

Trust-based management and organizational change in home care

An example from Sweden

The paper takes its empirical points of departure in the introduction of trust-based management in homecare in a Swedish municipality. The example – here referred to as *The Case* – is discussed and elaborated with references both to time, space, theory and practice.

As home care is an integrated part of the Swedish municipally administered welfare system; there are 290 different ways of putting home care responsibilities into practice. Still, the Swedish welfare sector is large and formally universally organized. For some decades this major welfare sector has been criticized on a number of salient scores – concerning unsatisfactory quality levels, inefficient implementation, financial deficits, and problems to ensure that adequate numbers of employees with the right profile and background are recruited. In many municipalities the latter of these problems is especially pronounced in homecare.

New Public Management-inspired methods have been established in order to address these problems across the western liberal world. In an article published as early as 1991 Christopher Hood, the probably most frequently cited researcher on NPM, classified Sweden as the most extreme introducer of NPM in its public and welfare sectors. It appears, nonetheless, as though NPM has failed to be the solution many organizations and welfare system managers initially hoped for. There is rather an emerging awareness that it has generated new problems; such as the ongoing expansion of administrative and measurement tasks, hence distracting and wasting the professional attention of specialist staff. These shortcomings have been reported in research reports, in the public debate and by politicians.

In 2016 the Swedish government announced a *Trust Delegation*, with a commission to reform the organizational principles of the public sector towards more trust-based management.

Trust-based management can be described as a form of steering by professionals, semiprofessionals and different occupational groups with their competence in focus. Quality measurement is conducted through peer-reviews – that is allowing employees to review each other's work – and through cross-professional collaboration.

The trust-based management discussion can be regarded as adjunct and a response to the development of an increasingly result-based management of the public sector in Sweden. Examining The Case the paper aims to contribute to developing understanding of trust-based management by giving an example of trust-based management and organizational change in a Swedish municipality – as well as to highlight different relational forms of trust. The descriptions give voice to key actors on all organizational levels which highlights conflicting perspectives in some dimensions but also points to unanimous statements and sentiments in others. Whether this will change over time has to be subjected to further research.

The Case is thus used to inventory relation variation based on trust and allows the paper to elaborate on how this effects a homecare organization as a whole but also to challenge dominating views of both how the homecare sector functioned before NPM, during NPM, and now in the aftermath of the NPM era. The discussion refers to public sector characteristics, the distinctiveness of care, especially distributed care, and how to manage and communicate in decentralized organizations.

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