

DATA-INFORMED VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Background

The Center and Aarhus Municipality's Department for Health and Care examine whether data-informed visionary leadership works best in combination with contingent verbal rewards or with distributed leadership.

The objective is to generate knowledge about how managers use data about performance and results in a meaningful and productive way that creates value for the citizens. An organizational vision is an image of a desirable future to which an organization is meant to contribute. The vision thus sets the direction for the organization, and data is a means to verify that the organization is on the right track. For data to be relevant, we have to know where we want to go.

If data-informed leadership is not coupled with a vision, data is just meaningless information. A vision that is not followed up with relevant data is just words without commitment. The core of the project is an expectation that the combination of vision and data can keep an organization on the right course.

Data-informed leadership and visionary leadership rarely stand alone. They are typically combined with a leadership approach that prioritizes relations with employees. For example, a manager tells employees when they are particularly successful in creating results and/or have made a valuable effort. The Danish Leadership and Management Commission uses the word "contingent verbal rewards" about this approach where the managers' positive and specific feedback satisfies the employees' need to feel competent.

Data-informed leadership and visionary leadership can also be combined with distributed leadership where manager and employees share leadership tasks. For instance, when employees contribute to coordination tasks, it may increase their motivation and ensure better task performance.



Objective and research method

The ambition is to contribute with context-specific knowledge about how the four types of leadership – visionary leadership, data-informed leadership, contingent verbal rewards and distributed leadership – can be combined specifically and create value in an organization for different managers, employees and citizens.

The project is a field experiment in the sense that the managers are randomly assigned to combine data-informed visionary leadership with either contingent verbal rewards or distributed leadership. All participating managers are trained in data-informed visionary leadership; half of them also receive training in distributed leadership, and the other half receives training in using contingent verbal rewards. The training is conducted by the municipality's own consultants to ensure recognizability with the managers' daily practice and to maintain knowledge and competences in the organization once the project is completed.

Employees and managers are asked about their behavior and experiences before training and a couple of months after training is completed. In addition, the project incorporates relevant data on citizens to study how they are affected by different combinations of leadership.

Additional information

The project is headed by Center Director Lotte Bøgh Andersen and Professor Simon Calmar Andersen and is supported by Data Manager Nanna Thomsen, Assistant Professor Jakob Majlund Holm as well as staff from Aarhus Municipality. Initial results will be presented in June 2019.