

SPAN OF CONTROL IN HEALTH CARE ORGANIZATIONS

Background

The number of employees you are responsible for is a central condition for a leader. During the last 20 years, there has been fewer leaders and an increasing number of employees in health care organizations. Today, many leaders are therefore responsible for many employees and very complex leadership tasks.

Through the years, both international and Danish research has studied how span of control affects: performance, goal attainment, leadership behaviour, the employees and the leaders.

Across the Danish health care sector, there are significant variations in the way which organizational set ups are modified, to address possible, negative consequences of large spans of control.

Hospitals often choose to have more side-by-side leaders at each section, who solves leadership tasks in collaboration. Furthermore, distributed leadership has become popular, since it may relieve some of the pressure on the formal leader. Distributed leadership means that employees perform leadership tasks on behalf of a leader, while possessing authority towards colleagues. Finally, some hospitals deploy different support functions. This may be in the form of a deputy manager, a set of specialists attending to specific technical or organizational responsibilities, or it may be more administrative support functions.

The purpose and methodology of the study

We address the need for additional studies on how span of control affects leaders and their employees. Specifically, we know very little on whether the consequences of a given span of control will be different across different organizational set ups.



The goal of the study is

- To provide knowledge on how span of control affects leadership behaviour and the possibility for the employees to provide the best service towards the citizens.
- To evaluate the degree to which side-by-side leaders, distributed leadership and the use of support functions leads to the increase in performed leadership behaviour.

Methodologically, two surveys are sent to staff at Danish hospitals. First, a survey is sent to nursing managers. Afterwards, a survey is sent to 10 staff nurses of each nursing manager.

More information on the project

Professor Christian Bøtcher Jacobsen and senior advisor Lars Dahl Pedersen lead the project. We complete the project in collaboration with DNO (the Danish Nursing Organization), and we use an advisory group consisting of Dorthe Danbjørg, Irene Hesselbjerg; Jonna Søgaard and Thomas Garlov from DNO.

