

MANAGERIAL ROOM FOR MANEUVERING: OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS FOR PUBLIC LEADERS

Background

Public leaders work in organizations where top management is ultimately political. This involves special opportunities and limitations. Likewise, legislation, policy objectives and employee expectations can influence the ability of public leaders to act.

This project focuses on the autonomy of public leaders, understood as the opportunities and constraints that characterize public leadership. The concept as well as the need for autonomy in public organizations has been the focus of public debate in recent years. However, it is unclear what exactly is meant by the term, also in the scientific literature.

It is a common assumption in both theoretical literature and politics that higher degree of managerial autonomy has a positive impact on the performance of public organizations. The project conducts a critical analysis of that assumption.



Objective and methods

The project's ambition is, first, to come up with a clearer definition and conceptualization of autonomy of public managers. Second, to add to limited empirical research on the importance of increased or decreased managerial autonomy for the performance of public organizations. In several areas, policies have been implemented with the explicit purpose of increasing the autonomy of public managers. The project examines how these changes effect organizational performance. Specifically, it examines, for example, the importance of reform and rule changes in primary school principals' self-perceived degree of managerial autonomy, as well as the significance for academic performance at the schools.

First, the project contributes to the international literature on public management with a solid theoretical understanding of what managerial autonomy entails in public organizations. Second, it contributes with empirical knowledge on the importance of autonomy of managers for organizational performance. Third, it is relevant for future public policy because of its insights about antecedents and effects of managerial autonomy.

The project uses both qualitative data sources (e.g. interviews) and quantitative data (e.g. questionnaires and register data). The following questions are highlighted in the project:

1. How can managerial autonomy be understood conceptually?
2. What is the relationship between managerial autonomy and organizational performance?

Additional information

The project is headed by PhD student Stefan Boye and supported by Associate Professor Anne Mette Kjeldsen and Professor Søren Serritzlew.