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Guides and an overflow of choices

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In *The metropolis and mental life*, Simmel (1903/1950) argued that the division of labor and specialization in growing urban agglomerations increase the opportunities of choice for ordinary citizens. For Simmel, improved choice opportunities were an interesting and positive aspect of urban life, but this favorable attitude toward choice came to be questioned in time. One contributor to this critique was US psychologist Barry Schwartz (2004), who summarized the debate by introducing the notion of the *paradox of choice*. He argued that even if modern urban people have more choice opportunities than ever before, they do not seem to benefit psychologically. Schwartz's idea, together with such notions as the *tyranny of choice* (Salecl, 2010), can be seen as arguments in favor of the thesis of an overflow of choices in contemporary societies.

Despite the critique, new choice opportunities have been added continuously. In the reforms of public sectors that started in the 1970s and 1980s in many Western countries, freedom of choice was one of the most frequently used arguments among politicians. Citizens were given opportunities to make choices within education, healthcare, and pensions; but as soon as such opportunities were introduced, they were criticized. Typical arguments against choice were that people could not choose because of information asymmetry (Greener, 2007), or that people did not want to choose (Clarke, 2007). Ordinary citizens faced problems with this new overflow of choices.

From the late 1990s onward, most politicians decided that one way of dealing with that critique was to launch web-based guides designed to support citizens by providing information before they had to make a choice. Private actors also saw business opportunities and started private web-based guides.

Yet guides for choice are not a new phenomenon. A classic example is the red Michelin restaurant guide that has been helping customers choose restaurants since 1955 (Karpik, 2010; Kwon and Easton, 2010); in time, this guide became web-based. Other well-known examples are TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and PriceRunner. Guides covering key public services are a relatively new phenomenon; they differ from those in the private sector, however, because they regulate the relationship between the state and the citizen. In the study reported here, we were interested in guides to public services, and how they are supposed to help people to deal with the overflow of choice opportunities. We first present the theoretical framework that helped us to classify a number of such guides, and then describe how their originators intended to help the user deal with the overflow of choices.

Market guides: a theoretical point of departure

We differentiate between two basic principles that guide designers can be expected to use, summarized in the notions of choice guides and judgment guides.

Choice guides

Choice guides are market devices, as they are supposed to contribute to the capacity for calculation in a market (Callon and Muniesa, 2005). One option for a designer who is creating a guide is to follow principles of the rational choice model. A first step for such designers is to *isolate* user choice options from their context and present them in a common frame, such as a computer screen (Callon and Muniesa, 2005). In the case of public services, this means that only a limited number of, for example, care centers or schools in a municipality are displayed. Once the options have been isolated, the second step is to provide the means to *examine* and compare them. To accomplish this goal, the guide may present statistics about the performance of schools or care centers. In the third step, designers must create a method by which the user can go from comparisons to a new entity – an ordered list based on a *ranking* procedure, for example.

In summary, when a guide serves as a market device, it is essential that it support user calculation by means of isolation, examination, and ranking/choice. An example can be taken from the online dating industry (Roscoe and Chillas, 2013), in which guides are usually based on a procedure that proposes a relationship between two persons,

including such factors as age and profession. The procedures in a guide can be formalized into an algorithm that creates the basis for a rational choice. According to Orlikowski and Scott, such 'algorithms are step-by-step instructions to achieve a desired result in a finite number of moves. Algorithms act, they do things' (2015: 18).

Algorithms can perform such tasks as ranking, but Woolgar (1990) also argued that the development of a formal choice procedure means configuring the user. Consequently, Callon and Muniesa used the concept of *algorithmic configuration* of a user in a market, for example. This issue is of importance in the context of public services for at least two reasons. The first is that the role of a citizen-consumer of public services (Clarke et al., 2007) is often a new role. In Sweden, users' choices were not common in this sector prior to the 1990s. This novelty means that a new consumer role has to be configured. Second, the role of a citizen-consumer can be seen as a key dimension in the relationship between the state and the citizen, which adds a political dimension to the configuration of the user in this sector (Clarke et al., 2007).

Judgment guides

Karpik (2010) suggested the alternative concept of *judgment device,* arguing that such devices as, for example, a judgment guide are more appropriate in markets for singularities. Such markets trade in non-standardized goods and unique services, in which providers are separated by quality differences and price is less important. This definition is relevant for key public services that are often free at the point of delivery. Karpik argued that the user in these markets wants to find a service that meets personal needs, and not the optimal choice, as described by rational choice theory.

Karpik used the example of the psychoanalysis market, in which the user wants to choose the psychologist who is the best fit, rather than going to someone who was considered by someone else to be optimal. Similar issues may be relevant for key public services – as when pupils and parents want to find a school that meets their general requirements in terms of cheerful atmosphere and results, rather than using the level of grading as the only criterion. Judgment involves a number of activities, and it may be supported by a guide that gives access to peer networks which evaluate provider units and to user networks exploring user experiences (Karpik, 2010). First, 'actors must have access to credible knowledge that can be added to their own store of knowledge' (Karpik, 2010: 49). Second,

relevant service providers must be identified. Finally, a judgment of the options must be conducted. For Karpik, 'judgment is a synthetic act that integrates a plurality of heterogeneous and variably weighted criteria' (2010: 42).

The concept of judgment assumes a qualitative choice based on the user having extensive knowledge. A judgment guide must match a mix of qualitative requirements with a provision of services of a large qualitative variation. This is in contrast to the market guides described in the previous section, which are usually based on simplified assumptions about user preferences, in order to support the user in finding the optimal option. But both types of guides seem to rely on action nets (Czarniawska, 2004) that tie together a number of actions and entities. Thus, a relevant question for a designer of guides is the degree of automation in the connections between actions and entities in the net.

Field material and methods of data collection and analysis

In this chapter, we describe three Swedish public services in which web-based user choice is permitted. We chose a Swedish setting for several reasons. Although Sweden's political majorities have shifted several times since the 1990s, the Swedish public sector has emphasized and supported the principles of New Public Management (NPM), which are perceived as reflecting a more conservative political orientation. NPM promotes market-oriented management of the public sector (Hood, 1995) and tends to view citizens as consumers who are entitled to freedom of choice in public services. Nevertheless, NPM is a controversial policy in Swedish public life, with both critics and supporters.

Swedish citizens currently have a choice in several key public service areas, and government policy documents reveal that large public and private agencies are designing and introducing supportive technologies to increase user choice (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012). One such principle is that funds collected through taxation should follow users (e.g., education vouchers). As a result, approved private and voluntary organizations may establish service providers in locations of their choosing. Under this system, users can choose any service provider as long as the public treasury finances the services (Le Grand, 2007).

In our research, we examined six web-based user guides intended to support choice in healthcare, education, and pensions, three of which are publicly owned and the other three privately owned. The public guides were the major official guides to the markets, as

recommended by the authorities. The private guides were popular options, with a large number of visitors at the time of our field research.

We followed four steps in our data collection and analysis. First, we conducted 16 semi-structured interviews. The interviewees (project leaders and designers) had extensive knowledge of the past, current, and future activities of their agencies and a good understanding of web-based support for choice. We conducted the first round of interviews between December 2012 and May 2014, and the second between September and November 2015. All interviews, which lasted between 30 and 70 minutes each, were audio-recorded and transcribed. We asked the interviewees to describe the general background of their guides and their basic features, in relation to our distinction between choice guides and judgment guides. Second, we interpreted some providers' policy documents. Third, we examined the design and content of the guides. And fourth, we compared and summarized the six guides. We focused on the use of choice guides versus judgment guides and on the contributions to technology design in public service choice.

In his often-cited publication on 'material markets', MacKenzie (2009) claimed that the best-suited method for studying technology uses is to observe how the technology is used 'in action'. We decided on the complementary approach, which is actually less frequently applied; it is used to study the technical and political intentions behind the guides, employing the methodology of interviews with designers in order to examine their policy documents. This methodological choice corresponded with our intention – to describe the potential agency or capacity in the guides. We are fully aware that actual use often follows unintended courses, but that is a task for another study.

Three markets and six guides

Three markets

The market for healthcare services

Even though there are some general choice options for healthcare in Sweden, the main efforts to introduce choice have taken place in the area of primary (that is, outpatient) care. Since 2010, Swedish primary care is organized according to a market model whereby citizens have a free choice of care center, and the money follows the citizen. This model is not used in other sectors of healthcare, though there is a certain degree of freedom of choice regarding

those other services. In Sweden (and incidentally in Finland), primary care is mainly organized in primary care centers (Chauvette, 2003) and is not based on a system of general practitioners, as it is in many other European countries.

The market for primary and secondary schools

Markets for primary schools were introduced in Sweden in 1992, and for secondary schools in 1994. The question of choice was new in relation to primary schools, in contrast to secondary schools, where user choice has been allowed for decades. Choice of secondary schools is also supported by a system of person-to-person counseling. When markets were introduced, the information that users required before they could choose became a hot topic, and web-based guides were introduced in the late 1990s.

The market for premium pension investment funds

It is commonly said that the Swedish pension system is built on three pillars (Sjögren Lindquist and Wadensjö, 2011): *earning-related insurance,* with a nationally defined contribution and a mandatory funded personal pension component – premium pension; *occupational pensions* negotiated by employers and trade unions; and *different forms of personal pension plans* such as traditional insurance and individual pension savings in a bank. In this section of the chapter, we concentrate on the premium pension – a national mandatory earnings-related insurance, in which 2.5% of the salary of people working in Sweden is deposited. The premium pension is the result of the 1994 pension reform, when the idea of individual choice was introduced. The premium-pension scheme comprises approximately 800 investment funds from which the citizens are expected to choose in order to maximize their own pension capital. Guides are developed by both public and private actors to support citizen choice.

Six guides

Government-owned guides

A public guide to healthcare

The major public website in Sweden is the Healthcare Guide (1177.se, Figure 8.1). A designer explained the intentions behind the guide: 'It is a source of knowledge […] we want to empower the patient or

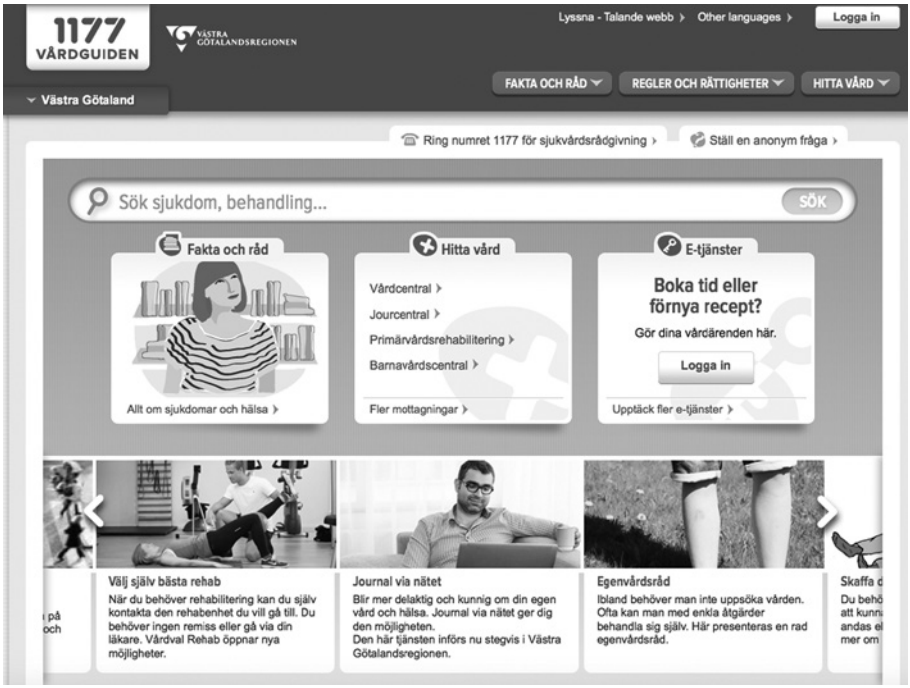

Figure 8.1 Healthcare Guide (*Vårdguiden* 1177)

the citizen regarding their ability to make their own decisions – to become a co-producer and to cooperate in the treatment program' (Designer, 13 November 2013, translations by the authors).

The website has three major entrances: 'Facts and advice' (*Fakta och råd*), 'Find care' (*Hitta vård*), and 'E-services' (*E-tjänster*). 'Facts and advice' contains descriptions of a large range of diseases and the appropriate treatment programs. 'Find care' focuses on primary care, even though there are some examples of special care. The user can select a limited number of care centers and compare them on the computer screen on the basis of a number of quality indicators, such as patient satisfaction and waiting times. 'Find care' can be seen as an example of a web-based guide.

Yet, the fact that healthcare guides allowed the user to choose a limited number of provider units that could be compared should not be interpreted as meaning that designers encouraged ranking. As a designer of the private Primary Care Center Guide said when asked about ranking based on quality indicators related to healthcare:

'We have avoided the whole discussion about ranking because it is a toxic question in healthcare, except for issues regarding patients' experiences' (Designer, 15 April 2013). The only ranking that is supported in public healthcare guides is based on patients' experiences and opinions generated, for example, in the National Patient Survey (2015). Some of the comparisons among care centers in the Healthcare Guide also provide information about certain treatment programs regarding diabetes. These comparisons are of a yes-or-no character, however: the center either has or does not have such programs. It says nothing about the quality of the programs.

A public guide to education

The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket.se) is the official website for Swedish primary and secondary schools. The website offers descriptions of the school system, along with sources of statistics on the school system and on schools: protocols from school inspectors who conduct peer reviews of schools on a regular basis, for example. A designer from the Swedish National Agency for Education formulated the aims of that website in the following manner:

> Parents and pupils should be able to choose a school – the guide makes it easier for them to compare schools – the guide supports choice. It's all about our having a school market in Sweden, and we want to contribute information, but it is also about our providing information about the school system, so that it's available to all citizens. (Designer, 25 September 2015)

The Choose Your School guide belongs to the Swedish National Agency for Education, but it is a separate web-based guide with its own address. It contains a database covering primary and secondary schools in Sweden and a selection procedure:

> The first step is the choice of the type of school (first or secondary school) and the ownership of schools (private or public).
>
> The second step in the procedure is to determine a specific geographical location (e.g., a municipality) from which schools can be identified.
>
> The third step is to identify factors that the pupil and parent consider important. There are such factors as distance, but also a number of quality indicators – such as the student–teacher ratio and the grades of pupils – which add information about each school.
>
> Finally, a limited number of selected schools can be compared on the computer screen based on such indicators, but the guide doesn't support rankings.

A designer at the Swedish National Agency for Education explained it:

> [W]hen we meet our target group (pupils and parents), we sometimes get the impression that they want us to make the decision for them: please tell me which school is best. They really want to select a number of variables and then push the search button, and something happens and they get a ranking list. But it is not realistic. It is you who must think about the options before making a certain choice, and we can offer certain jigsaw puzzle pieces along the way. (Designer, 25 September 2015)

A public guide to the premium investment-fund market

The Premium Pension Investment Fund Guide belongs to the Swedish Pension Agency; it offers support for the choice of various equity and bond investment funds. The public central website – owned by the Swedish Pension Agency (www.pensionsmyndigheten.se) – contains information concerning the Swedish pension system. As a representative of the authority explained: 'A distinct part of the mission that the Swedish Pension Agency received from the government is to inform about the whole pension system […] and how I can manage my own pension' (Designer, 25 October 2015).

The Premium Pension Investment Fund Guide contains a five-step procedure:

1. *Welcome.* At this stage the user is welcomed and receives information about the premium pension and the opportunity to choose from among approximately 800 investment funds.

2. *Choose risk level.* Here the user obtains information about risk and receives support in choosing an appropriate risk level. The risk is expected to be balanced among various stock markets (e.g., North America, Europe, and emerging markets).

3. *Choose investment fund.* At this step, the user receives information about the importance of the level of the fee charged by the respective investment fund and receives further support in choosing an appropriate level. The fee construction varies, but it is usually described as a certain percentage of the value of the fund over the year.

In Steps 4 and 5, users can receive support in creating a personal portfolio of funds. It is pointed out, however, that the guide is not allowed to provide recommendations. The message is that the user must learn about risk and about the role of fees before choosing funds. Nevertheless, there is also a default option with a moderate risk and a low fee – for users who refuse to choose.

Private competitors

A private guide to healthcare

Although it offers little in the way of provider ranking in healthcare, the Primary Healthcare Guide is an interesting example of an algorithm for matching user with care center. The algorithm was based on the user's answers to five questions regarding required proximity, valuation of the three dimensions of closeness, satisfaction with waiting times, and requirements for public versus private ownership. The algorithm automatically summarized the user's answers and matched the sum with a database of available care centers. The result presented by the algorithm was an ordered list, with the 'best' care center at the top.

A designer described the Primary Care Center Guide in this way: 'This is the fastest case we offer. You should not have to choose. We have three dimensions by which we can rank an option for you, dependent upon your preferences' (Designer, 15 April 2013).

A private guide to education

There are also privately owned guides in the market for education, and one of the best-known ones in Sweden is All Studies. All Studies covers education options at all levels in Sweden and, to some extent, even education abroad. This information about education possibilities attracts the most users. Another option that appeals to many users is the Job and Salary service, at which the user can obtain information about the salary which a certain type of education can be expected to generate. The guide also offers person-to-person counseling. There is no possibility of comparing schools based on quality indicators or ranking results. As to the purpose of this guide, a designer said:

> We provide information about gardening courses, but also options. What if the student finds out that there are too many candidates for gardeners in the coming 10 years, and there will be no jobs? We give information that allows students to consider other options. (Designer, 17 September, 2015)

In such varied ways, the guide supports the user in connecting education with working life.

A private guide to premium pension investment funds

The Premium Pension Investment Fund Guide is owned by the government, but there are also privately owned guides, one of which is Joint Funds. As one of the founders of the guide told us:

> There are many pension advisors in this market for investment funds. There is an apparent risk of conflict of interest between the user and

Figure 8.2 Joint Funds (*Kollektiva fondval*)

> the advisor. On the one hand, the advisor gets royalties from proposing a certain investment fund, while on the other hand the user is interested in the fund that gives the best return. (Designer, 29 September 2015)

Joint Funds offered a solution: to collect statistics of users' choices and their performance in the market. They identified the funds that the most successful users had chosen and proposed a portfolio of these investment funds to other users who had decided to follow Joint Funds (Figure 8.2).

The procedure of choice behind Joint Funds is as follows. First, the guide regularly identifies the most successful users who have used the guide and lists their choices among approximately 800 funds. Based on that information, and using a portfolio theory model, the guide establishes a basket containing the most successful investment funds chosen by previous users. The recommended portfolio of investment funds depends on age interval (20–30, 30–40, and so on; older generations are expected to decrease their risk). Information about an updated portfolio of funds is regularly sent to the users of Joint Funds via text messages, and they are invited to visit the website and change their existing portfolio of investment

funds to the newly proposed one. The creator of the guide pointed out to us that they do not work with recommendations; they merely identify the most successful users and suggest that other users of Joint Funds follow their choices. At the end of the interview with the creator of the guide, the interviewer asked, 'So, this is an almost mechanical procedure?' And the interviewee answered: 'Totally mechanical' (Creator, 29 September 2015).

Comparing guides

All the designers we interviewed admitted that users had problems choosing between various options and argued that information was the key for dealing with an overflow of choices. Different designers had different ideas about ways in which they could and should support the users. One option was to motivate and encourage the user to make an informed choice; the other was to mechanize the entire choice procedure in order to avoid choice. In the following pages, we begin by discussing some common characteristics of guides, and then, based on our theoretical frame of reference (judgment guides versus choice guides), identify some differences.

Common characteristics

The identification and demarcation of provider units is a major element of all guides. In the three markets we have studied, these units were schools, primary care centers, and investment funds. It is not always easy to identify units, however, because there are often education programs other than those offered by schools, general practitioners (rather than primary care centers), and different types of investment fund (e.g., equity and bond) rather than separate funds. The designers first had to decide what a unit was, and then separate each unit from the others in the market. All publicly financed schools, all publicly financed care centers, and more than 800 approved investment funds were identified as units and located in separate markets by the designers.

Designers realized that most users were not interested in all units in these markets and wanted to give users the opportunity to compile a limited number of units to choose from. One way to accomplish that was to include a geographical location in the guide on the basis of which the user could identify relevant units, such as schools and healthcare centers in the vicinity. In the investment-fund market, the type of fund was used as a way of selecting a limited number

of funds among more than 800 available options. One example is a geographical dimension that allows the user to select a limited number of global, European, Latin American, or Swedish investment funds. In summary, the guides wanted to give the user the opportunity to fill the computer screen with a limited number of separate units for comparison.

It was not enough for designers to enable the user to limit the number of separate units. They also added various types of quality indicators to the units that users had selected. All designers tried to use available sources of information and to connect that information to the units. Whether the unit was publicly or privately owned constituted one type of general information. Most designers also attempted to add user experiences to the units. In schools, it was data about pupils' and parents' experiences, often based on surveys. In healthcare, it was information about patient satisfaction as expressed in a survey (National Patient Survey, 2015); and in the case of the Premium Pension, it could be information about earlier user choices. Finally, some designers also added peer-review evaluations of units.

Judgment guides

We have identified three public websites (skolverket.se, 1177.se, and pensionsmyndigheten.se) that provide general information about schools, healthcare, and pensions, respectively. A major purpose of these websites seems to be a contribution to user knowledge before the making of a choice. The point of departure for the designers was that user choices in education, healthcare, and pensions are complex and cannot be reduced to one or a few personal preferences. These websites were also designed to connect the user to larger political objectives. In education, designers referred to life-long learning. In healthcare, they referred to the user's responsibility for his or her good health and for active participation in ongoing treatment programs. In pension-related guides, designers referred to the user's responsibility for future pension levels. These references to government objectives can be seen as a way for designers to motivate the user to make a choice. These guides promote the identity of the user as a citizen rather than a consumer, on the assumption that a motivated citizen can be expected to assume responsibility for the realization of government objectives.

The designers relied heavily on neo-liberal goals of individual freedom and responsibility (Gobby, 2017), and they wanted to

motivate the users to make a choice based on the information presented in the guide. Thus, to some extent, the designers relied on the motivated user's ability to collect information that could support a choice, but they also wanted to enable the users. To achieve this goal, they made various sources available to users: statistics from professional networks conducting evaluations of care units; primary school inspections by government institutions; and calculations such as the Sharpe ratio (risk in relation to earnings) developed by Nobel laureate William Sharpe, in relation to investment bonds. The designers' configuration of users was relatively loose, and the guides constrained their users in a limited way. The users were put at the center of an action net that was to result in a choice. Thus, increased knowledge and a long-term view were ways intended to motivate and enable the user and reduce the problem of an overflow of choices. In our interpretation, designers worked with the intention of creating a *judgment device* (Karpik, 2010) that would support the capacity of users to conduct more complex evaluations of existing units and their services.

Designers of these key public websites also tried to create dedicated guides that aided users in defining and comparing units on the basis of a limited number of quality indicators. The public guides Choose Your School, Healthcare Guide, and the Premium Pension Investment Fund Guide offer procedures supporting user choices. These guides help the user to pick out the number of units to be compared, and they offer tools that can be employed by users about to make a choice. These guides can be seen as examples of judgment guides, because they offer an open procedure to be followed by the user while making a choice; but they also add some restrictions. As we have said before, it is the user who is in the center of the action net, and the guide merely suggests a limited number of quality indicators to be employed by the user. The configuration of the user is still rather loose, and there are a number of other quality indicators available – to be utilized by the user or not. It is often recommended that users conduct their own research outside the guide before making a choice. Most public guides of this type were also connected to person-to-person counseling systems with a long tradition in the Swedish public sector, although private guides could offer counseling as well. In the All Studies guide, for example, students were offered the opportunity to contact counselors by telephone before choosing a secondary school. Here the users could add more information to their choice than was available in the more uniformly designed guides.

It must be stressed that the designers of public guides were not allowed, or did not find it appropriate, to give advice to users regarding which option to choose, and they tried to avoid doing so. The most obvious example is the Premium Pension Investment Fund Guide. It was not possible for its designers to build a guide that produced a ranking list that would suggest a specific fund to be chosen, because that would give the user the right to claim damages against the government if the investment fund decreased in value and the suggestion turned out to be a bad one. Ranking also goes against the idea that users must take responsibility for their choices in neo-liberal policies which involve the citizens' relationship to the state.

In summary, judgment guides seek to reduce the overflow of choices by motivating and enabling the user. The user, as a citizen, is expected to assume responsibility for choosing a unit from a long-term perspective.

Choice guides

There were also a number of guides in which designers tried to formalize the user's procedure when making a choice. Examples include the private All Studies, Primary Care Center Guide, and Joint Funds guides (Figure 8.2). Because of the formalized character of choice in these guides, we labeled them 'choice guides'. Their designers attempted to translate a rational choice model into these formalized procedures.

The designers of these guides were not against ranking, which opened up the opportunity to formalize choice procedures. The All Studies guide provides a procedure that compares user preference for a maximum life income with statistics of incomes that various educational programs have generated historically. Using that procedure, the user can obtain a ranking list of educational programs that have been the most profitable historically, which will suggest the optimal choice. A designer can proceed one step further in the construction of a formalized procedure, as illustrated by the private Primary Care Center Guide. There, the designer connected three types of criteria: geographical closeness, user opinions, and type of ownership (public or private). The user had to answer five questions regarding the value of the criteria before choosing a care center. Thus the user-preferences profile was automatically compared with available care centers in the area, resulting in a ranking list with the best provider at the top. As for the premium pension context,

a visitor to the Joint Funds guide (Figure 8.2) was recommended to follow the historically most successful members. The choice procedure was mechanized.

As the procedures used by designers were strictly formalized, we see them as algorithms. The designer assumed that the profile of the user could be a point of departure for a rational choice of care center according to an algorithm. The designer completes a configuration of the user by using advanced restrictions, and the user is not allowed to go outside these restrictions. In our opinion, it is the algorithm rather than the user that is located at the center of the action net in these guides. The user merely has the limited task of defining the value of a few predefined preferences, and the algorithm then makes the decision.

The algorithms used in the guides we described are not very advanced, and it is still possible for the user to understand the quality indicators that are used and, to some extent, how relationships between indicators are calculated. The question is, 'What happens if some of the quality parameters become more complex, and relations between them are hidden in a more complicated algorithm?' All designers in this study reported that adding qualities to a unit was a complicated and sometimes controversial job. One example is the medical performance of care centers: it was difficult to find measures of medical performance to be added to an evaluation of performance. Available data about performance were primarily intended for professionals, and they did not always agree. Consequently, this type of performance data was not (yet) included in the Primary Care Center Guide. In the future, however, more data of this kind may be included in the algorithms, and that may make it difficult for a user to comprehend the disputed medical quality of the units. More qualities can also be added to an algorithm, as happened in the dating industry described by Roscoe and Chillas (2013). In that industry, algorithms might be hidden, at least to some extent, and regarded as business secrets. If such guides and algorithms are used in the public sector, private guides with a hidden agenda will mediate the relationship between the state and the citizen.

The design of choice guides comes close to a rational choice model (Callon and Muniesa, 2005), but it still seems to have some limitations. One such limitation is the restricted user rationality (Gobby, 2017). The guide designer predefined the preferences of the user and the algorithm. The user cannot add personal preferences other than those predefined; the algorithm hence includes some things and excludes others. If the user accepts the predefined preferences,

however, the guide can spot 'the best option' without delay. Such guides can be useful if the user wants to find the 'best' primary care center or quickly contact a provider. It seems that choice guides tend to configure the user strictly as a consumer – not as a citizen. Yet from the government's point of view, choice guides can efficiently match the available provision of services with the user's (predefined) preferences on a large scale. Choice guides can be seen as an example of users having the ability to make a choice in the market if they have the appropriate support (Le Grand, 2007).

The idea of choice guides also has some connections to traditional organization theory and theories of decision-making. Cyert and March (1963) suggested that decisions are often avoided in organizations and compensated by standard operating procedures. The algorithms presented in this chapter can be seen as examples of standard operating procedures. Furthermore, user decisions supported by judgment guides have been described in organization-theory research. Simon (1947) proposed the concept of *bounded rationality*, which means that users try to find a 'satisficing' rather than an optional decision.

In summary, choice guides seek to reduce the overflow of choices by stabilizing the action net and the choice procedure via an algorithm. One could ask, therefore, if it is the algorithm or the user who makes the final choice. In any case, the guide and the algorithm in itself are key contributors to the final choice made on the basis of a choice guide.

Conclusions

The guides in the three welfare service markets addressed in this chapter were supposed to deal with the issue of an overflow of potential choices, as summarized in the concepts 'paradox of choice' (Schwartz, 2004) and 'tyranny of choice' (Salecl, 2010). They did that in either of two ways, their designers configuring two types of users: a motivated and enabled citizen and a consumer represented by an algorithm.

The first type of guide is tied to the major public authorities in the three markets. A main objective behind these guides is to motivate and enable the user to make an informed choice. The designers of these guides want to put the user at the center of an action net of choices. The guide enables the user by providing such information as peer reviews, user opinions, and general relevant information that can be easily sought and found. The purpose of most guides

is to counsel and support users' knowledge creation. Therefore, the guides can be seen as connected to a long tradition of human guidance and counseling that is an important aspect of the Swedish welfare model. The guides also connect the users to more contemporary political goals, such as users' life-long responsibility for their own health, education, and pensions. We regard this type of guide as judgment guides (Karpik, 2010). Users are given the opportunity to create their own action net which can help them to find a 'satisficing' option – in contrast to the optimal one.

A second type of guide is mainly tied to private actors, but some aspects can be found in public guides as well. These guides invite the user to an automatized action net, in which an algorithm is at the center. A major idea behind this guide is that the user should not have to choose; it is the algorithm that makes the choice. The designers select a number of factors, such as proximity to the unit, user opinions and performance, and salaries related to education. The user is invited to use this formalized action net in order to identify the best option. Such action nets are used by designers to connect a user with a unit by means of more or less simple propositions about user preferences. Among these designers, automatization of the choice procedure is regarded as a solution to the paradox of choice. Even so, the creation of choice guides is also subject to major restrictions. Because the publicly owned guides are not allowed to make recommendations, the designers of these guides hesitate to produce ranking lists. Privately owned guides have greater freedom. We agree with Callon and Muniesa (2005) that the goal of this type of guide choice is to map a rational choice model. (The purpose is to produce a ranking list and the best option, given the factors that are built into the action net.)

We concluded that a number of relatively dissimilar guides are being developed in each market, confirming Karpik's (2010) prediction that the future will see an increasing competition among guides which has the potential of being more important than the competition between provider units. Users would be able to choose a guide that suits their preferences regarding, for example, the degree of formalization of the choice procedure. Another dimension which may turn out to be essential in a competition among guides may be the attractiveness of these guides to users. While this is a key issue for all guides, it may be most important for private ones, whose goal is to attract investors and commercials.

This is a report from a study of the designers of web-based guides, but studies of the ways in which users actually use available

guides are required. Could it be that users combine guides, for example, and therefore act as both consumers and citizens?

Field material

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