

DIGITAL DISTANCE LEADERSHIP

Background

Digital technologies, such as e-mails, video conferencing and case management systems, have become a central part of most public managers' work, and the new technologies have made it possible to lead at a distance. This is necessary, for example in the relocated sections of state agencies or for managers in charge of several physical facilities.

From research, we know that digital technologies cannot replace face-to-face dialogue. It can be difficult to engage employees emotionally and cognitively when communication is digital. Humor is also difficult to convey if we cannot look each other in the eye.

On the other hand, you can reach more employees more often by using digital technologies. This can support leaders in communicating and sharing the organizational vision. Additionally, many managers are aware that their behavior is particularly important when managers and employees are dispersed and need to communicate digitally.

Importantly, digital technologies are very different, and so are forms of leadership. That is why we need more knowledge about how leaders combine different technologies and how it interacts with their leadership practices.



Objective and methods

How does digital communication between leaders and employees affect the ability to conduct leadership? How does physical distance between them matter? These are the key issues in the project.

The project is based on ethnographic methods. A number of public leaders from different organizations will be followed and observed in their everyday work life. In addition, data is collected through interviews with managers and employees. To the extent possible, digital data will be included.

Organizations are selected to represent different types of physical distance between managers and employees. The fieldwork will answer the following questions:

1. What characterizes public managers' use of digital technologies when they interact with employees?
2. How and why do digital technologies and leaders' use of them influence this interaction?
3. How does physical distance, digital technologies and leadership relate?

Additional information

The project is part of the REPLACE project ([link](#)). The PhD project is headed by PhD student Mathilde Winsløw and supported by Associate Professor Caroline Grøn and Assistant Professor Anne Mette Møller.

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