

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF AND IN MUNICIPAL INITIATED GOVERNANCE NETWORKS/PARTNERSHIP What characterises ‘balanced’ management?

Summary

Mandate and design of the study

The local government interest and employers’ association, The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) invited competitive tendering where the main theme was:

“What characterizes ‘good’ management and leadership of and in governance network/partnership initiated by local government sector?”

KS wished to obtain knowledge and information concerning: 1) Political- and administrative governance challenges and possibilities when public tasks are solved through partnership/network; 2) policy tools for political- and administrative governance of partnership/networks; 3) What characterizes good leadership of, and within, a partnership/network.

The study design took the point of commencement whereby ‘good balanced management’ can be analyzed through three legitimacy criteria: 1) democratic anchorage (input legitimacy), 2) achievement of the desired objective/effective solution (output legitimacy), and 3) openness and transparency (throughput legitimacy). The legitimacy criteria were based on the fact that “good management and leadership” was not solely dependent upon political and administrative *steering and control* of the concerted action, but also *leadership* within the networks. Collaboration involving these functions was also assumed to influence the democratic basis, effective solution, and transparency in the decision-making process.

A study of the literature together with case-studies of 12 different networks/partnerships in Rogaland and Akershus counties formed the basis for the study. The literature illustrated the challenges, possibilities and experience where local government services and functions were allotted to inter-municipal organizations (AS, IKS, §27, committees, boards, projects). The case-studies focused attention on the interplay between political/administrative governance and the leadership in the joint functions. The objective was to acquire knowledge of the various forms of cooperation where local government functions and services are solved outside traditional governmental structures. Further, this provides the basis for discussions related to “good” governance and management of and in governance networks/partnerships.

Political- and administrative governance of governance networks/partnerships

The study indicates that there is a deeper awareness, wider knowledge and better routines in the choice of the form of cooperation. This corresponds with recent studies which indicate that within inter-

municipal cooperation, an increasing and more active use of resolutions, ownership reports, municipal ownership strategies and so forth, is used in order to provide guidelines and control. Nevertheless, these are policy tools given special importance in the early phases of cooperation, but gradually receive less attention by the politicians and the administration.

The study shows how *continual* anchorage through the use of both more formal policy tools (which the municipalities use relatively frequently today), together with softer policy tools is important. Continual anchorage of networks priorities and activities is dependent upon political- and administrative facilitating satisfactory flow of information, good contact, and not least support and follow-up. Research and practice focussing on the municipality has devoted much attention to control procedures which ensure owners (i.e. municipal) control in matters of inter-municipal cooperation. The study shows the importance of taking responsibility by following up and supportive cooperation where challenges are encountered. The study reveals good experience with a ‘sponsor’ within the municipal line. The concept of ‘sponsor’ signifies administrative- and/or political actors within the municipal organization who support and contribute to bridge-building between the manager working in the network outside the municipal and within the municipal.

Operative management in governance networks/partnerships

The study shows that operative management in governance network/partnerships should be afforded closer attention. An operative manager has a responsibility in promoting the key activities forward, simultaneously to coordinating and motivating members. The network context is complex and in continual movement, which demands an operational manager with considerable ability in manoeuvring, adaptability and endurance. The study clearly reveals the sensitivity inherent in the nature of cooperation, and the role of the manager in ensuring that all members recognise the value of participating. The operative management role thereby includes the important role as conservator as well as the catalyser which sets things in motion.

Additionally, the study illustrates the significance of the operational managers’s collaboration with the municipalitie(s). As ‘bridge-builder’, the manager emerges as a key node. An important function of the bridge-builder role is the close familiarity with how the dynamics of a political-administrative system function. The bridge-builder works towards continual anchorage. This occurs though continual contact with municipal ‘sponsors’, where information flows constantly. Managers also depend upon the municipality being actively engaged and manifesting adaptability. The room to manoeuvre is created in this juncture: through predictable framework (organisation and economy), and through the interplay and contact between administrative and/or political ‘sponsors’ and the manager.

The study shows that the operative manager is recruited internally or on the basis of their local or specific knowledge in the field. Nevertheless, the amount of time and resources employed by the owner to find the right manager, who fits the requirements and objectives of the cooperation, varies broadly. Previous studies illustrate how the owner (municipal), through strategic choice of manager, can influence the cooperation. This study shows that strategic recruitment can contribute closer cooperation with and control of governance networks/partnerships.

Finally, the study shows that the operative management in governance networks/partnerships can be a particularly lonely boundless task. Unclear mandates and expectations in addition to few/small permanent collegial arenas are characteristic of the leader's everyday life. Clear framework, in addition to political- and administrative engagement contribute to closer cooperation with the support functions within the municipal organization. This form of local governance is not experienced as limiting, but rather as a contribution to more specific expectations and greater predictability for the operative managers working tasks.

Balanced governance and management

The study's objective was to investigate and discuss what characterises 'good governance of and management in governance networks/partnerships in the local government sector. Similar to previous studies, this study shows that there is not *one* management model which is applicable to all situations. Nevertheless, a number of examples emerge which provide the basis for reflection on the establishment, on-going interplay, relation and evaluation of governance networks and partnerships which the municipality has been involved in establishing.

The study shows how the following three balancing factors are closely associated when searching for "good governance and management: 1) *continual democratic anchorage* within a clearly defined formal framework, but also in the form of support and active follow-up; 2) *possibilities and ability to disseminate information and enthusiasm* concerning the networks priorities and activities; and 3) *a direct focus on the achievements of the cooperation* where regular evaluations together with the manager evaluate the results and possible need for change. The study shows that governance of is closely linked to management in - continually. These are not functions which are disengaged immediately after "birth"; they are closely linked. The findings indicate that in order to maintain the requirements of legitimacy, the municipalities must focus more on these mechanisms which ensure *a bridge* between the network and its manager and the political/administrative sponsor within the municipal organization. This demands both strategic recruitment of managers, but also more formalised, on-going, predictable support functions provided by the municipality to ensure stability and close contact. In turn, this will provide a firmer basis for evaluating the actual value added derived from governance networks / partnerships in the production of public goods and services.
