The Norwegian Superintendent

Administrative context and work role

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Important reform trends in Norway

- Local Government Act (1992): Decentralization of powers and authorities from the state to the municipalities
  - Local autonomy in administrative and political structures, including leadership positions
  - Municipalities have freedom to change the local school board and the superintendent position
- New Public Management rhetoric: Leadership competencies *not* situated in professional knowledge
- Education a promoting theme on the national agenda
  - PISA, TIMS and national test data
- Indirect “soft governance” from the state
On this backdrop we ……

- Mapped the landscape
  - **Administrative design**: A central and functionally specialized school office in Norwegian municipalities
  - **Political structure**: A political board with major responsibilities for local school policy making – and control
  - **School superintendent position**: “holder of a position in the municipality’s administrative hierarchy between the chief executive officer (CEO) of the whole municipality and the school principals”

- Try to explored the *nature* of the identified changes
  - **Hypothesis 1**: New forms of school governance and municipal school management
  - **Hypothesis 2**: Mostly symbolic changes – inspired by ”fads and fashion”
  - **Hypothesis 3**: ”Traditional modernism” - strong institutional pillars of professional norms that is supplemented in minor

- Will analyze leadership profiles

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Response Rate 2009

- Response: 293 (68%)
- No response: 138 (32%)
- Active exit: 16

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The main pattern

- Most municipalities have maintained a central "school office"
- Stable hierarchical unit - specialized in school administration
- Small scale: 1-3 full time positions
- Policy board responsible for primary education
- Many names – similar policy content
- Coupled to policy domain in the “neighborhood” of schooling
- 20 % of the municipalities in our sample (N-60) operate in a “holding company” context
- Two-level structure
The main pattern

1. The data identifies a formal superintendent role conceptually close to our working definition
   - Administratively responsible for primary education within the entire municipality
   - Superior manager of the school principals (unit of command) – 77%
   - Directly subordinated to the CEO – 81%

5. Variation in formal descriptions
   - Job title of the school superintendent
   - Responsibility for other civil service areas in minor part of the position

6. Traditional recruitment and career path
   - Teacher background
   - Career bound to the educational sector

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Supplements in work role

- School superintendents members of the senior leadership team (SLT) of the municipality – 71 %
  - Perceive positive impacts from their SLT engagement on various job domains
  - Perceive exerting influence on central decision making processes through their SLT work

- Relative highs scores on personal empowerment items
  - Goal autonomy and decision making autonomy
  - Perceived impact on school development

- High scores on “classical” administrative instruments
  - Planning, budgeting, change management, implementation

- Accompanied by “soft” pedagogical leadership rhetoric

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Three potential leadership arenas

- SLT of the municipality
- Leadership dialogue with school principals
- Professional network engagement
To be continued……

- Multivariate analysis of leadership variables
- Modeling robust variables
- Modeling relationships
- Cross-country comparisons
- Similarities and differences
- Matching organizational level data with register data
- More robust assumption of the work context of superintendents
- Paper writing

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**Political responsibility**

- **A** Ministry of Education and Science
- **D** County administrative board
- **E** Political School Board
- **H** Parents and students committees

**Central/state level**

- **B** National Agency for Education and Inspection
- **C** National Inspection
- **F** Superintendent
- **G** Principals and teachers’ work teams

**SCHOOLS**

- **MUNICIPALITY**
- **GOVERNMENT**

**Professional responsibility**