

Summary

Ramboll has completed the project "*Is administration a waste of time or an essential part of leadership?*" on behalf of KS in the period from November 2012 to September 2013.

Main questions have been the following:

- How is administration and leadership understood and performed by municipal leaders?
- How do municipal leaders assess the value of administrative and other leadership tasks?

Administration (or management) and leadership are often considered as two different roles that are both important for an effective organization¹. It is evident that the municipal sector has undergone significant changes affecting the framework for municipal leadership. On the one hand there has been a movement toward increasingly setting goals, measuring results and comparing them with the goals. This can be seen to have increased the amount of administrative tasks. On the other hand, there have been changes in the municipal organization, with a general tendency that responsibility is delegated downward in the organization.

The project has investigated how municipal leaders in practice understand the relationship between management and leadership, and whether administration is perceived as an important part of leadership. This is examined through a combination of questionnaires and interviews. In addition, the findings are seen in the context of relevant research. A survey has been answered by a total of 245 municipal leaders at different levels in different municipalities and sectors. Moreover, 24 municipal leaders in selected municipalities have been interviewed, and a final focus group was completed. The following is a general description of the leaders who participated in the survey:

- Municipalities of various sizes are well represented, with about one-third respectively small, medium and large municipalities
- Different levels of management are represented, but most responses are from unit management and municipal management
- The majority have tasks within kindergarten, school and education and health care
- Almost all have higher education, and the majority of have additional training in administration and/or management
- The majority of leaders have been leaders for more than 10 years

Main findings

A background for the study has been the hypothesis that administration can be seen as a cost that should be reduced. This study shows that administration on the contrary is

¹ Se blant annet Kotter (1990): «What leaders really do»

understood as an important part of leadership. However, the majority of municipal leaders consider that they have neither enough time for administration nor management. Administrative tasks are further considered to be at the expense of other tasks, and nearly half of the managers who participated in the survey report that they spend too much time on the task reporting.

The study shows that the distinction between administration and leadership in practice is unclear. The survey shows that the respondents are relatively in agreement that administration and management can be categorized as follows:

- **Administrative** tasks are understood as: tasks related to reporting, documentation, payment and time registration, as well as tasks related to absence
- **Leadership** tasks are understood as: tasks related to appraisals, meeting management, professional leadership, professional development, strategic planning, preparation of goals and organizational development
- Some tasks are understood as **both administration and leadership**: financial tasks, meetings with external stakeholders, planning and following up on goals and effectiveness

This categorization shows that administrative and leadership tasks can be considered to overlap.

Municipal leaders have a wide range of tasks. Municipal leaders see a variety of tasks as their own. The survey shows that six tasks are included in the job description of more than 80 % of the respondents. These are the preparation and monitoring of goals, meetings with external stakeholders, strategic planning, planning and organizational development. The tasks fewest municipal leaders see as their own are tasks related to payroll and time registration. The survey also shows that the tasks of the municipal leaders are very complex, and that administrative and management tasks included in the work of most municipal leaders. At the same time there is a tendency that the higher management position you have, the fewer tasks you have.

Municipal leaders spend most time on typical leadership tasks. Another relevant question is how municipal leaders perceive their own use of time on both administrative and management tasks. A hypothesis has been that municipal leaders use "too much time on administration", and that this is at the expense of other responsibilities. The survey shows that a typical "leadership tasks" are the most time consuming. Reporting and documentation tasks that managers do not necessarily spend the most time on, but are the tasks which leaders consider to spend *too much* time on.

Time for both leadership and administration is a challenge. Half of the leaders consider that they don't have enough time for administration, while most consider that they don't have time for leadership. This can be seen in the context that about half of municipal leaders state that it is challenging to prioritize between different tasks.

Municipal leaders consider administrative tasks as an important part of leadership. Most of the tasks are considered to be of high value. The survey shows that the majority considers administrative tasks as an important part of leadership.

The leaders are confident in their own role. The study shows that expectations to their role and practice of administration and leadership are not considered to be particularly problematic. The majority of respondents agree that:

- There is a coherence between one's own and others' expectations
- There is a coherence between the expectations of their leaders and their employees
- Expectations from employees and managers are clear

A challenge that is brought up in the interviews, is however the expectations from employees when it comes to leaders being present and available.

There are some differences between leaders in small and large municipalities. The impression is that the situation is somewhat more challenging for leaders in the smaller municipalities.

- Leaders in small municipalities report that they have less time for administration and leadership
- Leaders in small and medium-sized municipalities are more critical to the competences of leaders in their own municipalities
- Leaders in small municipalities are less satisfied with their own practice of administration and leadership
- Leaders in small and medium-sized municipalities consider it more challenging to prioritize

The need to develop leadership skills further can therefore be considered to be somewhat stronger in smaller municipalities.

Suggestions for further development

Through the survey and especially the interviews, Ramboll has gained insight into what is considered important to municipal leadership in the future. Input from municipal leaders regarding this are:

- There is a need to strengthen and support management expertise , regarding both the administrative and the more relational
- It is important to attract necessary competences and expertise
- Municipalities must be willing and able to change and develop
- Coordination and effective utilization of various competencies and resources are becoming increasingly important

The input points toward aspects of the leader himself and the municipality that the leader is a part of. This impression is reinforced by what the respondents in the survey consider that conditions for successful management and leadership. Feedback from leaders is mainly about the following topics:

- Clear goals and clear leadership
- Leadership competence
- Time and resources
- Vertical and horizontal coordination and cooperation