

# Improvised Futures

## Understanding 'Duct-Tape Solutionism' in Swedish Public Sector Automation

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In the realm of Swedish public administration, there is a growing recognition of automation as a fertile ground for innovation and efficiency. This paper, drawing upon ethnographic research with key stakeholders in Swedish municipalities, investigates how the public sector is responding to an anticipated demographic crisis, with a particular focus on the challenges presented by an ageing population. It critically examines the dual role of automation, especially Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Generative AI, perceived simultaneously as a comprehensive remedy and a makeshift solution. Central to this exploration are two predominant themes: firstly, the urgent necessity to rejuvenate the public sector through automation to prevent an impending collapse, and secondly, the need to adapt current work practices to an automated yet unpredictable future. This paper posits that automation represents a continuous journey of adaptation, rather than a definitive endpoint. This journey is metaphorically likened to ongoing repair work, where automation technologies function as flexible, 'duct-tape' solutions, continually extending the horizons of what is possible in public administration. The analysis delves into the transformative role of automation, arguing that its impact goes beyond the mere reduction of human labour. Instead, automation is seen as a catalyst for organisational change, promoting standardisation and challenging the entrenched norms of individualised work methods. In conclusion, this paper demonstrates how the use of metaphors related to breakage and repair can be used to understand the public sector's organisational transformation. It offers insights into how the anticipated futures of automation are shaping the future of public administration in Sweden, not just as a tool for efficiency, but as a key driver of organisational evolution and adaptation.