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**Agencification and marketization in Danish and Swedish state
administration - patterns of adoption**

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Abstract:

We analyze similarities and differences in the adoption of marketization and agencification practices in state administration in the two Nordic countries: Denmark and Sweden. Based on a literature review and on contrasting notions of a global management reform movement enforcing more similarity (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997) and the notion of local path dependencies and tradition enforcing difference (March 1994; Premfors 1998) we elaborate hypotheses concerning the adoption of agencification practices in the state agencies of the two countries. The empirical analysis is based on survey data generated 2008-2009 in the state administration of the two countries. The survey instrument was largely elaborated from the COBRA questions (Verhoest 2009).

Our preliminary findings indicate that agencification has been widely adopted in both countries, while Danish state agencies tend to have adopted significantly more practices related to marketization than their Swedish equivalents. We discuss the possible interpretation of our findings.

Keywords: New Public Management; Agencification; Denmark; Sweden; State administration; Diffusion; Marketization; Managerialism

Introduction

“Many features of the contemporary nation-state derive from worldwide models constructed and propagated through global cultural and associational processes.” (pp. 144-145) (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997)

During recent decades a number of public management reforms diffused between the public sectors all over the world (Kettl 2005). The reform movement included a number of organizational innovations often summarized under the label New Public Management (NPM) (Christensen and Laegreid 2007; Hood 1991; Hood and Peters 2004).

In this paper we set out to provide a preliminary analysis of similarities and differences in how and why parts of these NPM reforms associated with agencification have shaped the organization of the central government administration in two Nordic countries – Denmark and Sweden.

In a comparative perspective, the two Nordic countries Denmark and Sweden are very interesting since they are similar on a number of dimensions, but also have some striking differences. Based on these differences and the theoretical notion of local path dependencies we expect differences in the adoption of New Public Management reform ideas.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we provide a brief theory section and elaborate hypotheses of agencification adoption. Second, our data and methods of analysis are presented. Third, our empirical findings are shown and compared to our hypotheses. Fourth, a discussion of possible interpretations of the preliminary findings is given.

Theory and hypotheses

“The specific, historically inherited institutions of each country thus form a unique context in which problems are viewed and interpreted. Almost identical problems may therefore be treated very differently in two countries with divergent histories.” (p. 204) (Knudsen and Rothstein 1994)

The Diffusion of New Public Management

Our point of departure is the impact of the initially Anglo-Saxon New Public Management movement from the mid 1980s onwards on the two Nordic countries Denmark and Sweden. Basically, we presume a diffusion (or translation) process to have taken place (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996; Rogers 2003; Røvik 2007) in which reform ideas from especially the Anglo-Saxon countries travel into the Nordic countries with varying impact due to structural and cultural differences in the state administration of the two countries.

NPM has been defined in various ways and it has also changed over the years (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, and Tinkler 2008; Hood 1991; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004; Rhodes 1999;

Verhoest, Roness, Verschuere, Rubecksen, and MacCarthaigh 2010). The result is that NPM is a slippery label. There are important differences in the way NPM has been conceptualized. Some scholars have emphasized the Neoliberal marketization aspects of NPM, while others have emphasized more managerial aspects of NPM. This distinction was already preeminent when the NPM label was coined in a seminal article by Hood (Hood 1991). Hood provided a list of seven “doctrinal components” of NPM, and suggested that NPM was “a marriage of two different streams of ideas.” (Hood, 1991: 5). One stream related to the new institutional economics, emphasizing free choice and market mechanisms. Another stream related to the tradition of scientific management, emphasizing management by objectives and results and organizational autonomy to let the managers manage.

A lot of the NPM literature of the past two decades can be related to these two streams and how they may interact (Hansen 2011). In this paper we relate the concept to the agencification literature and make a distinction between marketization and agencification aspects of NPM. Marketization as well as *agencification* has been prominent parts of most conceptualizations of NPM over the years.

By *marketization* we refer to the introduction of hard and soft Market-Type-Mechanisms (MTM's) into the management of the public sector. In its broadest sense it involves essentially an increased emphasis on the adaptation of the activities of the organization to *external* users and costumers of public sector organizations.

By *agencification* we refer to various versions of Management by Objectives and Results (MbOR). These organizational innovations are especially related to the *internal* hierarchical steering relations within and between the state agencies.

Comparing Denmark and Sweden

In terms of similarities, both countries are comparatively small, open and wealthy market economies. They are relatively homogenous countries with a well-consolidated democracy and comparatively high economic equality. The countries are characterized by a large universal welfare state and an egalitarian culture with low acceptance of power distance (Hofstede 1980). They both have an old and well-established system of central agencies, but also a strong international orientation, and thus all have been exposed to the reform ideas associated with NPM.

But the two countries also show different characteristics on dimensions presumed to be important for NPM adoption. Especially important is probably the different models characterizing the state administration of the two countries (Knudsen and Rothstein 1994). Furthermore, there are some important differences in the political culture of the two countries, liberalism traditionally being stronger in the Danish context.

Differences between Danish and Swedish central administration

Comparative research in Nordic central administration indicates a significant difference between an East Nordic (Finland and Sweden) and a West Nordic (Denmark and Norway) administrative model (Knudsen and Rothstein 1994; Lægneid and Pedersen 1994; Lægneid and Pedersen 1999). The East Nordic model, represented by Sweden in the current analysis, is a dualistic model with strong autonomous central agencies and a government in which the central agencies are responsible to the cabinet and not to a superior ministry. In contrast the West Nordic model, here represented by Denmark, is more monistic with closer ties between central agencies and the parent ministry through the principle of ministerial responsibility. This difference in the formal structure could be significantly related to patterns of NPM adoption. Due to the strength of the cabinet, in the Swedish model it might be easier to implement a unitary administrative policy in the entire state administration. Thus, if NPM concepts become accepted as useful ways to reorganize the public sector one should expect a more forceful implementation than in the Danish context. Furthermore, some research seems to indicate that Swedish social democrats – at least in the 1990ies - have been more inclined to accept NPM policies than their Danish counterparts (Green-Pedersen 2002). Thus, based on these arguments one might expect that Swedish state agencies would be more prone to NPM activities than their Danish equivalents.

Differences between Danish and Swedish political culture

Another important difference is the basic political culture of the two countries. Although both countries have strong social democratic parties, the social democrats tend to be much stronger in Sweden than in Denmark. Due to a number of reasons, liberalism (in the European sense of the word) has historically been much stronger in Denmark than in Sweden. This can be illustrated by using the Political Data Yearbook and comparing the political composition of the cabinet in the two countries in the last decade (Armingeon, Careja, Engler, Potolidis, Gerber, and Leimgruber 2010). Right-wing parties in percentage of total cabinet posts, weighted by days was more than 77 percent in the Danish cabinet and less than 17 percent in the Swedish cabinet from 1999 to 2008. Since the heydays of Margaret Thatcher, especially the marketization dimension of NPM has been able to mobilize the old left-right conflict cleavages of western democracies (Hansen 2011), right wing parties being very supportive and vice-versa. The previous Danish government (until fall 2011), which in varying compositions had been in power since 2001, has had an explicit focus on increased marketization of the public sector. Thus, based on such lines of reasoning, we should expect the Danish state agencies to be more prone to the marketization dimension of NPM.

Hypotheses

Thus, the two types of demonstrable differences between the two countries, which have been emphasized above, points to partly competing hypotheses concerning the adoption of NPM dimension. We suggest that the managerial aspects of NPM – agencification that is - are easier to align with a social democratic worldview than the marketization aspects. Thus we expect *agencification* to be stronger in the Swedish state administration, *marketization* to be stronger in the Danish context and, since the total NPM measure is a composite of the two subcategories, we expect no difference in the overall adoption of all NPM activities in the state agencies of the two countries. These arguments lead to three hypotheses:

H1: There are no significant differences between the overall NPM activities (both marketization and managerialism) of the state agencies in the two countries

H2: Danish state agencies are more positively related to the marketization dimension of NPM activities as compared to their Swedish equivalents

H3: Swedish state agencies are more positively related to the managerial dimension of NPM activities as compared to their Danish equivalents

Data and Methods

The empirical analysis is based on data generated in web surveys carried out in Sweden, between the end of November 2008 and the beginning of April 2009, and in Denmark, between the end of April and the end of June 2009 (Hansen, Jensen, and Pedersen 2010). The questionnaires used in Sweden and Denmark was tightly coordinated in order to ensure comparable data, and to a large extent based on the COBRA items (Common Public Organization Data Base for Research and Analysis) (Verhoest 2009). The COBRA network were initiated by Guy B. Peters and Geert Bouckaert in 2001 and it offers a unique opportunity to compare public administration systems in different countries. Apart from the two countries at hand, the survey has also been carried out in Norway, the Netherlands, Germany, Ireland, Belgium, Italy, Australia, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Rumania, Finland, and Lithuania.

The population in both countries were state agencies with some kind of hierarchically subordinated relation to a ministerial department. Based on these criteria the population of state agencies was found to be 262 in Denmark and 256 in Sweden. The response rate was reasonably high: More than 60 % in Denmark and more than 70 % in Sweden for most items (Hansen and Andersen 2012; Hansen, Jensen, and Pedersen 2010; Niklasson 2009; Niklasson 2012).

The theoretically suggested distinction between a marketization and an agencification dimension of NPM was tested by means of a Principal Component analysis (see appendix) and Cronbachs alpha scale reliability tests (see table 1). Thus three dependent NPM variables of the analysis in this paper were constructed as summative indexes based on 8 variables (see table 1). The total NPM index includes all eight measures indicating an influence of NPM in the organization. The marketization index includes the four variables indicating a market orientation in the organization. The agencification index includes the four variables indicating an orientation towards MBO in the organization.

*** around here table 1****

Our assumption, that NPM tools can be perceived as one phenomenon with the two subcategories of marketization and managerialism, find support in the high scores of Chronbach alpha of all the three indexes. The validity of the distinction between the two subcategories marketization and managerialism were also supported by results from a factor analysis using principal component analysis with Kaiser Normalization (see appendix).

The independent variables included in the analysis were all measured as dummy variables. The relation between country and indicators of NPM is in focus in the analysis and in order to measure that relation a dummy variable for Denmark was included using Sweden as reference group.

Besides that we included eleven control variables in the analysis. First we expected the policy field (tasks) of the organization to have an impact on the adoption of NPM practices. Second, we expected organizational size to have an impact on the adoption of NPM and we knew that Swedish agencies tended to be larger.

Four dummy variables for policy field (General Public Services; Law and order; Environmental protection; Social agencies) was included using other policy fields as reference group. Five dummy variables for the size of the organization were included (up to 10 employees; 11-20 employees; 201-400 employees; 401-1000 employees; 1001 or more employees) using organizations with between 21 and 400 employees as reference group. One

dummy variable for the position of the individual respondent (CEO of the organization) was included using other organizational positions as reference group. Finally the gender of the top CEO (Female) was included using male as reference group.

Descriptive statistics for all the variables included in the analysis is presented in table 2.

*** Around here table 2***

Findings

Data were analyzed by means of OLS regression analysis and the results of our analysis are presented in table 3.

**** Around here table 3****

Concerning the national level, Danish state agencies tend to be positively related to the measure of total NPM activities as compared to their Swedish equivalents. Comparing the two NPM subcategories, it is on the marketization dimension, that the Danish state agencies have been more prone to adopt NPM activities, while there is no significant difference in the adoption of agencification concepts.

Concerning policy field, the policy field of law and order is significantly negatively related to the Total NPM index and the marketization index, while there is no significant difference in the adoption of managerial NPM concepts. Concerning size, organizations with few employees tend to be negatively related to the adoption of NPM activities on all three measures. Large organizations, especially those with between 401 and 1000 employees tend to be positively related to all three NPM measures. Concerning the individual respondent, the CEO's tend to be positively related to NPM activities as compared to organizations in which the respondent was a lower ranking manager or employee. Concerning the gender of the CEO, organizations having a female CEO tend to be positively related to the adoption of NPM activities.

The three models account for around 24-25 percent of the variation in the adoption of NPM activities.

The findings in table three are compared to the hypotheses elaborated in the theory section in table four.

**** Around here Table 4 ****

Discussion

As can be seen from table four only one of our three hypotheses were supported by the findings, while two were refuted. Confirming our expectations Danish state agencies tend to be more positively related to the marketization dimension of NPM practices as compared to their Swedish equivalents (H2), but contrary to our expectations Swedish state agencies are not more positively related to the agencification dimension of NPM activities as compared to their Danish equivalents (H3). That is probably the reason why our first hypothesis (H1), that there are no significant differences between the overall NPM practices (both marketization and agencification) of the state agencies in the two countries, was also refuted. The obvious interpretation seems to be that since only the marketization dimension of NPM practices is significantly different between the two countries, and that this dimension tend to be significantly more related to Danish state agencies, also the total measure of NPM practices tend to positively related to the Danish context although less strongly than for the marketization dimension.

One plausible interpretation of our findings may be that who holds the political power of government matters for the politicized aspects of the NPM adoption of state organizations. Contrary to agencification, the marketization aspects of the NPM movement have been politicized, especially in the 1980ies but to some extent still. In the Scandinavian context right wing parties tend to be more in favor of marketization. Since right wing parties have been more in power in the Danish (77 %) than in the Swedish (17 %) government context in the decade before the survey, this may explain the higher extent of marketization in Danish state administration.

The findings in the present analysis should be understood as very preliminary results. They need to be scrutinized further by examining other models, perhaps utilizing other statistical techniques and including other control variables. They also need to be linked more carefully to the agencification literature.

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Table 1: Three NPM indexes of organizational innovation

<p>To what extent do the following activities take place in your organization?</p> <p>Make a selection on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a very large extent)</p>	
<p>1. Total NPM index*</p> <p>(Marketization and agencification)</p> <p>(alpha=0,83)</p>	<p>a. Development of innovative products and services etc.</p> <p>b. Restructuring of internal processes to markets, products or target groups</p> <p>c. Customer surveys</p> <p>d. Future business plans</p> <p>e. Internal steering of the objectives and results of the organizations subunits and lower management levels</p> <p>f. Internal reporting and evaluation system to enable management to assess results in relation to the objectives set</p> <p>g. Internal autonomy for lower management levels concerning the management of financial and human resources</p> <p>h. Result oriented pay</p>
<p>2. Marketization index*</p> <p>(Adaptation to environment)</p> <p>(alpha=0,79)</p>	<p>a. Development of innovative products and services etc.</p> <p>b. Restructuring of internal processes to markets, products or target groups</p> <p>c. Customer surveys</p> <p>d. Future business plans</p>
<p>3. Internal Agencification index*</p> <p>(Internal hierarchical relations)</p> <p>(alpha=0,75)</p>	<p>e. Internal steering of the objectives and results of the organizations subunits and lower management levels</p> <p>f. Internal reporting and evaluation system to enable management to assess results in relation to the objectives set</p> <p>g. Internal autonomy for lower management levels concerning the management of financial and human resources</p> <p>h. Result oriented pay</p>
<p>*Summative indexes constructed by summing up the responses and dividing by number of variables</p>	

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for all variables included in the analysis

	N	Mean total	Mean DK	Mean Swe.	Med.	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Total NPM Index	306	3,2	3,3	3,2	3,3	0,77	1	5
Marketization Index	317	3,1	3,4	2,9	3,3	0,94	1	5
Internal agencification Index	316	3,3	3,2	3,4	3,5	0,83	1	5
Denmark	441	0,4	1,0	0,0	0,0	0,49	0	1
Policyfield: General public service	425	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,0	0,39	0	1
Policyfield: Law and order	425	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,0	0,37	0	1
Policyfield: Environment protect.	425	0,1	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,24	0	1
Policyfield: Social agencies	425	0,1	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,27	0	1
Up to 10 employees	430	0,1	0,2	0,0	0,0	0,31	0	1
11 to 20 employees	430	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,0	0,28	0	1
201 to 400 employees	430	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,0	0,34	0	1
401 to 1000 employees	430	0,2	0,1	0,2	0,0	0,35	0	1
1001 or more employees	430	0,1	0,1	0,2	0,0	0,33	0	1
Female manager	441	0,3	0,3	0,4	0,0	0,47	0	1

Table 3: Regression analysis of the adoption of NPM practices

Multiple OLS regression	Index 1 Total NPM	Index 2 Market NPM	Index 3 Manageria 1 NPM
1. Denmark	0,195***	0,333***	0,017
2. Policy field – General Public Services	0,07	-0,005	0,099 [^]
3. Policy field – Law and Order	-0,142**	-0,234***	0,000
4. Policy field – Environmental protection	-0,018	-0,093 [^]	0,064
5. Policy field – Social agencies	-0,111*	-0,115*	-0,047
6. Size: Up to 10 employees	-0,368***	-0,258***	-0,364***
7. Size: 11 to 20 employees	-0,105 [^]	-0,020	-0,159**
8. Size: 201 to 400 employees	0,094	0,084	0,084
9. Size: 401 to 1000 employees	0,200***	0,207***	0,133*
10. Size: 1001 or more employees	0,090	0,142*	0,020
11. Top CEO Female	0,103*	0,124*	0,070
N	300	309	308
R2	0,253	0,255	0,261
Adjusted R2	0,224	0,228	0,233

Note: Standardized regression coefficients.

Level of significance marked as: [^]p<0.1 *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

Table 4: Hypotheses compared to findings

H ₁	There are no significant differences between the overall NPM activities (both marketization and managerialism) of the state agencies in the two countries	Refuted (Significantly positively related to Danish context)
H ₂	Danish state agencies are more positively related to the marketization dimension of NPM activities as compared to their Swedish equivalents	Confirmed
H ₃	Swedish state agencies are more positively related to the managerial dimension of NPM activities as compared to their Danish equivalents	Refuted (No significant difference between Sweden and Denmark)

Appendix: Principal Component Analysis of eight NPM items

	1	2
a. Development of innovative products and services	0,873	-0,161
b. Restructuring of internal processes to markets, products, etc.	0,846	0,007
c. Future business plans	0,639	0,173
d. Customer surveys	0,634	0,268
e. Result-oriented pay	-0,208	0,781
f. Internal evaluation system to assess results in relation to objectives	0,107	0,774
g. Internal steering of objectives and results of the organization's subunits	0,2	0,722
h. Internal autonomy for lower management levels	0,195	0,587

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in 8 iterations.