



ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

Background

Many public employees make decisions every day in their work that affect the lives of citizens. Police officers, for example, have to decide whether to fine citizens who do not comply fully with the rules during the COVID-19 crisis. Should they give a fine for staying in a town square with too many others or just issue a warning?

Similarly, caseworkers at job centers may give some slack to unemployed citizens who for some reason do not meet the requirements formulated in collaboration with the caseworker. Or they may not. As tax-paying citizens, we expect that public servants always try to do what is "right", "fair" and "good". More precisely, we expect public servants to act on the basis of ethical considerations.



As role models, public managers can have great influence on employees' ethical considerations (or lack of the same) through ethical leadership. Existing research indicates that leadership is of great importance for how employees act and perform in public organizations, but we still need more specific knowledge about what ethical leadership entails and how it affects ethical behavior.

Objective and methods

The project addresses what ethical leadership really means. Does it actually have a substantial impact on employee behavior and performance? The project is based on qualitative data in the form of individual interviews with staff in public hospitals, as well as quantitative data in the form of questionnaires sent to various public organizations. Based on this data, the project will, among other things, answer the following questions:

1. What characterizes "ethical leadership" in public organizations?
2. What are the relationships between ethical leadership and employee behavior?
3. Which mechanisms can explain a possible connection between ethical leadership and employee behavior?

Additional information

The project is headed by PhD student Rebecca Risbjerg Nørgaard and supported by Professor Lotte Bøgh Andersen and Professor Martin Bækgaard.