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**The Diffusion of Global Models of Appropriate Leadership Behavior  
Explaining Changing Leadership Priorities of High Ranking Public Managers**

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**Abstract**

The question posed is whether and how public senior managers' perceptions of what is important in performing their roles have changed from the beginning of the 1990s to the end of the 2000s.

The theoretical approach to the analysis is based on a macro-phenomenological institutional perspective, which emphasizes the importance of diffusion and translation of global models of legitimate behavior.

The hypothesis is that certain globally legitimated notions of good leadership gradually became more widespread among municipal senior managers from the start of the 1990s to the end of the 2000s.

The empirical analyses are based on multivariate regression analyses of survey data generated among Danish municipal senior managers in 1992, 2006 and 2008.

The study clearly indicates that a change has taken place in leadership orientation among Danish municipal senior managers towards globally legitimated models of good leadership. Municipal senior managers orient themselves more towards leadership priorities that are recommended in the international literature on leadership. They have generally become more oriented towards production, development of relations, innovation and attention to the external environment. During the same period the classic administrator role has been given a lower priority.

**Keywords:** Management; New Public Management; Structural reform; Education; Institutional theory; Diffusion; Globalization

## 1. Introduction

”World models have long been in operation as shapers of states and societies, but they have become especially important in the postwar era as the cultural and organizational development of world society has intensified ...” (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997)

The issue that is explored in this article is whether and how Danish municipal senior managers’ perceptions of what is important for performing the role of public leader have changed from the start of the 1990s to the end of the 2000s.

The theoretical approach to the analysis takes its point of departure in a macro-phenomenological institutional perspective that emphasizes the importance of global models of legitimate behavior (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997). The general framework of interpretation that is used in the analyses is an institutional diffusion model (March 1981; Rogers 2003; Strang and Meyer 1993), in which globally legitimated notions of what characterizes good and bad management are gradually diffused in a population of leaders.

The hypothesis that is developed and studied in the following is that specific, globally legitimated notions of good leadership, which are defined more precisely below, gradually became more prevalent among municipal senior managers from the start of the 1990s to the end of the 2000s. The reason for this is that public management was only really put on the agenda during the global wave of reforms that started in the 1980s in the Anglo-Saxon countries. In the 1990s these reforms were collectively designated New Public Management (NPM) (Hood 1991). Thus in the beginning of the 1990s, NPM ideas were in their infancy in both Denmark and the rest of the world, not least those that concerned personal leadership, while at the end of the 2000s they had matured and had been more or less tested in a large number of contexts (Hood and Peters 2004a).

Below, to begin with, a brief historically-based analysis is presented of development trends in public management in Denmark from the 1970s to the present (section 2). Then, the theoretical basis of the analysis is developed (section 3). The analysis is initiated with an explanation of the general point of departure in a macro-phenomenological diffusion perspective (3.1). Next, a selected part of the models of good personal management style that have been developed within management theory are presented (3.2) and hypotheses on changes in the diffusion of the models among municipal senior managers are developed. The theory section is concluded with a discussion of alternative explanatory models and the resulting need for control variables (3.3). After the theory section, the data and methodological approach are explained (section 4). Then the results of the

empirical analyses are presented (section 5) and discussed (section 6). A brief conclusion follows (section 7).

## **2. Development trends in public management in Denmark**

Public management, along with the concepts related to it, is one of several elements of the trend in recent decades to emphasize management, results-based management and market-type mechanisms (MTMs) in the management of the public sector.

Many of the notions of how to best manage the public sector that characterize management thinking even today were formulated and put on the agenda for the first time in Denmark during the modernization programmes of the 1980s (Bentzon 1987; Ejersbo and Greve 2005). There was an international wave of reform ideas, which from the beginning of the 1990s were collectively designated “New Public Management” (Hood 1991; Klausen and Ståhlberg 1998), despite the fact that the term covers widely different reform ideas (Hansen 2011a).

NPM, understood as assigning higher priority to one or more of these three forms of management, has since the beginning of the 1980s without doubt increasingly influenced the public sector’s management thinking (discourse, if you will) in a large number of OECD countries, although the significance of the ideas for the public sector’s management practice is more controversial and varies from country to country.

In conjunction with the development of information and communication technology (IKT) organizational innovations inspired by NPM have for better or for worse influenced, and become nearly synonymous with, the wave of administrative reforms that have characterized the public sector in OECD countries in general and Denmark more specifically over the past 20-30 years (Ejersbo and Greve 2005; Hansen 2008).

There has not been a revolution, since the new forms of management have not replaced older forms of management but are embedded in them and co-exist with them. However, there have been substantial and occasionally conflict-ridden transformations of management of the public sector in many OECD countries.

This has also been the case in Denmark, and a number of examples of how management<sup>1</sup> has been assigned higher priority illustrate this.

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<sup>1</sup> The influence of two other strong NPM tendencies in the Danish public sector, results-based management and market-type mechanisms, has also been clear. The widespread use of benchmarking, evaluations and evidence-based actions are

The NPM slogan “let the managers manage” illustrates an endeavor to move away from detailed control of public sector activities and towards framework-based management, which in principle gives individual organizations and their managers a greater degree of freedom on the condition that they comply with certain especially economic frameworks and pursue certain political goals that have been set. This goal and framework based thinking characterized the modernization programs of the 1980s in Denmark and it is today a widespread and accepted, albeit not entirely uncontroversial, management philosophy. The intense focus in recent years on contract management and Purchaser-Provider-Split models can be best understood as further developments of the goal and framework based thinking, which at the same time link this philosophy to market thinking and, at least in theory, contribute to creating the organizational preconditions for strengthening market-type mechanisms in the public sector.

The slogan “let the managers manage” has also influenced another general trend within public management – namely, the tendency to delegate more formal authority to public managers. This trend is apparent in, among other places, the education sector, where school principals and recently also university vice-chancellors, deans and heads of departments have been entrusted with formal management authority by professional bodies such as teacher and faculty councils. Increasing willingness to invest in leadership/management training has followed up this focus on management. In Denmark in the 1990s, increased focus on public management was manifested in, for example, the establishment of actual public management programs in the beginning of the 1990s such as the Master of Public Administration (MPA) program at Copenhagen Business School (CBS) and the Master of Public Management (MPM) program at the University of Southern Denmark. The 2000s have seen the development of a code for public senior management (Forumforoffentligtopledelse 2005) and a further escalation of the market for public management programs.

The situation at the end of the 2000s is that the ideas that were put on the agenda internationally in the 1980s are no longer novel. “New Public Management” is not longer new and many management and leadership ideas have been tested for several years in several countries – including Denmark – with variable success. Many observers of international management policies have begun to speak of a new phase, in which NPM reforms have entered a paradoxical era (Hood and Peters 2004b), in which there are partial breaks from NPM reforms in newer reforms (Christensen and Laegreid 2007) and the progress of the processes of digitalization challenge the paradigms of NPM reforms (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, and Tinkler 2008).

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examples of the prevalence of a results orientation, while free choice, privatization and outsourcing are examples of the increased priority given to market-type mechanisms.

The central message in relation to the analyses presented here is, however, that while the early 1990s marked the beginning of the NPM era in Denmark, the end of the 2000s marks a period in which most NPM ideas are well known and have been tested with variable success in the Danish public sector.

### **3. Theory and empirical research**

The theory section is introduced with an explanation of the macro-phenomenological institutional diffusion perspective (3.1). Then a detailed account is given of the recommendations of management theory for good management and two hypotheses are developed for further study (3.2). Finally, alternative explanations are discussed along with control variables related to them (3.3).

#### *3.1 A macro-phenomenological institutional diffusion perspective*

As pointed out in the introduction, the analyses are based on a macro-phenomenological institutional diffusion perspective. By macro-phenomenological is meant that the interpretative framework is developed in transnational global processes, which to a greater or lesser extent become manifest in local forms of practice (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997) through diffusion and translation processes (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996; Rogers 2003; Røvik 2007). In somewhat slogan-like language one could say that the expectation in a macro-perspective is that globally established frameworks of understanding about good management will gradually achieve a hegemonic status in relation to more locally developed frameworks of understanding. By institutional diffusion model is meant that it is institutional conditions for diffusion rather than specific network relations that are critical for understanding differences in the adoption of certain notions of management (Strang and Meyer 1993).

On this background, the process that is assumed to take place in this perspective can be outlined roughly as follows: international research in management has over the years developed more or less sound conceptions of what characterizes good and bad management practice (we will return to this in the next section). Many of these conceptions have been formulated generically and were already established as “good management practice” in textbooks on management from the 1980s (Adizes 1979; Larsen 1991b; Nielsen 1988; Yukl 1981). This is why it was at all possible to formulate a number of questions for public managers that were based on several of these management theories already in 1992 (Mouritzen, Larsen, Ragn-Hansen, and Liedecke 1993). When the NPM wave gained strength in the 1980s and beyond, one of the things that were

emphasized was the meaning of “letting the managers manage” and of “steering not rowing”. With the aim of training public managers to be better managers, short public management courses were gradually introduced from the end of the 1980s; later, from the beginning of the 1990s, public management programs (for example, Master and diploma programs in management) were introduced. During the 1990s and through the 2000s, this management education activity escalated to everything from one-day courses in management to longer year-long education programs in public management. This means that public managers today, regardless of whether or not they have taken a real education in management, could hardly have avoided knowing about and taking a position on the most widespread basic ideas within management theory. The expectation is therefore that *municipal senior managers from the 1990s and until the end of the 2000s increasingly prioritize globally legitimated ideas about how good management is practised.*

This raises the question of whether modern management research has clear suggestions for good management and if so, what these suggestions entail.

### *3.2 The recommendations of management theory for good personal management*

“Almost all of the prevailing theories of leadership, and about 98% of the empirical evidence at hand, are rather distinctly American in character” (House and Aditya 1997)

Modern management research was primarily developed after the Second World War in the USA with the aim of attaining systematic cumulative knowledge of managers’ behavior (Yukl 2010a) and what forms of behaviour are positively related to various forms of performance. Different observation techniques have been used to map similarities and differences in managers’ behavior and their causes (Carlson 1991; Hansen 1997; Hansen 2000; Mintzberg 1973; Stewart 1982; Stewart 1989). Over time, some classic management functions have crystallized, the two oldest of which are the production/task orientation and the relations/employee orientation (Yukl 2010c). Practically all management courses touch on these topics in some form. Effective managers are assumed to focus on the execution of tasks and production as well as the maintenance and development of relations between employees, senior management and managers at the same level. In a Danish context these two management functions are well known from, for example, Blake and Mouton’s managerial grid theory (Blake and Mouton 1964; Nielsen 1988) and can also be recognized in the Producer and Integrator roles in Adize’s four management functions (Adizes 1979; Larsen 1991a). These are highly pedagogic, make sense and have been used in innumerable



Danish manager courses since the 1980s, yet, incidentally, have never been tested in their entirety in a scientific study.

Concurrently with the increased focus in recent years on change, development and innovation, a change or innovation orientation has been added to the task and relations orientations, and the three types of management functions thereby constitute a sort of modern trinity in the recommendations of management research (Yukl 2010c) for effective management. For example, a version of Kotter's model of the management of change processes (Kotter 1995; Yukl 2010b) is included in many courses and programs in modern management, just as concepts such as innovation and Lean Management (Womack and Jones 1994; Womack and Jones 2003) illustrate how the change oriented approach to management has gradually become more central to modern understandings of good management. One last, perhaps somewhat less prominent, trend in normative recommendations for good management in modern management theory, which it is possible to test in the present analysis, is the tendency to assign higher priority to an orientation towards the organization's external environment. The prioritization of an innovation and change orientation nevertheless also implies recognition of the importance of adaptation to the organization's external environment. Furthermore, it could be said that the whole development of the public sector's use of other elements of the NPM reforms indicates an increased orientation towards the external environment among public managers. For example, the increasing use over the past couple of decades of market-type mechanisms (MTMs) such as vouchers and outsourcing, benchmarking and comparative hearings, but also the increased focus on user and citizen evaluations, push in the direction of increasing orientation among public managers towards the external environment.

The question is then whether there are some forms of management that previously were widespread but which have become outdated in the management reforms of recent decades. It could be expected that the classic administrator, who painstakingly practices management by rules and focuses perhaps somewhat narrowly on his or her own area of responsibility is less acceptable today than was the case a few years ago – at least, according to the rhetoric. An early, well-written and humoristic Danish critique of this management can be found in the differentiation between FUT (managers who see possibilities) and DUT (managers who see limitations) managers (Larsen and Nielsen 1988), which captures the dawning confrontation in the 1980s with this classic form of public management.

The above discussion gives rise to the following hypotheses for further exploration:

H1: Globally legitimated models of good modern management such as production, relations, innovation and external environment orientation have become more widespread among Danish municipal senior managers from the beginning of the 1990s until the end of the 2000s

H2: The classic administrator orientation has become less widespread among municipal senior managers from the beginning of the 1990s until the end of the 2000s

### *3.3 Alternative causes of the changes in Leadership orientation*

In the above discussion, the argumentation is that over time a change has taken place in the Leadership orientation of public senior managers as a result of a diffusion process, whereby globally legitimated general management ideas have been gradually spread among the population by public managers.

There are, however, a number of other possible explanations for possible changes over time in public managers' perceptions of the role of a manager.

First, in 2007 structural reforms were carried out in Denmark, which nearly abolished municipalities with populations under 20000 and changed the average population size of municipalities from approximately 20000 to over 50000. In addition, the new large municipalities have been given many of the tasks of the old counties. Therefore, it could be argued that the job of senior manager of the new large municipalities is somewhat different. An alternative explanation of possible changes in how the job of the manager is perceived may therefore have a natural basis in the fact that the job has changed after the municipal reforms or that there is a fundamental difference in the job between large and small municipalities. It is therefore important to check both the size of the municipality and the perception of the job of the manager before and after the municipal reforms.

Second, other research has shown (Hansen 2011b) that there have been a number of marked differences in the municipal senior managers' collective profile in the period under study. The municipal senior managers' gender, average age and typical education changed considerably from the beginning of the 1990s to the end of the 2000s. There are more women, the average age has risen and the share of senior managers with a long-cycle higher education within the social sciences (typically members of the Danish Association of Lawyers and Economists (DJØF)) has increased. An alternative to the diffusion model could therefore be a regeneration model (March 1981), in which any possible changes in Leadership orientation are the result of a change of managers, who due to their somewhat different background have different attitudes towards management. It is

therefore important to include control variables for these factors in order to test whether the diffusion explanation holds water.

Third, differences in perceptions of the tasks of managers may result from differences in the job one has. It is therefore important to check whether there are significant differences between municipal chief executives and administrative managers with different portfolios of tasks.

## 4. Data and method

In this section an explanation is provided of the data used in the study (4.1) and the method used to construct the independent variables of the analysis (4.2). Finally, a frequency analysis is presented of the variables included in the regression analyses in the results section (4.3).

### 4.1 Data

The analyses are based on survey data from studies conducted in 1992, 2006 and 2008 (Hansen 2009; Hansen and Eriksen 2006; Hansen, Jensen, and Pedersen 2009; Mouritzen, Larsen, Ragn-Hansen, and Liedecke 1993; Mouritzen and Svara 2002).

Four groups of senior managers are included in the analyses: Municipal City Managers (CM), Social Service Managers (SSM), Technical Service Managers (TSM) and School- and Culture Managers (SCM). The definition of a City Manager (CM) is the top unelected official in the municipality. The definition of a Social Service Manager (SSM) is the top administrative manager with eldercare as part of his or her portfolio of responsibilities. The definition of a Technical Service Manager (TSM) is the top administrative manager with the technical area as part of his or her portfolio of responsibilities. The definition of a School and Culture Manager (SCM) is the top administrative manager with municipal primary and lower secondary school as part of his or her portfolio of responsibilities. A small number of senior managers have been rejected because their portfolios of responsibility cut across the above classification. For example, administrative managers who are responsible for both the elderly and schools are not included in the analyses. This is due to the aim of being able to compare the development over time within equivalent groups. On the basis of these criteria a total of 1543 respondents have been divided between four groups of managers in the three years of study (see Table 1).

		1992	2006	2008	Total
1. Managers in the study	City Managers (CM)	213	142	74	429
	Social Service Managers (SSM)	175	135	64	374
	Technical Service Manager (TSM)	185	133	64	382
	School- and Culture Managers (SCM)	154	133	71	358
Total		727	543	273	1543
<p><b>Note:</b> In 1992 the population was a maximum of 275 (a few municipalities did not have the manager position in question), in the spring of 2006 it was a maximum of 271, but there were many vacancies and in the autumn of 2008 it was a maximum of 98 due to the structural reforms. The response rate for all studies and manager groups were over 50 percent and in some studies much higher.</p>					

#### 4.2 Construction of an index for leadership orientation

There are 17 general indicators of leadership' priorities of various tasks in the studies from 1992, 2006 and 2008. The responses to these questions have been analyzed using factor analyses and reliability tests.

**Table 2: Factor analyses of 17 indicators of Leadership orientation**

	P	R	A	I	O
1. Ensure that political decisions are implemented loyally and quickly	<b>0.477</b>	-0.115	-0.173	0.196	0.224
2. Be informed about political signals	<b>0.419</b>	-0.137	-0.244	0.189	<b>0.235</b>
3. Keep subordinates informed about goals and plans	<b>0.354</b>	-0.143	-0.122	0.335	0.177
4. Solve interpersonal problems and conflicts	-0.032	<b>-0.902</b>	0.027	-0.015	0
5. Be informed about employees' viewpoints	0.253	<b>-0.342</b>	-0.019	0.286	0.113
6. Stimulate cooperation between sector administrations	0.155	<b>-0.219</b>	-0.263	0.25	0.208
7. Be a unifying symbol; inspire and create enthusiasm	-0.046	<b>-0.177</b>	-0.127	0.422	0.372
8. Supervise subordinates in their day to day administrative procedures	0.103	-0.117	<b>0.702</b>	-0.014	-0.102
9. Ensure that rules and routines are followed	-0.034	0.065	<b>0.624</b>	0.033	0.031
10. Secure the greatest amount of resources possible for one's own area	-0.073	0.031	<b>0.531</b>	0.005	0.089
11. Develop and implement new working routines and methods	-0.016	-0.048	0.024	<b>0.86</b>	-0.085
12. Create the basis for an efficient utilization of modern technology	0.208	0.002	0.04	<b>0.534</b>	0.128
13. Formulate ideas and visions	0.089	-0.056	-0.247	<b>0.438</b>	0.294
14. Solve problems through adjustments in the organization	0.171	-0.045	-0.015	<b>0.413</b>	0.228
15. Work for the development and recognition of the management team	0.187	-0.08	-0.172	<b>0.302</b>	0.31
16. Represent the administration in external contexts	0.078	-0.076	0.041	-0.016	<b>0.727</b>
17. Be informed of citizens' viewpoints	0.148	-0.31	-0.073	0.193	<b>0.264</b>
Cronbach's alpha	0.967	0.889	0.637	0.898	0.854

Note: (P): Production orientation; (R) Relations orientation; (A) Administration orientation; (I) Innovation and change orientation; (O) External environment orientation.  
Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

On this basis five summative indices of Leadership orientation have been constructed .There are two basic methods for constructing indices: formative and reflexive (Diamantopoulos, Riefler, and Roth 2008; Diamantopoulos and Siguaw 2006). The formative index is constructed on the basis of a theory or an identity defined by the researcher. The reflexive index, which is the method most frequently used, investigates whether a group of specific indicators can be interpreted in a meaningful way as a measure of an underlying dimension – a factor – in the population under study. In this analysis the main method has been formative since the idea has been to study how

widespread particular management models are among municipal senior managers. The degree to which these formative indices also reflect a general underlying understanding among municipal senior managers is controlled using a reliability test of the indices (Cronbach's alpha) and factor analyses (see Table 2).

As shown on Table 2, the five leadership orientations from the theory section have been measured using the following indicators:

*The production orientation* is represented by three indicators (1. Ensure that political decisions are implemented loyally and quickly; 2. Be informed about political signals; and 3. Keep subordinates informed about goals and plans)

*The relations orientation* is represented by four indicators (4. Solve interpersonal problems and conflicts; 5. Be informed about employees' viewpoints; 6. Stimulate cooperation between sector administrations; 7. Be a unifying symbol; inspire and create enthusiasm)

*The administration orientation* is represented by three indicators (8. Supervise subordinates in their day to day administrative procedures; 9. Ensure that rules and routines are followed; 10. Secure the greatest amount of resources possible for one's own area)

*The innovation orientation* is represented by five indicators (11. Develop and implement new working routines and methods; 12. Create the basis for an efficient utilization of modern technology; 13. Formulate ideas and visions; 14. Solve problems through adjustments in the organization; 15. Work for the development and recognition of the management team).

*The external environment orientation* is represented by three indicators (16. Represent the administration in external contexts; 17. Be informed of citizens' viewpoints; 2. Be informed about political signals).

The five formative indices have been constructed through simple addition, whereby the values of the indicators have been added up and divided by the number of indicators.

As shown in Table 2, the five formative indices also seem more or less to reflect underlying understandings among the municipal senior managers. The values of Cronbach's alpha are very high for four of the five indices and also reasonably high for the *administrator orientation* (Cronbach's alpha 0.637). The factor analysis shows that individual indicators would be included in a different index if the reflective approach governed the placement. This is true of, for example, indicator 7 (Be a unifying symbol; inspire and create enthusiasm), which according to the factor analysis should be placed in the *innovation orientation*. Since a formative approach has been chosen, the original placement is maintained.

### 4.3 Frequency analysis of all dependent and independent variables in the analyses

Before proceeding to the results of the analyses, we present here a frequency analysis of all the variables included in the multivariate analyses (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Frequencies of all variables in the analyses of Leadership orientation**

	N	Average	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
1. Production and implementation orientation	1459	2.9111	3.3333	1.58994	1	5
2. Relations orientation	1444	2.946	3.2	1.03811	1	5
3. Administration orientation	1334	2.9823	3	0.83113	1	5
4. Innovation orientation	1443	2.955	3	1.09209	1	5
5. External environment orientation	1452	2.9279	3	1.2179	1	5
6. 2008	1543	0.1769	0	0.38173	0	1
7. 2006	1543	0.3519	0	0.47772	0	1
8. 1992	1543	0.4712	0	0.49933	0	1
9. City Manager	1543	0.278	0	0.44817	0	1
10. Social Service Manager	1543	0.2424	0	0.42866	0	1
11. Technical Service Manager	1543	0.2476	0	0.43174	0	1
12. School- and Culture Manager	1543	0.232	0	0.42226	0	1
13. Age	1449	48.1877	48	8.30708	29	66
14. Female	1524	0.1391	0	0.34617	0	1
15. Primary and lower secondary school teacher	1533	0.2061	0	0.40466	0	1
16. Education in the social sciences (Master's degree in law, economics, political science, etc.)	1533	0.2277	0	0.41946	0	1
17. Technical education (engineer, architect)	1533	0.2009	0	0.40081	0	1
18. How long have you been employed in your current position?	1459	8.3164	6	7.08349	0	38
19. Over 80000 inhabitants	1543	0.0525	0	0.2231	0	1
20. Up to 20000 inhabitants	1543	0.6118	1	0.4875	0	1

Table 3 shows that the independent variables in the analyses – the five indices of Leadership orientation (variables 1-5) – assume values between 1 and 5, with an average value of approximately 2.9. The indices are constructed in such a way that a higher value indicates a higher prioritization of the management task in question.

With the exception of age (variable 13) and length of employment in current position (variable 18) it is also apparent from Table 3 that the independent variables of the analyses have been constructed as dummy variables, which can assume the value of 0 or 1.

Furthermore, a great deal of interesting information about the data and the public senior managers can be found in the study. For example, it can be seen that approximately 14 percent of senior

managers in the study are women (variable 14), that approximately 23 percent have a long-cycle higher education within the social sciences (variable 16) and that approximately 61 percent are senior executives in municipalities with a maximum of 20000 inhabitants (variable 20).



## 5. Results

The hypotheses of the study have been tested in both bivariate and multivariate analyses. The results of the bivariate Pearson correlations are presented in the appendix (see Appendix Table A). First, the correlation between the dependent variables should be commented. The four Leadership orientations that represent global models of good Leadership orientation (variables 1, 2, 4 and 5) are all very significantly and positively correlated with each other. In contrast, the administrator orientation (variable 3) is significantly negatively correlated with the other four Leadership orientations.

Second, the bivariate correlation between the year dummies for 1992, 2006 and 2008 (variables 6-8) and the five variables for Leadership orientation (variables 1-5) indicate support for the hypotheses formulated. A number of the remaining independent variables are, however, also significantly related to Leadership orientation and it is therefore reasonable to test the hypotheses in a multivariate regression analysis.

**Table 4:** OLS Regression analysis of Leadership orientation among municipal senior managers in 1992, 2006 and 2008

	Production	Relations	Administration	Innovation	Ext.env.
2008	0.759***	0.66***	-.572***	0.693***	0.686***
2006	0.862***	0.775***	-.572***	0.805***	0.783***
1992	reference	reference	reference	reference	reference
Social Service Manager	-0.016	-0.011	0.092**	-.0.03	-0.014
Technical Service Manager	-0.018	-0.002	0.053	0	-0.032
School- and Culture Manager	0.004	0.014	0.079	-0.033	-0.017
City Manager	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	reference
Age (29 to 67 years)	0.011	0.053**	0.234***	-0.011	0.05**
Female	0.019*	0.028*	0.059*	0.024	0.022
Primary and lower secondary school teacher	-0.016	0.008	-0.04	0.03	0.029
Soc.sci. edu. (law graduate, economist, etc.)	-0.01	-0.02	-0.023	-0.016	-0.01
Tech.edu. (engineer, architect)	0.008	0.018	0.039	-0.007	0.016
Length of employment in current position	-0.001	0.025	0.003	0.018	0.02
Size of municipality over 80000 inhabitants	-0.009	-0.002	0.002	0.01	0.008
Size of municipality 0-20000 inhabitants	-0.008	-0.011	-0.029	-0.01	-0.007
Adj R2	0.929	0.778	0.273	0.77	0.808
R2	0.93	0.781	0.281	0.772	0.81
N	1301	1288	1184	1288	1296

Note: Standardized regression coefficients.  
Level of significance is marked with: \*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001

The results of the multivariate regression analysis are shown in Table 4. It is clear that the results of the bivariate analysis and therefore the two theoretically formulated hypotheses find support in the analyses. *Hypothesis 1 about globally legitimated models of good modern management such as production, relations, innovation and external environment orientation having become more widespread among Danish municipal senior managers from the start of the 1990s to the end of the 2000s* finds support for all four types of Leadership orientation. When controlled for age, gender, length of employment, position and size of municipality, the analysis indicates that the development over time is the most important explanatory factor.

The same is true of *hypothesis 2 about the classic administrator orientation having become less widespread among municipal senior managers from the beginning of the 1990s to the end of the 2000s*. This hypothesis also finds support in the results of the analysis.

With regard to the remaining independent variables it is interesting to see how few are significantly related to the five indices of Leadership orientation in the multivariate analysis. Size of municipality, which was significantly related to all five types of Leadership orientation in the bivariate analysis, is not significantly related to Leadership orientation in the multivariate analysis. Nor is the type of management position significantly related to Leadership orientation in the multivariate analysis. The only exception is that Social Service Managers are significantly more administration oriented than the other three groups of senior managers.

Education is not significantly related to any of the five types of leadership orientation in the multivariate analysis either.

The two variables that, in addition to year, are most frequently significantly related to Leadership orientation are age and gender. The analyses thus indicate that an older age is significantly positively related to the relations, administration and external environment orientations. As regards gender, the analyses indicate that women are more production, relations and administration oriented than men.

Finally, the high coefficient of determination with an R<sup>2</sup> of between 0.77 and 0.92 of four of the models is remarkable. In contrast, the administrator model has a somewhat lower coefficient of determination, with an R<sup>2</sup> of 0.28.

## 6. Discussion

The empirical analyses clearly indicate that there is support for the general diffusion thesis presented in the article and the five specific hypotheses deriving from it. Danish municipal senior managers have since the beginning of the 1990s, clearly become more oriented towards globally legitimated models of good leadership and less oriented towards the classic administrator role. The change does not seem to be the result of other significant changes during the period such as changes in the size of municipalities and changes in the profile of the basic education of the municipal senior managers. Size of municipality is thus not significant related to the indicators of Leadership orientation used here.

The results with regard to basic education are interesting in relation to the debate that has taken place in Denmark about the increasing predominance of administrators with a background in law, economics or political science (Dahler-Larsen, Ejersbo, and Hansen 2011). Other analyses have clearly shown that an educational background that includes a long-cycle higher education in, for example, law, economics or political science has become much more widespread among municipal senior managers in the period under analysis here (Hansen 2011b). But senior managers with this educational background (typically members of the Danish Association of Lawyers and Economists) do not apparently have a significantly different leadership orientation than other municipal senior managers in terms of the dimensions studied here. The study confirms the results of previous analyses of Danish City Managers (Dahler-Larsen, Ejersbo, and Hansen 2011; Dahler-Larsen and Ejersbo 2000)

On the contrary, the study indicates that in-service training and continuing education in the form of courses and programs in management have, directly or indirectly, had an effect. We know that the Leadership orientations that have been studied have been included in a large number of these programs and we know that the quantitative extent of these programs has increased tremendously in the period. It has not been studied here whether there is a significant difference between managers who have and have not participated in such training and education, but that is not the main point. The point in an institutional diffusion perspective is that a common management language is gradually created, which reflects and translates global models of good management to a particular organizational field. These models have increasingly influenced the Danish public management discourse. Public senior managers have therefore increasingly had to relate to and base their actions

on globally legitimated models of good management, regardless of whether or not they have taken a formal education in public management.

## 7. Conclusion

The study clearly indicates that a change has taken place in the leadership orientation of Danish municipal senior managers towards globally legitimated models of good leadership from the beginning of the 1990s to the end of the 2000s. Municipal senior managers have become more oriented towards leadership priorities that are recommended in the international literature on leadership. They have generally become more oriented towards production, development of relations, innovation and attention to the external environment. During the same period the classic administrator role has been given a lower priority.

Furthermore, the study indicates that the change can best be explained on the basis of an institutional diffusion process, in which globally legitimated models of good management have gradually diffused into the population of municipal senior managers. In other words, it seems as if the accelerated investments in public in-service training and continuing education in management have generally contributed, directly or indirectly, to changing public managers' understandings of what parts of the managerial role should be prioritized. Whether this change has actually had an effect on the performance of the public sector cannot be elucidated by this study.

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