes of how ideas become “taken for granted” or become institutionalized both in an organization’s institutional environment and within an organization, have been described as the *institutionalization process* (Zucker, 1987). The institutionalization process is seen as a way of describing the rise of management reforms. However, since it is commonly seen that ideas and technologies often have difficulties to “stick” in organizations, literature has discussed processes of how they become de-institutionalized (Dacin et al. 2008; Greenwood 2008; Abrahamson and Fairchild 1999; Røvik 1996; Oliver 1992). De-institutionalization processes is seen a way of describing the fall of management reforms.

As a lens to study how organizations respond to different pressures in their institutional environment the study uses the concepts of *normative*, *mimetic* and *coercive* pressures from a framework developed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). In DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) framework, *mimetic* is perceived to be a standard response to uncertainty, and it is the tendency of an organization to imitate another organization’s structure in the belief that the latter’s structure is beneficial. This might, for example, be if an organization copies a results model from another organization they perceive as legitimate. *Normative* refers to the pressure exerted by professions; for example, the development and adoption of normative standards on how to deliver aid (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). These could also

be pressures widely considered to be the proper course of action, or even a moral duty, such as when a signal is received from an international body such as the OECD that a “best practice” is a correct moral choice (Boxenbaum and Jonsson 2008). *Coercive*, in turn, concerns pressures from other organizations upon which the organization is dependent and from cultural expectations in the society where the organization operates. As for a public agency, the coercive pressures can be understood as the demands of the state or other large actors, such as audit institutions or international bodies, to adopt specific structures or else face sanctions (Boxenbaum and Jonsson 2008).

This development dissertation brief (DDB) begins with a presentation of conclusions drawn in relation to the research questions. This is done by presenting an observed pattern of five phases in the four results initiatives. Thereafter, the DDB presents the concluding discussion. In this discussion mechanisms that drive the rise, as well as the fall, of management reforms is discussed at a more general level. The DDB ends with a discussion of some general learnings from the study and whether there are alternative ways to gain the kind of legitimacy and the kind of benefits that the initiatives provide.

## 2. The Five Phases of the Results Initiatives

The study observes a pattern of different phases during which the environmental demand and the organizational responses seem to be somewhat similar. The life of each of the four results initiatives can thus be understood as having taken place in five phases: 1) the pressure phase, 2) the launch, 3) implementation, 4) point of re-do or die, 5) phase of opening up for something new. During these five phases different internal and external mechanisms contributed to either further institutionalization or to de-institutionalization of the results measurement and management ideas and technologies.

The “pressure phase”, is characterized by an increased amount of questioning by an increasing number of actors. The pressure from the various actors on the idea that results are needed to organize and secure the survival of development aid, functions as a mechanism for initiating the results initiatives. Up until 2006 the main mechanisms that drove Sida to initiate the initiatives were mimetic and normative pressures, i.e the action to initiate the results initiatives was voluntary. The 2012 initiative was mainly driven by

coercive pressures, i.e. it was mandatory for Sida to improve its results reporting. However, independent of the type of pressures, the results initiatives can be seen as an act chosen by Sida that would decrease questioning and increase legitimacy. The main mechanism that influenced Sida to initiate the results initiatives was thus the need to regain legitimacy.

The "launch phase", is characterised by belief that a perceived solution exists to the problems raised during the pressure phase. The mere launch of the initiatives provides Sida with legitimacy. At this stage, questioning and external pressure decreases. During the launch, top leadership is typically content that a solution now exists. However, at the level of the designers (i.e. staff members in charge of the results initiatives), there is an awareness that the implementation of the results initiative might face difficulties. Despite this knowledge the results matrixes used in the results initiatives are topped with "extra everything" requirements, probably to gain a sense of safety for any further questioning. The fact that results matrix used in the 2012 initiative went furthest with the "extra everything" toppings can be understood by the coercive pressure put on the organization prior to the initiative.

During the "implementation phase", staff are requested to fill out the requirements in the results matrix and the organization is to take action based on the collected information. During the implementation problems arise in relation to a) the concept of results, b) with the use of information, and c) the fact that the exercise is seen as crowding out work with recipient relations. Both staff and designers respond to these problems by using different strategies. Resistance and non-compliance is higher during the initial stages of the initiatives, whilst it decreases after some time in implementation.

The "point of re-do or die" is characterized as the process when the initiatives start to de-institutionalize or fall. There is at this point in time a need for the organization to do something in order to hinder de-institutionalization. Four alternatives of changing the initiatives are identified:

1. To change the aim or intended user of the initiative, something I call a *re-motivation* of the initiative.
2. To change the technology and reporting requirements in the initiative, something I call a *re-initiative*.
3. To launch a parallel, but in other ways equal, initiative with a different name, something I call the launching of a *sub-initiative*.
4. To let the initiative die or fade away.

It is argued that three mechanisms explain when and why the final tipping point – to the death – is reached.

*The first tipping mechanism* relates to the reporting categories used in the initiatives. The final fall of the initiatives occurs *when every possible way of reporting “results” has been tried out*.

*The second tipping mechanism* is related to the *non-use of the information*. Once results information has been compiled within the initiatives the information is considered to be of inadequate quality and is therefore never disclosed outside the organization. The tipping mechanism is thus related to the “fear of the use” and opinions that would come if information would be disclosed rather than actual knowledge of non-use among external actors.

*The third tipping mechanism* is related to the fact that the *results initiatives no longer fulfill the function of providing legitimacy* for the organization. Rather, at this stage they produce a bad or a negative reputation for the organization.

A “fear of death”, implying, for example, an increased number of meetings being held to discuss the consequences if the initiative was to die out, is a mechanism that impedes the de-institutionalization. In contrast, resistance, as well as changed external demands, contribute to de-institutionalization.

The final fall, or the death, occurs when there is an increased awareness among actors of the (non) usefulness of the information and when all the possibilities to re-do the initiative has been tried out. Whereas mimetic, normative and coercive forces contribute to the initiation and adoption of the ideas and technologies in different ways, it is mainly internal factors within the organization that explain the fall of the initiatives.

After the initiatives have died out, the organization is once again open for new ideas, most often *contrary* to results measurement and management. During the phase of “opening up for something new” there is typically an open mind and a search for new solutions on how to demonstrate results within the organization. Directly after the death of the initiatives there is seldom much interest in analyzing the reasons for the death of initiatives. However, it seems as ideas as well as the technologies used in the results initiatives are “stored” within the organization in for example the rememberings of staff members dedicated to results measurement and management. However, after a period of

interest in, for example, qualitative evaluations, with its focus on learning or trust management, the organization again seems to be open to ideas relating to rational reforms and results measurement.

### 3. Concluding Discussion

An analysis of the four results initiatives over time shows it comprises five stable, or institutionalized, elements. First, both public development aid and results measurement and management can be regarded as institutionalized ideas, and as institutionalized practices within Swedish public administration since the 1960s. It is taken for granted that Sweden should provide public development aid, and it is taken for granted that public agencies should be able to demonstrate results. Prior to the initiation of the initiatives the pressure increased; ideas and statements such as “we do not know the effects of aid”, “incentives in development aid are centred on disbursements and not results” and “Sida staff are not sufficiently willing to work with results orientation” are increasingly voiced by external actors. A stable element found in this study is thus that *during certain time intervals the ideas of results measurement and management were promoted more intensively*. This confirms Ferlie et al.’s (2009) proposal that the quest for “performance” or “results” seems to remain a permanent feature in governance and that a greater quest for it comes in “tides of reforms” or in different peaks.

The second stable element is that Sida *initiated similar results initiatives every 10-12 years*. The study shows that the launch often signifies a point when a momentary solution to the external pressure is found. During the launch the organization designed the technology, i.e. the result matrix to be used in the initiatives. As shown, this technology is designed with “extra everything” toppings, i.e. there is often a wish to show that everything possible had in fact been done. This demonstrates that the desire to aggregate and make results visible and also to test the technology, despite knowledge of previous difficulties, appears to be a stable, recurring element. This confirms Miller and Rose’s (2008) proposal that solutions to ideas of pressure are often sought in the introduction of technologies. This study, however, shows that the design of the technologies is driven by an interest both in making results and the results initiative visible (Martinez 2013; Quattrone 2009) and also by uncertainty of what works and fits in the organization.

The third stable element is that the reform attempts *faces difficulties every time when it comes to implementation*, with non-compliance and resistance as responses. There are often problems related to the concept of “results”, with who is going to use the information and a feeling that the exercise crowds out “real” work. These types of problems are in line with earlier findings on implementation of result management reforms.

A fourth stable element found in this study, something that adds to previous literature, is the occurrence of what is labeled as the “point of re-do or die”, i.e. a point when there is an urgency to do something in order for the initiatives not to wither away. The organization then chooses to re-launch the initiatives, either by a re-motivation, a re-initiative or a sub-initiative. So, the *back and forth process between resistance and compliance, between de-institutionalization and institutionalization* also seems to be a stable and recurring element in the initiatives.

The fifth institutionalized element is apparent when analyzing the type of resistance more deeply, and if distinguishing between the “ideas” and the “technologies” (Kurunmäki et al. 2011). It is mainly the task of filling in the requirements in the technology, not the ideas of results measurement and management, that are resisted. In the end, the information gathered is typically considered non-useful for decision-making purposes, which subsequently leads to the fall of the reforms. In the end, the reporting categories introduced in the initiatives remain un-institutionalized (Abrahamsson 1996). A stable feature within the initiatives is thus the *constant hope of finding better reporting categories, but also the failure to do so*.

Previous literature on “tides of reforms” has explained the occurrence of the tides with different mechanisms driving organizations and people to be seen as effective and rational (for example Ferlie et al. 2007; Brunsson 2006). I argue that there is also a need to analyze whether reforms can be explained by mechanisms such as feelings and emotions that drive people and organizations to, for example, show solidarity; actions that people and organizations simply perform because they feel that they gain a good feeling out of it. I will argue in the following section that the stability of the five elements mentioned above leading to continuous rise and fall of management reforms. Three main mechanisms explain their stability:

- a) The tension between solidarity and effectiveness.
- b) Fear and other emotions.
- c) Gained benefits.

Below I will discuss each of the three mechanisms.

a) The Tension between Solidarity and Effectiveness

The tides of reforms in this story can be understood as a continuous tension between the wish to do good or to do a proper action, i.e. the solidarity rationale, and the pressure to show results, i.e. the effectiveness rationale. Thus, actors involved in the processes are constantly driven by both rationales, and since it is at some points in time difficult to combine the two, tensions are created. These tensions drive the results initiatives. For example, prior to the initiation of the results initiatives, an increasing number of questions are raised by an increasing number of actors. I argue that the increased pressure for results is related to ideas and beliefs that the public aid sector as a whole cannot survive without showing results. The assumption in the problem statements is that results are needed in the sector in order to continue to organize actions of solidarity; citizens need results in order to nourish the notion that their tax money supports something good in the world, and Sida staff and recipients need results in order to make correct judgments of what actions are proper.

Lack of trust, i.e. that aid funding might not support something “good”, leads to a collective “dissonance in the minds” of people (Martens et al. 2005), which in turn leads to a search for solutions in the form of results initiatives that can increase (the feeling of) objectivity and bring back trust. During the “pressure phase” there are concerns that the solidarity rationale is too strong and therefore solutions are sought within the effectiveness rationale, in results measurement and management techniques.

However, problems arise during the implementation phase. The problems are mainly connected to the concept of results and the requirements in the technology, the fact that there are problems with how to use the information and to the notion that the exercise crowds out ordinary or “real” work duties in development aid. During implementation there are thus concerns that the effectiveness rationale is dominating, and solutions are therefore sought within the solidarity rationale. Oliver (1991) argues that using strategies and responding to organizational pressures might give organizational members a feeling of

being in control. One could therefore see the staff's resistance as an action to protect the solidarity rationale in aid work. The fact that staff in the four studied initiatives often react against the requirements in the technologies can be seen as giving them a sense of doing something which they feel is a proper action in relation to their work duties and in relation to the reality of the recipients of aid.

In turn, the fall of the results initiatives can be understood as a phase when the actors stop believing that the initiatives could do any good for either the solidarity rationale or the effectiveness rationale. In line with literature arguing for "loose links" between ideas and practice (see for example Miller and O'Leary 1987; Meyer and Rowan 1977), and that practice never turns out to be the same as the ideas (Brunsson 2006) one could say that the loose link only becomes obvious for the actors after some time in implementation. However, the de-institutionalization process does not happen, as claimed by Røvik (1996:146), as a gradual process with a constant "decline in enthusiasm" of the ideas and the technology. The de-institutionalization is a back and forth process consisting of several mini-processes with renewed attempts to revitalize the results initiative. One could therefore say that throughout the life of the initiatives the link between ideas and practice sometimes increased, sometimes decreased.

That the initiatives survived for as long as they did can be explained by the fact that as long as there is hope that the right reporting categories can be found there is also hope that the link between ideas and practice can be tightened, and that both the solidarity and the effectiveness rationale can be supported.

As a consequence of this reasoning, the rise and fall of the initiatives cannot be explained only by external factors and the desire of organizations to be perceived as rational or to show that they are effective. I argue that the solidarity rationale must be seen as an equally strong driver of action. Since staff in development aid also need to respond to the solidarity rationale, they ensure that their actions also are supportive to this rationale.

Previous literature studying tides of reforms has typically focused on explaining how "reformers", i.e. staff in governments offices and in external audit agencies (Brunsson 2006; Sundström 2006) act. I have shown in this study that the designers and staff often acted in different ways than reformers. The designers are, for example, most often aware of difficulties with results measurement models. I argue that the reformers and the designers

have different professional values they need to be loyal to. Whereas the reformers might have need to be loyal to their profession for example as accountants, the designers also need to stay loyal to the core values in aid and aid reality. One can understand the designers and staffs actions as following the “logic of appropriateness” (March 1991) and that they chose to perform actions they perceive are appropriate and right in a given situation. However, I argue that what was perceived as appropriate depends on the strength of the tension between the solidarity rationale and the effectiveness rationale at that moment in time. During the pressure phase, the most appropriate action seems to have been to launch a results initiative i.e. do something within the effectiveness rationale, whereas during implementation, when requirements became too heavy, the most appropriate action seems to have been to resist the requirements and defend the solidarity rationale.

Since the story told in this thesis is cyclical, and since it is clear that each results initiative come in different phases of a cycle, I believe that there is not just one answer to the question of how organizations respond to increased control requirements and results measurement and management techniques. The answer depends on when in time one actually analyzes responses. Sometimes, staff might very well find a balance between increased control requirements and their daily work duties, while at other times they experience a major conflict. This finding leads to the argument that organizational responses depend on a factor of *time*.

Given the above, my contribution to previous literature is that people’s inner drive to do good and proper actions (since this gives them a sense of “feel good”) is also a mechanism that drives reforms. A tension between the solidarity and effectiveness rationales makes people and organizations act and react, since they wish to resolve the tension. Their collective actions contribute to the rise and fall of results reforms, in this case in development aid. The strength of the tension differs depending on where in a reform cycle it occurs.

In the following I will discuss why hope, but also other emotions and feelings, such as fear, drive results reforms.

## b) Fear and Other Emotions

Previous literature on waves of reform explains rational reforms as being driven mainly by positive emotions and feelings, such as hope (Brunsson 2006) or optimism (Miller and Rose 2008); emotions that during the initiation of a results initiative can imply a “largely uncritical discourse” (Abrahamsson and Fairchild 1999) and where people are blind to other alternatives (Gill and Whittle 1993). In line with this literature I have also in this study found that hope and wishful thinking are clearly part of the studied reforms. However, I have found that hope mainly explains behavior and thinking by top management during the launch phase.

Based on the findings in this study I claim that fear, as well as other (negative) emotions, drive the tides of reforms. Three types of “fears” driving the results initiatives are identified.

First, *fear of illegitimacy*, a fear that is most visible during the pressure phase or a fear of the consequences if results are not demonstrated, triggers the initiation of the results initiatives. This fear is most apparent in the 2012 initiative. The strong coercive pressure, and the fact that all staff members within the organization during this period are personally affected by the organizational crisis in 2011, led to fear becoming a mechanism that drove the organization to fully adapt and incorporate external demands. Fear of further external scrutiny and sanctions might also explain why the organization and staff members this time refrained from archiving their personal reactions towards the initiative. The initiation of the results initiatives is seen as a proper course of action to reduce this fear of illegitimacy.

Secondly, *fear of the use of results information*, a fear that is visible during implementation, drive action during the implementation phase. This happens on two occasions. First, during the initial phases of implementation staff often asked questions about who is going to use the information and how information is going to be used. And whether this use might have any consequences for the aid projects that they were handling. The reaction or action of not complying or of avoiding fulfilling the exercise for as long as possible, could be interpreted as a way to reduce the fear of the use. If no information is submitted, no one can take any action on it. Second, when information is submitted by staff and compiled by the designers, the designers and the top management frequently (except for in the 1981 initiative) decided not to disclose the information further. So, the action taken by the

designers and top management in deciding not to disclose information can also be seen as a way to reduce the fear of the use. If no external party knows about the internal details, no further actions can be taken based on the information.

Thirdly, the *fear of dying* drive action, especially at the “point of re-do or die”. During this phase the initiatives are re-done in different ways: either by changing or fine-tuning the purpose descriptions, or by changing the intended users of the information, or by changing and trying out different reporting categories. The different ways of changing the initiative can be seen as different attempts to keep the initiative alive, i.e. to reduce the fear of dying. The increased number of meetings held during this phase can be seen as a way to reduce anxiety about what would actually happen if the initiative is left to face death.

To sum up, the *fear of illegitimacy* mainly influenced the rise of the initiatives while the *fear of use* mainly influenced the fall of the initiatives. The *fear of dying* influenced the time it took for the fall to be completed.

Literature within organizational institutionalism often notes that *uncertainty* influences organizational action (see for example Greenwood et al. 2008). It is also often argued that organizations decide to perform the type of actions that can benefit them in the future (for example Brunsson 2006; Ferlie et al. 2007; Miller and Rose 2008). In this literature, concepts of feelings and emotions, or other non-cognitive ways of describing people’s action, such as fear, are seldom used. Fear can certainly be a feeling that is similar to what people feel when they experience uncertainty. However, fear is something qualitatively different than uncertainty. In literature on emotions, fear is often considered as a basic emotion (Ekman 1992; Damasio 2006). According to Ekman (1992), fear is a feeling induced by a perceived danger or threat, leading to several instant responses which are intended to help people to survive a dangerous situation by preparing them for either “fight or flight”, i.e. either to escape or to avoid the threat. Fear and the fight-or-flight response are depicted as an instinct mechanism that every animal (including humans) possesses (see for example Ekman 1992).

Moreover, Damasio (2006) argues that when people react with a strong emotion such as fear, reactions come instinctively. Rational reasoning about what to do to gain advantages in the future often comes secondarily. I argue that many of the actions and reactions in the cases studied in this thesis should not be perceived as being planned rationally, but have

rather taken place instinctively, from a feeling of what is the right thing to do right there and then, without thoughts about future consequences. In this vein, I further claim that instinctive feelings and emotions, such as fear, also function as mechanisms that drive the results initiatives.

In this vein, it is also most probable that the mechanisms of fear function differently among the “reformers” studied by Brunsson 2006 and Sundström 2006 than among designers and staff in implementing agencies who are to fulfill results measurement and management reforms, but who do not have these reforms as their overall goal. Although Bringselius (2013:11), for example, argues that the organizational culture within the Swedish National Audit Office (an organization which according to Brunsson 2006 and Sundström 2003 would consist of “reformers”) is characterized by “a fear of making mistakes”, I would claim that fear might be an even stronger mechanism driving action among government agencies implementing results measurement and management reforms. Since the reformers set the rules whereas the government agencies need to obey them, there is a power imbalance between the two. Fear of, for example, sanctions might therefore explain action among implementing agencies.

So, one can assume that coercive pressures and power trigger mechanisms of fear to a larger extent than mimetic and normative pressures. In this vein one might assume that fear is a stronger mechanism driving action prior to the 2012 initiative when coercive pressures are the predominant mode of influencing action.

Given the above, my contribution to previous literature is that the initiation of organizational reforms and adoption of technologies within an organization cannot be explained only by positive emotions, such as hope and optimism, but I also claim that negative emotions, such as fear, drive action in reforms. Fear might play out differently depending on the type of pressure put on the organization/persons and depending on when, during the reform cycle, one conducts the analysis.

### c) Gained Benefits

The fact that actual results produced within the four studied initiatives have never been officially disclosed (except for the two Catalogues produced in 1984 and 1987) or used in agency-wide decisions could be seen as a failure of the initiatives as such. The initiatives

have not fulfilled their intended purposes. Still, the initiatives have continuously been re-introduced and implementation has continued for long periods of time (four to ten years). This indicates that they have been beneficial in some way for the organization. Otherwise, the organization would have closed them down quicker. Below I will discuss some benefits that might have driven the initiatives.

It is found that the results initiatives quite quickly put an end to external questioning. During the phase of launching the initiatives, Sida is able to demonstrate that it has worked out a solution, and that it will soon be able to demonstrate results. This finding confirms overall assumptions made by scholars within organizational institutionalism that the mere appearance of effectiveness is important for securing organizational survival and legitimacy and that this legitimacy can “insulate the organization from external pressures” and external questioning (Deephouse and Suchman 2008:51). Despite that “results” from the initiatives were not disclosed the agency continued during all this time receiving government allocations for aid, since 1970’s the public support to aid has continuously increased. A conclusion drawn from this reasoning is that it was not the disclosed “results” that mattered, benefits are gained anyway.

However, during implementation the initiatives also proved to be valuable internally for the organization. The launch in itself typically provided the designers, primarily, with some form of internal legitimacy, meaning that it gave them legitimacy to further pursue results measurement and management reforms within the agency. The initiatives are moreover found to be valuable internally for some staff members who declared that the running of the initiative provided them with “a sense of safety” with regard to their professional role as aid managers. When they fill in the requirements in the technology, they feel that they fulfilled external expectations and that they are doing what is expected of them.

So, even though the story can be looked upon as a continuous failure to meet pronounced purposes, I argue that the results initiatives have filled a function, for both external and internal actors. They have reduced the “dissonance in our minds” regarding worries that aid is ineffective (Martens et al. 2005). Their mere existence proves valuable for their “symbolic purpose,” as they are convinced both external and internal actors that attempts are made to prove there is value for money provided by public organizations and programs (Thomas 2007). Since they have done this, they have also proven valuable for

supporting the other expected “payment” of development aid – i.e to gain a sufficient “feel good” value; that aid supports people living in poverty (see for example Lumsdaine 1993; Ramalingam 2013; Riddell 2007).

So, one could say that the results initiatives – even though they failed in a technical sense – have in fact supported what they intended to support, namely increased legitimacy for development aid. Therefore, I argue that the benefits gained from the initiatives drive their further continuation. Therefore it is most likely that similar initiatives will also be tried out in the future.

I will now turn to discuss some issues I believe it will be important to consider when the next peak comes.

#### 4. Is an Alternative Possible?

Since the coming and going of results initiatives represents a stable feature in this story, there is not much to support a claim that a new peak and new results initiatives will not come again in the future. At the present time, the end of 2016, it is clear that development aid discussions in Sweden are focusing on finding alternative ways to demonstrate results. One could say that development aid practice today is in a valley, or in the “phase of opening up for something new”. At the moment the Swedish government focuses on the importance of “trust” and “trust based management” in government steering.<sup>3</sup> In Swedish development aid discussions are focused on “simplification”, “adaptation” and being flexible to recipient needs.

However, if we would in future follow the time intervals when the four studied results initiatives have peaked, the next peak should arrive sometime around 2022–2026. I will end this paper by discussing what I believe can be considered as learnings from this study for when the next peak comes.

First, although the results initiatives have proven valuable in many ways, one can question whether there are other more cost-effective ways to support the legitimacy and existence of development aid. Riddell (2007) argued that people in general are not overly

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<sup>3</sup> In June 2016 the government made a decision to establish a Committee for Trust Management <http://www.regeringen.se/rattsdokument/kommittedirektiv/2016/06/dir.-201651/>

interested in knowing too many details about aid. The fact that the results produced within the initiatives have not been disclosed or used, but that the initiatives have nonetheless proven valuable, confirms Riddell's (2007) claim. These findings show that the solidarity rationale, i.e. also the mere feeling of doing good and the knowledge that Sida is doing its best to ascertain results, seems to have been a sufficient "payment" for most actors. However, a continuation of this feeling needs to be supported by various measures taken to ensure that people can have faith that their tax money is used for good purposes.

During my work with the thesis I tried to count all the costs connected to the initiatives, but soon found it very difficult, as they not only involve *direct* costs (such as the actual costs for consultancy firms, development of IT systems, etc.), but also *indirect* costs (such as working hours devoted to compiling information, competence loss when staff members leave the agency, etc.) (see Forssell and Ivarsson Westerberg 2016). However, a Sida director in the 1971 initiative claimed that the initiatives have also involved other costs, such as "psychological costs," which he explained as costs of waiting for results reports to be produced and approved before taking action, and so on. Moreover, Forssell and Ivarsson Westerberg (2016) have claimed that increased control often also leads to *social costs* in terms of poorer working conditions, increased stress and the erosion of trust between the one who is controlling and the one being controlled. I believe that when planning for results initiatives in the future one might benefit from asking the question of what costs it is worth allocating for these kinds of initiatives. Interestingly, I have not found that such a discussion has been carried out in any of the initiatives.<sup>4</sup>

Second, since, the intended users of the results information have been multiple (the initiatives intended to serve both internal and external actors) a recommendation for future similar initiatives is to be clear, already at the planning stage, about *who* is to benefit from the information; in other words, to follow Patton's (2008) recommendation to identify, already at the planning stage, an individual or a group of individuals who personally care about the results information. It may also be important to analyze clearly which information different users actually need for their decision-making. If it is not possible to produce the information (they believe they need), or if it is only possible to produce it at a

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<sup>4</sup> An exception is the discussion in SIDA (1976:32) discussed in section 4.2.4. However, this discussion referred to costs of evaluations in aid projects and not costs involved in the results initiatives as such.

very high cost, then both sides may benefit from a dialogue on the possible costs and value of this information. The suppliers (or designers) of results information might benefit from declaring that proving exact results of aid may not be possible and, even if it might be possible, these results might turn out to say little of interest for broader management decisions since aggregation is generally difficult.

Third, I suggest anyone interested in knowing the results of development should ask themselves the following question: Who do you want to trust: information from people and the “real world” or the results information gathered in the results matrix? This question is similar to the final question Neo poses to the human population in the movie *The Matrix*. The movie depicts a dystopian future in which reality as perceived by most humans is actually a simulated reality called *the Matrix*, created by sentient machines to subdue the human population. The Matrix is presumed to support people in their ordinary lives so that they can live in a perfect world without suffering and with total happiness. However, in the movie, the main character, Neo, argues that people are enslaved under *the Matrix*, that their minds are trapped and pacified under the simulated reality created by this simulated world. This makes him fight for “a world without rules and controls, without borders or boundaries”, for “a world which is messy and in which we actually do not know the future”.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the movie, Neo says that it is up to the people themselves to decide what to believe in and what kind of world they want to live in.

I believe that the message from the movie *The Matrix* may contribute an interesting point in relation to the findings of this thesis. As in the movie, the “results matrix” in the four results initiatives is created to organize information and to predict changes in the “real world.” Following this line it is interesting to note that the word “matrixing”, as in the title of the thesis, is a word used in paranormal investigations (i.e. by ghost investigators), which concerns the human mind’s natural tendency to find proof concerning facts about a given subject before they can believe it. In paranormal investigations, this might, for example, be finding a face (i.e. proof of a ghost) in the shapes and shadows of a collection of objects.<sup>6</sup> As when “matrixing” for ghosts, it seems that when the results initiatives peaked there is a belief that if they are done just a little better the “results ghost” would finally be found.

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<sup>5</sup> From Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Matrix](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Matrix)

<sup>6</sup> See for example: [http://www.angelsghosts.com/matrixing\\_ghosts](http://www.angelsghosts.com/matrixing_ghosts) and <http://www.ghost-tech.com/Matrixing.php>

During these periods there is a strong belief in objective and quantifiable information. The consequences are that incentives favors staff doing things right in the “results matrix” rather than actually working towards results in reality. As with the point made in *The Matrix*, an overbelief in the ability of a “results matrix” to provide perfect knowledge of what happens in reality can actually lead to us missing what is happening in the “real world”.

A general recommendation for forthcoming initiatives is thus to be aware of the different mechanisms that may contribute to the rise and fall of results initiatives and not lose sight of what is happening in the “real world”. This would also mean paying attention to what people actually say when resisting the initiatives. I believe that these opinions and experiences cannot be seen as mere resistance toward results measurement and management ideas, but that they may tell us something important about reality and the “real world”, something that “the matrix” cannot tell us. Since the mere knowledge that aid organizations are at least doing their best, and that the wish to do good for someone else and the feeling of doing so are also “payments” of aid, in the end it might not be the knowledge of exact results that matters for doing the right actions as well as continuous trust and support for aid.

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Vähämäki, Janet (2017). *Matrixing Aid – The Rise and Fall of ‘Results Initiatives’ in Swedish Development Aid*, Doctoral Dissertation, Stockholm Business School, Stockholm University

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