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Author

Sehested, Karina

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**ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURAL CHANGES
IN
DANISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

by Karina Sehested

Institute of Industrial Relations,
University of California at Berkeley,
and
Institute of Local Government Studies, Denmark
Institute of Industrial Relations
University of California at Berkeley
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ABSTRACT

Since 1990, profound structural changes in the organization of local government have taken place in Denmark: Changes in the political structure (with the consolidation of political committees), in the administration (with the consolidation of departments and internal decentralization), and at the level of institutions (with decentralization from the administrative unit to the institutions). At the center of the changes are despecialization and decentralization. The longterm goal is to improve service, increase efficiency, share responsibility, create a more holistic orientation, as well as to increase the public's influence. A research project has been started to document effects of these changes and to find explanations for them.

The research project is still in progress, but initial results show that effects of the structural changes can already be seen in some instances and that it is possible to discern patterns in the relationship between specific structural changes and the changed attitude of local government. However, the research also shows that the goals have not yet been completely reached. One explanation for this may be that different cultures, norms, and values are slowing down the implementation of the changes.

To reach the stated goal, it appears necessary to change the perspective of the actors in the organization (i.e., the employees). In Denmark, most of the employees in local government are "professionals," as the term is defined by social science. One way of dealing with cultures, norms, and values is to view professions as the creator of these cultures. Norms and values of professionals are mostly formed outside the organization, but expressed through structures and cultures within the organization. This provides an opportunity to combine structural and cultural approaches to the analysis of organizational development.

One of our main theses in the project is that changes in the organization of local government require changes in the "professionals" way of thinking and acting. The discussion of the relationship between professions and organizational development will be used to improve the models for change in the reorganization of Danish local government.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with recent changes in local government organization in Denmark. In 1990, Danish district authorities implemented radical changes in the structure of their organizations. These changes are interesting: First, they are going on in many district authorities and are radical in the sense that they are "moving the goal-post" of many old structures and practices; and secondly, they are taking place rapidly. These changes are being referred to as the "silent revolution" in district authorities. Obviously, the changes constitute a good subject for serious study.

The Institute of Local Government Studies-Denmark, the National Association of Local Authorities in Denmark, and Odense University have joined forces on a major research project focusing on this restructuring of local government. The project (the first of its kind in Denmark) has the initial aim of documenting *effects of organizational development in district authorities*, concerning the political, the administrative, and the institutional level in the district authorities. In this paper, I shall summarize some of the results of our investigation thus far and make some comments on our future work on the research project (especially in relation to its theoretical aspect).¹ But first I shall give a short introduction to what local government is about in Denmark.

Danish Local Government

In Denmark, well over one-half of all public expenditures are administered by local government. "Local government" refers to the county authorities and the district authorities (the latter also referred to in this

¹ The first results from the research project are published in the book: "Effekter af strukturændringer i kommuner." Karina Sehested et al., AKF rapport 1992.

paper as the municipalities) who operate in different areas of public administration and public services.²

The **municipalities** are mainly involved in the health and social areas, with a concentration in the social area. Their tasks include handling a variety of social security benefits, offering practical support programs and institutions (such as day-care institutions for children and homes for the elderly). In addition, they also provide home help, home nursing, etc. The municipalities also perform a major role in the educational area. They are in charge of the nine-year primary/lower-secondary schools and provide all the services connected with schooling (such as a pre-school year, libraries, dentists, doctors, etc.) and also operate in the cultural area by providing public library systems. In addition, the municipalities also deal with tasks related to urban development and the environment (such as sewage, refuse removal and disposal, supply of water, gas, electricity, natural gas and district heating). (Albæk 1993, p.29)

The **county authorities'** major function is in the hospitals area, providing free medical care for all citizens in the county. In the social and cultural arena, they run the residential institutions for children and young people and institutions for the physically and mentally handicapped of all ages, and are in charge of the three-year grammar-school. They are also responsible for inspections of environmental pollution and do some physical planning too. (Albæk, 1993, p. 30)

The focus of this paper is on the reorganization of the municipalities which administer the major proportion of local public expenditures. Changes at the county level are similar to those in the municipalities described below but are yet to be investigated.

How are the Municipalities Organized?

A political structure (a collegiate system) exists in which the local councils and the committees share the responsibility for all matters of the municipalities. The councils are elected for a four-year period by direct elections based on proportional representation. (Albæk, 1993, p.10.) In addition, there is the administrative structure

²The following is based on: Erik Albæk, "Denmark: Two decades of local government reform," paper prepared for the inter-Nordic Research Project: Public Sector Experiments as a Learning and Adaption Strategy, in press, 1993.

consisting of a centralized administrative unit and of the institutions which perform some administrative duties and in practice provide most of the services. The politicians in each municipality decide on the division of responsibility and duties between the administrative and the political levels. The different departments in the administration have the responsibility for their specific area. Customarily, there has been one department for each political committee.

Figure 1 shows a standard organization of the municipalities, before change.

2. WHAT ARE THE STRUCTURAL CHANGES ABOUT?

Early in 1990, after an election to municipality councils, we see widespread changes in the structure of the municipalities in three areas: the political committees, the central administration, and the delegation of responsibility to municipal institutions. These are the three main types of changes that are the subjects for investigation in the present project.

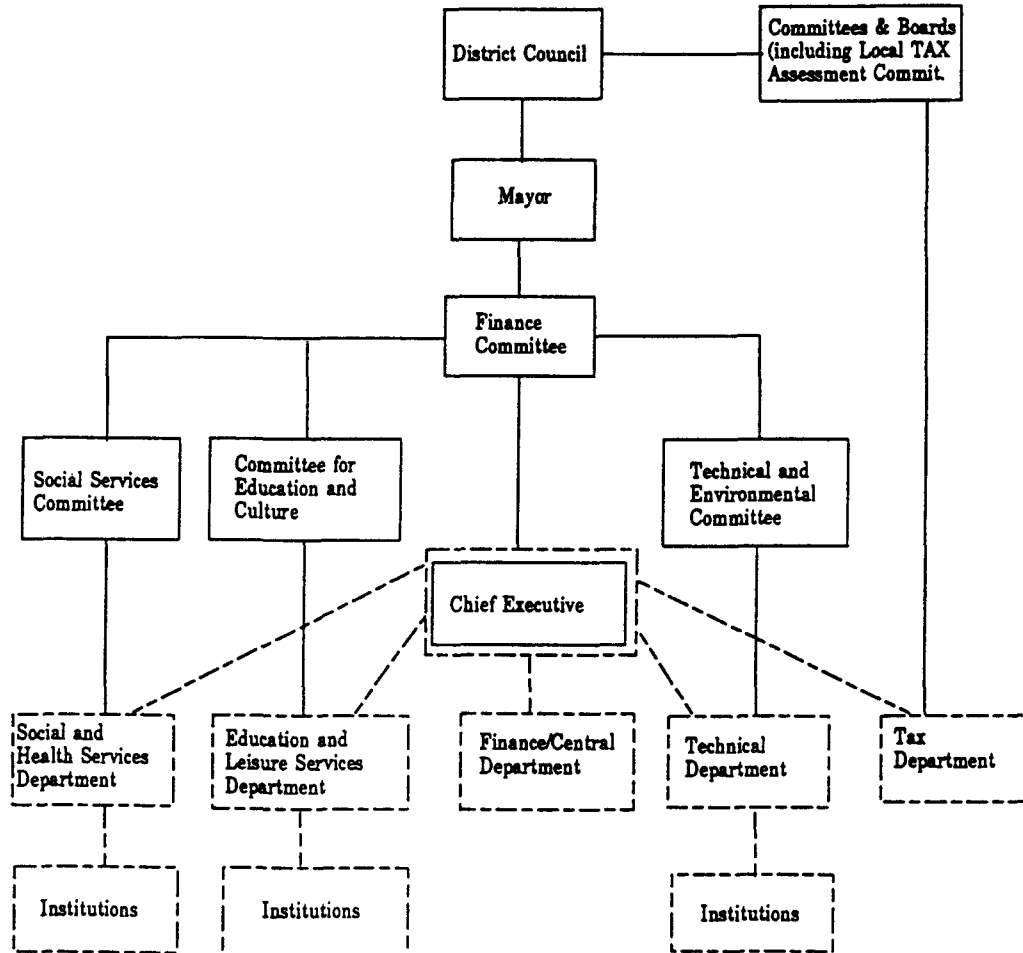
The structure of political committees is considered first. Since 1988, 132 municipalities out of a total of 275 have made changes in their political structure; 75% of these changes were made in 1990 alone. The average number of committees in 1980 was 4.5. In 1992, the average number was 3.6. The tendency is to have fewer committees -- to consolidate political committees -- with a wider sphere of responsibility. And we see a broader variation in the way of structuring the political governance in the municipalities than before. (Mouritzen et al. 1993, p.20)

Looking at the administrative structure, I shall first deal with the centralized administrative unit. In the period from 1988 to 1992, 183 municipalities out of 275 have implemented changes, most of which were made in 1992. In 1988, the average number of departments in a municipality was 5.4. In 1992, it was 4.7. So we see the same tendency here as at the political level: a tendency to fewer departments (through consolidation) with a wider area of responsibility. The changes can mainly be seen in the area of the social and cultural departments; fewer changes have been made in the area of the technical departments. (Mouritzen et al. 1993, p.22)

The overall tendency in the political structure and the centralized administrative structure can be characterized as

de-specialization. The former structures were very much based on a functional specialization in different areas such as economics, taxation, technical service, social service, school service, etc. The new structures are based on more holistic views of service provision, as expressed in the names for new departments: "unity" department, "citizens service" department, "the individual" department and "children's" department.

Figure 1: STANDARD DISTRICT AUTHORITY STRUCTURE



List of symbols: _____ Political structure
 ----- Administrative structure

Source: Albæk 1993

Finally, there are also changes in the administrative structure of the level of institutions. The overall tendency is a **decentralization** of responsibility within the administrative system away from the centralized administrative unit to the institutions. In 1989-90, 61% of the municipalities took additional steps towards financial autonomy for institutions within their respective budgets.³ And since then, the rest of the municipalities have followed this trend to implement some kind of decentralization from administration to institutions.⁴ However, the degree of decentralization varies greatly between the municipalities. Besides the economic autonomy of the institutions we see autonomy in the areas of administration, in wage- and personnel policy, and in professional issues.

Why Did the Municipalities Change Their Structure?

It is possible to find some explanations for the changes if we look at the goals of the changes. Surveys⁵ show that it is possible to summarize the goals of the municipalities as follows:

- **Improve service for the citizens -- "the citizen at the center of the service":** The goal is to change attitudes of all parties involved in the provision of service to citizens. Instead of focusing on bureaucratic and control functions, the focus is now on the service function. One practical example of the consequences of the reorganization is that now the citizens only have to address one place/one office for getting a service instead of being referred to different offices and different people. And, of course, that the quality of the services has improved.
- **Increase the public's influence and self-government:** The public must be involved in the decision making and provision of services to a larger extent. This is considered to be important to avoid the critic who claims that the system

³ According to a national survey in 1989 referred to in Gjelstrup and Albæk 1990.

⁴ According to a national survey made in 1992 by the National Association of Local Authorities in Denmark.

⁵ Made by the National Association of Local Authorities in Denmark in 1991.

alienates the citizens and turns them into clients instead of persons. Decentralization gives the citizens more influence through the board of users⁶ in the institutions.

• **Increase efficiency and improve resource management:** For years, municipalities have been under pressure to reduce their expenditures and to find a more efficient way of allocating resources. Fewer organizational levels, delegation of authority to employees, new structures of leadership, new technology, etc., are seen as a means to attain this goal.

• **Holistic solutions and the breaking down of the sectoral and professional boundaries:** New structures have to be formed so the finding of solutions to problems is not limited to the view of one sector or one profession alone. The establishment of cross-sectoral leadership groups, consolidation of committees and departments, new structures based on "objectives" instead of functions, are all examples of changes in this direction.

• **Increase sharing of responsibility and improving the work place:** The ideal being that high productivity will be achieved if a better work environment is created for the employees. Delegation of responsibility to the employees, improved management, management by objectives, and on-the-job training are all a part of this.

What is worth noting here is that though the goals are very diverse, they are still seen as connected. The diversity is expressed by the various aspects of the changes. We are not just talking about saving money or cutting back on the expenditures of the municipalities, but we also see an effort to change the way of providing public services at the local level: The overall goal is to improve the services to the citizens. The rest can be seen as different means to achieve this goal.

⁶The term 'users' is a blanket term for citizens using a specific service or representing others using a specific service, e.g., parents representing their children in schools or day-care centers.

3. HOW TO EVALUATE EFFECTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES?

The basis for the research project was pragmatic and instrumental.

Pragmatic in the sense that the municipalities involved in the project deliberated with the researchers what kind of changes should be included in the project (that is, on which examples the research should focus within the overall limitations mentioned above). Discussions and conclusions from other research projects in organizational change show us that it is very difficult to find "objective" factors to measure the effects of changes. It was possible to use some (especially in the case of decentralization of the institutions), but mostly we had to use more "subjective" factors to illustrate the very wide and divergent picture of effects. The latter factors we found in the experiences of the people involved in the process of the implementation of the changes. And we tried to verify the experiences by concrete examples and facts confirmed by other participants in the process of change (this includes the citizens as well).

Literature on evaluation⁷ recommends that an evaluation of organizational changes should be undertaken as an evaluation of fulfillment of goals. The same was recommended by the practitioners involved in the changes. Initiators of changes in municipalities seem to think that structures are to be used as a means to change behavior and attitudes and thereby to achieve the goals. Therefore, we chose an **instrumental** basis for the research project: the changes of structures implemented are expected to have effects especially on behavior, i.e., in municipality decision making and, provision of services as well as on attitudes and perceptions of the actors involved in decision making and the provision of services. There are many problems with this approach to evaluate changes in organizations. We are aware of this in the research project and have correspondingly tried to adjust the concept of the investigation and the findings concerning these problems. But unfortunately, it is not possible to overcome all the obstacles and the results will necessarily be influenced by that fact.

The project is designed as case studies in six municipalities representing different characteristics of the

⁷For example Vedung 1991.

changes. The documentation consists partly of written material and partly -- and principally -- of focus group interviews and individual interviews with politicians, chief administrators, institution directors, employees, and citizens/users⁸ in the municipalities. More than 200 participants have been involved in the investigation. In one municipality, a small users survey has also been carried out. As mentioned before, the main goal of the interviews was to determine how those participating in the municipal restructuring perceived the effects of the changes.

4. EFFECTS OF STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE MUNICIPALITIES

The following comments on the general findings in the effects study and describes the effects in greater detail in relation to the different types of changes.

The study shows a tendency for the changes to have a greater effect on internal administrative conditions (e.g., efficiency, unity, co-responsibility) than on external conditions directly related to the citizenry (e.g., generally improved service, increased user influence). On the other hand, the participants did expect this to be felt in the next few years. Generally speaking this means that the participants believe the development is on the right track: that the structural changes are a good means to achieve the goals in the long run, as it takes time for the changes to penetrate to the outermost levels: improvement of service and users influence. It is often difficult for the participants to judge whether the effects are due to the structural changes or to the general social trend, such as changes in laws and a general change of attitude concerning public sector activities. However, it appears that the general social trend and the aim of the changes coincide and are closely linked.

The study also shows a pronounced difference in the perception of the effects between politicians and managers, on the one hand, and employees and -- particularly -- users, on the other. Politicians and managers both expressed the opinion that the changes have had a greater impact than the employees and users do and the politicians and managers also

⁸In the research project we only included citizens that were users of services undergoing change. Therefore, in the following I will denote the citizens involved in the investigation as "users."

find it most difficult to provide concrete examples of the effects in support of their responses. This may be partly due to their seniority positions in the organization, but another reason might partly be that some of their positive responses may be colored by wishful thinking -- a perception of how one would like things to be. The responses given by users, on the other hand, are characterized by the fact that they have no opportunity of registering changes of internal nature, and -- as mentioned previously- they claim that better service has generally not been provided yet.

The goals mentioned above are not all relevant to every type of change. This fact has been considered in the evaluation and in the following description of effects of changes on the political committees, in the administration, and at the level of institutions.

Effects of Changes in the Structure of the Political Committees

The principal goals of the committee changes are to increase efficiency and better resource management, and evolve more holistic solutions in the political work. Fulfillment of these goals is intended to result in better service for the citizens. The changes evaluated are consolidation of committees, particularly in the cultural and the social sectors.

Their impact differs, depending on whether the effects are seen from the sector covered by the new committee or from the point of view of the municipality council.

Seen from the new committee, the aims have largely been achieved, especially more holistic solutions in the political work concerning children and elderly. The political plans for and the implementation of a more holistic approach in these areas are ascribed by all participants directly to the structural changes. The political work has become more efficient with fewer committees to deal with and the distribution of resources is made easier and more flexible to adapt to current needs. However, the municipal councils feel that the new structure makes it more difficult to form a comprehensive understanding of all the political work in the municipality and that this results in a poorer basis for political decisions. The local politicians are now members only of one committee, whereas previously they were on several committees and were thus afforded greater insights into more political arenas.

Two problems must be solved: One is a lack of inter-committee, general theme discussions in the municipality council. For this to be achieved, change in the political role is considered essential. The politicians are used to deal with individual cases in their political work. If the new structure is going to function, they will have to give this up and work on a more general and overall political level. The other problem is a lack of holistically-oriented groups of chief administrators as the link between the political and the administrative levels. A clearer demarcation of authority between the two levels is necessary. The structural changes reveal a need for new work procedures and tools to ensure an appropriate political process of decision making.

Effects of Changes in Administration

The principal goals of administrative changes are the internal administrative aims that are intended to result in better service -- aims such as increased efficiency and better resource management, more holistic solutions and breaking down of sectoral and professional boundaries, increased sharing of responsibility, and a better work place. The changes we have studied are consolidation of administration with new structures based on the citizens situation, e.g., family and children department, elderly department, quick service counter, municipal shop, etc.

It is widely accepted and agreed that efficiency and resource management have indeed improved. The improvement has been achieved particularly in the reorganization process and through the introduction of new management structures which give the handling of individual cases in the administration a more holistic character (e.g., a case of a child or a family is now being dealt with in the same department), but it must be noted that it is mainly the consolidation of professional related administrations which has this effect (e.g., in the education, culture, and social services area). No effects have been observed in the case of consolidation of departments not from a professional view, but from, for instance, a methodical point of view, (e.g., the tax department and the social services department because of the individualized approaches to handling cases). There are trends towards increased holistic orientation at the top administrative level (e.g., the education area, the day care area, the elderly area), but examples are still few and far between. A more radical break with traditional thinking at the management level in the municipalities is called for. In general, there still appears to exist a dearth of clarity concerning the new division of authority between managers

and employees, and the employees do not feel that they have been given greater responsibility.

Looking at the external goals, such as increased user influence and better service, the users do not feel that there has been any noticeable change in the services they receive since the organizational changes took place. However, many positive words were expressed about the secondary services, where the structural changes have resulted in the users not having to go to quite as many different offices now, that fewer local government officers are involved in one and the same case, and that cases are handled more expeditiously.

Increased user influence is not regarded as a primary goal of administrative changes, but the study shows a slight tendency for municipalities to seek and achieve user influence as a side effect of the changes. In the municipalities, the users are typically involved in the reorganization process (e.g., in the planning phase), and the tendency is that the users will retain influence in more permanent forms after the changes have been institutionalized -- in the form of elderly councils, working groups in selected areas, health committees, etc. However, there is overall still a big gulf between the citizens/users and town hall.

The reasons given for the fact that the goals have not yet been fully met in the administrative changes is customarily that there are very big differences in culture, norms, and values among the employees. The view is expressed that employees have a big influence in the implementation of the changes. If the changes are to have a greater impact, attitudes of both managers and employees must change, and this takes a long time. A majority of the participants think, however, that the structural changes will help to bring about this change of attitude and that the changes are therefore a step in the right direction.

Effects of Decentralization

All the above-mentioned goals are vital goals in the decentralization measures. We have studied decentralization from administration to institutions and internally in the administrative system (e.g., social services district offices, district care of the elderly, and of the children).

The decentralization results in a high degree of attainment of most of the goals. With the decentralization, the municipalities have achieved most in respect to

fulfillment of the external goals: better service and greater user influence.

Looking at better service, though, there are two trends. The many cost savings on municipal services, which often accompany the municipal restructuring, tend to lead to an impairment of services. But, at the same time, users think that increased user influence leads to improvements and that the resources, although there may be fewer of them, are used more effectively when they themselves have a say in their management.

All the participants agree that user influence has increased since the decentralization measures were taken. The division of administrations or areas of administration into districts results, indirectly, in better interaction between employees and users, as new relationships develop between users and employees, and users feel that they gain more influence. At the institutions, the users feel that the more independent the institutions become, the more influence they themselves will be able to exercise. However, the users also stress some limitations to their influence: the area in which they have a say is still only marginal (a small part of the budget, since wages are still not open for negotiation), and both users and employees think that the boundaries of influence are still very unclear. Will the users be allowed to influence the general framework of the institutions and/or the institutions' operational tasks?

The high degree of goal fulfillment achieved by decentralization measures can perhaps best be explained by the "built-in success." Decentralization supports a development towards autonomy that has been going on for a long time in the institutional arena and which coincides with the employees' and users' own wishes about developments in the future.

The goal of holistic solutions that has not yet been reached by decentralization; though it is fulfilled within the individual, autonomous unit (e.g., the school or the day-care center), it has not generally been attained -- for example, at the inter-institutional or overall municipal levels. Decentralization tends to support institutional egocentricity, so the grand whole, the community, and common formulation of policy, loose out. Many of the participants in the study, including employees and users, consider it a problem that it does not seem possible to establish a more coherent development in their sector or area in the municipality. There is a demand for further substantive discus-

sions of goals among users, employees, and politicians. The users and the employees want political responsibility and political attention to be maintained despite decentralization. This seems to indicate that increased decentralization will lead to a greater need for change at the political level and in the political role in the future. As we have seen in the effects of changes on the political committees, the trend of more general and holistic political discussions progresses only slowly and sporadically. If the decentralization is to work according to the wishes of the employees and the users, it presupposes a profound change at the political level towards a political double role: a combination of holistically-oriented committee work and greater political openness to employees, users, and institutions in general.

5. FUTURE WORK IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

As previously mentioned, the main purpose of the research project was to document effects of organizational changes in the municipalities. We started out by looking at the changes in 6 municipalities, and in 1993-94 we will be continuing in 6 more municipalities in 1993-94. However, another purpose was to try to explain these effects and to develop a theoretical framework.

The research concept involved a specific theoretical understanding of organizational development. Recently, extensive surveys on public organizational changes have been undertaken in the Scandinavian countries. Two views are represented. Both are structural approaches to understand organizations.

One has its background in the instrumental approach and been developed further into a "new-instrumental" perspective. The formal structures of the organization are seen as a central element for governing behavior in organizations. Formal structures include stable, impersonal, and official norms. But the physical and the demographic (with education as the most important feature) structures are also essential means of governing.⁹

This perspective is challenged by several other perspectives. But one of major influence in Scandinavian countries and the one we have chosen to work with has its

⁹ Egeberg 1989.

roots in the institutional perception of organizations. This perspective is developed within the "new-institutional" perspective. The starting point here is the rules set by culture, norms, and values governing the behavior of actors in organizations and thereby the development in an organization. Structures and processes have their own value: they are not merely instruments that can be used as a means to change behavior.¹⁰ So to understand organizational development, a two-pronged focus on actors as well as on structures is needed. The focus on actors will provide an understanding of culture, norms, and values.

In our research project, the experiences from both of these perspectives were used. The aim was to highlight to what extent the structural changes actually change behavior in the organization and whether it is possible to find a pattern in different kinds of structural changes and their influence on behavior within the organization. Other explanations for the change of behavior, such as culture, norms, and values, were also considered. Here too, we wanted to find a pattern and analyze these cultures, norms, and values: what is their content? how are they constituted? how are they expressed? etc...

The result of the research has provided several answers, which will be investigated further in the project. They confirm that the understanding of organizational changes is not a question of taking either the instrumental or the institutional approach. Both ways of thinking contribute to the understanding. The point is not to exclude one or the other, but to find the right combination of the approaches according to the specific empirical material.

In the case of structural changes in municipalities we found "instrumental" effects and some patterns. The study showed that effects are different according to the form and the content of the structural changes. An example: we saw that a structural separation or division (e.g., decentralization) seems to result in a higher fulfillment of goals than a consolidation of units in the structural setting (e.g., consolidation of administrative departments and political committees). Separation/division seems to decrease conflicts and thereby make it easier to achieve the goals, while consolidation seems to increase conflicts and block the reaching of the goals. However, we also see a tendency of a change in tasks and perspectives in the desired direction through consolidation: the more holistic

¹⁰ Brunsson and Olsen 1990.

orientation, even though this is only accomplished to a certain minor degree. It appears that the separation/division prevents an achievement of this goal. So the general assumption about the effects of consolidation and separation has to be differentiated according to the content of the goals.

The results show us in general relationship between structural factors and actual behavior in the organization, and it seems possible to discern certain patterns in the relationship. But the research also shows us the limitations of changing the behavior through structures, because a complete fulfillment of the goals is still to be seen. This indicates that structural changes provide a way for changing behavior, but not a guarantee that it will happen. The participants' explanation for this is as stated before: that the different cultures, norms, and values in the organization block the full implementation of the changes. And the "new-institutional" theory agrees with this. This leads us toward an actor-based view on organizations in the further analysis of effects.

Again, we have made a choice, which is to focus on three different actor perspectives to explain effects. One is the politicians' view, another is the managers' view, and the last is the view of the employees. For a while, we change our perspective to look at groups of actors in the organization operating in specific structures with specific culture, norms, and values.

From the perspective of politicians, it will be the discussion of the development of democracy and the role of citizens/users and politicians in this development which are the main subject for further investigation in the project. From the perspective of managers, it will be the role of leadership in implementation of organizational changes that is the main subject. And, we are especially interested in administrative management in a political organization. Finally, from the perspective of the employees, it is their role in and opportunity for influencing the implementation of changes that set the stage for further investigation.

The Influence of Employees on Structural Changes in the Municipalities

In my own future work in the research project I shall concentrate on the perspective of the employees. The following comments concern this aspect.

The empirical work shows that the employees have a strong impact on effects of structural changes. They especially have the capability of supporting or hindering the implementation of changes. And their way of behavior is conditioned on their different cultures, norms, values, patterns of perception, and prejudices.

One way of dealing with cultures, norms, and values of the employees in municipalities is to see **professions** as a central creator of the cultures, etc. in the administration and the institutions of local authorities. By doing that, we supplement the governing of the organization with an additional form of governing: the norms and values of the professionals. Each form of governing has its own core, but they also interact. Their professional norms and values have evolved through structures and cultures within the organization. In that sense, the professional norms and values can be seen as an attempt to integrate a cultural and structural perspective on organizations.

The question is whether or not a professional approach is relevant in our context.

In Danish local government, by far the largest group of employees are professionals; most are teachers, nurses, psychologists, economists, lawyers, architects, etc. The same holds true also for the social and cultural areas in which most of the employees are considered to be professionals. And in future research work we shall concentrate on the cultural and social area of the district authorities, where we see the greatest effort being made to implement change.

The term "professional" is used in the social science meaning. In sociological discussion on professions it has not been possible to come to a consensus on what exactly a professional is. This will be a matter of future discussions in the project. For now, we have characterized professionals as having a certain perception of themselves related to a profession, a perception based on abstract, scientific, and theoretical knowledge and, later on, on practical experiences made. Being a professional has to do also with having autonomy in the work process and having monopoly on certain work areas or tasks (the objective recognition of the profession).

These features may be seen as common features for professionals, but we also see big differences in the degree of fulfillment of these features. And in the case of employee reaction and influence, these differences are

important to understand. What we realized as a major difference is the difference between **autonomous** groups: developed without a specific connection to either the private or the public sector, and **integrated** groups: developed in relation to either the public or private sector. But the length of education, tasks, work conditions, and organization of interests (e.g., in unions) also contribute to this difference. A high degree of autonomy can provide direct influence, especially if it is connected with a high structural position in an organization, and indirect influence if the autonomy is mostly connected to the working process.

So one argument regarding whether the professional approach is reasonable or not is that most of the employees in Danish municipalities can be regarded as professionals (as stated above, being professional meaning controlling ones working situation to a large extent). Another argument is that the changes in the municipalities relate to the professional life of the employees.

The goal of improvement of services, adoption of more holistic views, the breaking down of sectoral and professional boundaries, and the giving of more responsibility to the employees affects the very essence of the professional life of the employees. On the one hand, the municipalities try to break down the sectoral expert regime: to break down the monopoly. But on the other hand, shared responsibility is an important part of the changes and this supports the autonomy. Our investigation shows us that most of the reactions and comments made by employees involved in the changes concern the professional aspect. Reactions and comments made by non-professional employees concern more personal aspects or specific organizational matters.

A salient characteristic of the professional aspect is that it is constituted structurally outside the organization/the municipality. And this fact can lead to restraints in the progress of change, when it is a change internal to the organization. So the fact that the employees can be termed professionals, that the changes have to do with the professional aspect, and that the professional aspect is primarily set outside the organization (but expressed within the organization) is the reason for using the professional approach to explain the picture of effects on the municipalities.

Based on the foregoing, our main thesis then for the perspective of employees is that changes in the organization

of the municipalities require corresponding changes in the professionals" way of thinking and acting.

This leaves several questions open to be analyzed in future work.

First, as mentioned above, we have to analyze who the professionals are. This discussion relates to the essentialistic or definitorial part of the professional literature. What are their common characteristics, and what are their differences? We have to relate this discussion to the specific Danish context with the strong influence of the welfare state, the power of interest organizations (e.g., unions), etc.

Secondly, we have to look at the function or the role of professions in modern society and especially in Danish society. We have to go back in history to trace the meaning of professions in society. This relates to broader discussions of the development of modern society, but it also relates specifically to the issue of which groups in society actually act as professionals and the reasons why they do so. What are their strategic aims? We have to take a closer look at how the professionals exercise their authority in society and relate this to the Danish case: specifically the professions in the public sector at the local level. In the literature on professions, the more general questions on this issue are discussed in historical sociological analyses on professions with a development from the functional orientation to the more recently neo-Weberian approach to professions.

Thirdly, we have to go into another aspect of the historical sociological approach to professions which concerns the history of a single profession and its relation to society in general. We have to study the history of the professions involved in actual changes in Danish municipalities to find their essence, their way of thinking and acting, their capabilities for influence, and relate all these facets to the form and the content of the changes.

These studies will constitute the basis for analyzing the last question in the study: how to initiate changes in the professionals" way of thinking and acting? To answer this question we have to complement the above-mentioned discussions with theories of learning in groups of actors and in organizations. And we have to steer this discussion to the issue of professions in public organizations. We shall have to see whether a change of behavior of

professions in the municipalities requires "special treatment" that has to be integrated in the model used for the changes which can be seen in the municipalities right now.

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