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Police leadership development – intentions, hope and critical factors

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Abstract.

The Norwegian police has been heavily criticized after the 22 July 2011-incident at Utøya (massacre of youngsters gathered at a political camp near Oslo). An evaluation report (NOU,2012:14) stated three shortcomings in the Norwegian police force: culture, attitudes and leadership. Management and leadership in the Norwegian police has to be improved and strengthened, and this shall happen through developing the policy document ‘Leadership in Norway’s Civil Service’ (Meld.St.21:2012-201). The policy document pertains to how the public sector in general ought to be managed, and the document is based on leadership research and are in accordance with mainstream management theory. The idea of formulating a principle of management that would characterize the classical contributions is also evident in this document (Vanebo and Andersen 2014).

This paper addresses two problems:

1) How can police leadership skills be operationalized and measured, and
2) What are the key critical factors in transferring police leadership principles into best practices?

Police leadership challenges

Police are required to understand and effectively operate in a complex social, political and organizational environment (Pearson-Goff and Herrington,2013). By systematic review and synthesized findings from 57 peer review journal articles they conclude that despite the work done on the topics to date we still have little understanding of “what works” in police leadership beyond what others perceive to be effective. They call for the need for robust research and hope that researchers are spurred into undertaking work to establish objective measures of effective leadership behaviours to organizational outcomes, to consider the heterogenic nature of police leadership, and to help inform our understanding of the best ways that individual can be prepared for the leadership tasks they are faced.

The paper will elaborate whether a relevant response to police leadership challenges could be distributed leadership research.

The policy document as a recipe for leadership development

The document clearly specifies the premise for managers within the state and focus on four leadership functions: strategic and operational functions, building relations and information and communication functions.

Strategic functions. Managers at all levels have to make choices and set priorities, for example with regard to targets, plans and effective measures. Before such decisions are taken,
the expectations of higher authorities, target groups and customers as well as the manager’s own staff must be clarified. All Civil Service managers are responsible for following up sectoral policy objectives in their own areas and for complying with the general regulations and values governing the public administration. Managers must:

- decide how financial, human and other resources are to be used in order to ensure the best possible performance, and organise personnel management accordingly;
- choose methods, coordination procedures and forms of leadership that produce the best results; and
- view facts in the light of expert assessments of risks and impacts.

Decision making can be particularly demanding for Civil Service managers since their decisions often affect the general public.

**Operational functions.**

Managers often have to introduce, develop and maintain systems in order to ensure that tasks are performed and goods and services are delivered. This applies in particular to technical, financial and personnel systems. The manager must ensure best possible general administration, personnel management, financial management and quality assurance. In large agencies, the responsibility for various operational functions may be delegated to managers at lower levels. In small agencies, the top senior executive may have to take care of a number of tasks relating to day-to-day operations. High-level officials must in any case distribute the responsibility for operations and results, and ensure that the agency complies with the relevant requirements and standards, for example for financial management, quality, and health, safety and environment.

**Building relations.**

Managers must establish, foster and develop relations both within and outside their own agencies. All Civil Service managers are part of a politically governed apparatus, including those who have little or no direct contact with the governing political leadership in their day-to-day work. Building relations is important for ensuring that political signals are picked up and implemented effectively. Managers must build solid working relations with their own staff and the employees’ organizations. High-level officials have a particular responsibility for ensuring that sound personnel management is practiced throughout the agency.

**Communication and information functions.**

The Civil Service shall be characterized by transparency both in relation to the general public and the employees and between the various parts of the public administration. This means that managers have to ensure adequate communication and the dissemination of necessary information. Information and communication have their own intrinsic value, but are also vital for successful task solution and for developing democracy in working life and society as a whole.

**Methodology**

The analytical part of the paper draw on a pragmatic institutionalism perspective and the “Best practice Policing Leadership Model” from The Police Sector Council in Canada.
According to Røvik (2007) pragmatic institutionalism as a distinct position in the battlefield between the modernistic and socialconstructive paradigm. Røvik’s starting point is that ideas and practices do not exist independently of each other, but work together in very complex ways”.

The Police Sector Council was incorporated in 2004 to facilitate more integrated and innovative human resource planning and management. Its mandate is to understand and address the most critical issues facing all policing organizations, including the sustainability of policing services through improvements in productivity and performance. The 2010 Policing Leadership Development Project examined the roles and responsibilities of police leaders to define what is required to become an effective police leader. It defined the leadership competencies required for successful job performance of uniform police members at four levels of increasing leadership responsibility. The resulting model for leadership development is consistent with the Policing Competency Framework and focuses specifically on the development of leadership competencies across the organization.

The project resulted in the identification of a model with fourteen essential competencies for leadership proficiency levels. The leadership competencies are grouped into three categories: performance, partnering, and accountability. Competencies are defined as «the observable and measurable skills, knowledge, or other attributes that contribute to successful performance in jobs». The statement is that competencies are all about behaviours that help us produce results at work.