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Introducing a Nordic Welfare State model

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Introducing a Nordic Welfare State model

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The increased focus on collaborative governance in the western world—the collaborative nexus between civic society, public organizations and private enterprises—demands new forms of organizational recipes in the public sector for delivering better results for citizens and public service users [1,2]. A key lever in this search for improved results is the involvement of service users' knowledge in the redefinition of public services. The arguments are that public services will be better targeted to the service users, and that the service users are empowered with the ambition to mobilize their individual resources [3,4].

In the following sections, we introduce a methodology for service user involvement in public service development and evaluation that is established based on empirical research in the Nordic Welfare State: The BIKVA methodology[1] [5-8]. A recent impact study determined that the BIKVA methodology has been utilized in more than 500 evaluation and development projects across Northern Europe [9].

The purpose of this model introduction is to provide scholars and practitioners with a step-by-step methodology to service user involvement in public service development, innovation, and evaluation. A methodology that can facilitate organizational learning and capacity building in public organizations [10]. Our goal is to increase awareness of the methodology and its practical potential for generating impact in relation to an increased awareness of a service user–oriented agenda in a public sector beyond the Nordic Welfare State.

THE BIKVA METHODOLOGY
The purpose of the BIKVA methodology is to challenge existing norms, routines, and practices in public service organizations and in local governments from a service user perspective. The impact case study cited above established that the BIKVA methodology has been—and can be—used for both organizational and individual capacity building, organizational development, and innovation and evaluation [5-6, 9]. In BIKVA, the service users are given the role as the central informant, while at the same time, the service users are asked to define the development or evaluation questions for the study being initiated. As the service users define these questions, it is their values that constitute the organizing principle of the developmental program or evaluation.

An example of an open question could be: "*In your opinion, what is good about 'x service,' and what is not so good?*" Such a question allows the service users to choose the dimensions they want to describe about the public service. The first step thereby enables the identification of the service users' criteria for what they think

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[1] *The BIKVA methodology is developed in the Danish welfare system. BIKVA is a Danish acronym (**B**rugerinvolvering **i** **kva**litetsudvikling) which is not translated, because the model already is well known and widely used in the Northern countries. In English the Danish acronym can be translated to 'service user involvement in quality development'.*

should be the basis for assessing or improving the public service. The consequence of giving the service users this authority is that the BIKVA methodology must be characterized as a normative evaluation and development approach. It is important to note that this approach is not more or less normative than any other evaluation of the solutions to complex, social problems, regardless of what rationale is used [11].

The four steps of BIKVA

The BIKVA methodology consists of four steps, which are processed by a facilitator. See figure 1 below. The *first step* is a group interview with the service users concerning the phenomena or topics that are to be rethought, improved, or evaluated. In the *second step,* the front staffers are presented with the service users' knowledge and perspectives stemming from the service user group interview. This presentation enables the front staffers' reflections concerning the service users' knowledge and perspectives, which can be used to inform the front staffers about the effects, the advantages, and disadvantages of their work, from a service user perspective. In the *third step,* the service users' knowledge and perspectives and the front staffers' reflection on these are presented to the management. The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the causes and reasons for the service users' and the front staffers' knowledge and perspectives on a managerial level. Finally, in the *fourth step,* the knowledge and perspectives from the three previous steps are presented to the political level, with the purpose of discussing and investigating potential causes and effects for the service users' knowledge and perspectives and the ones existing in the public organization.

Figure 1: The BIKVA methodology
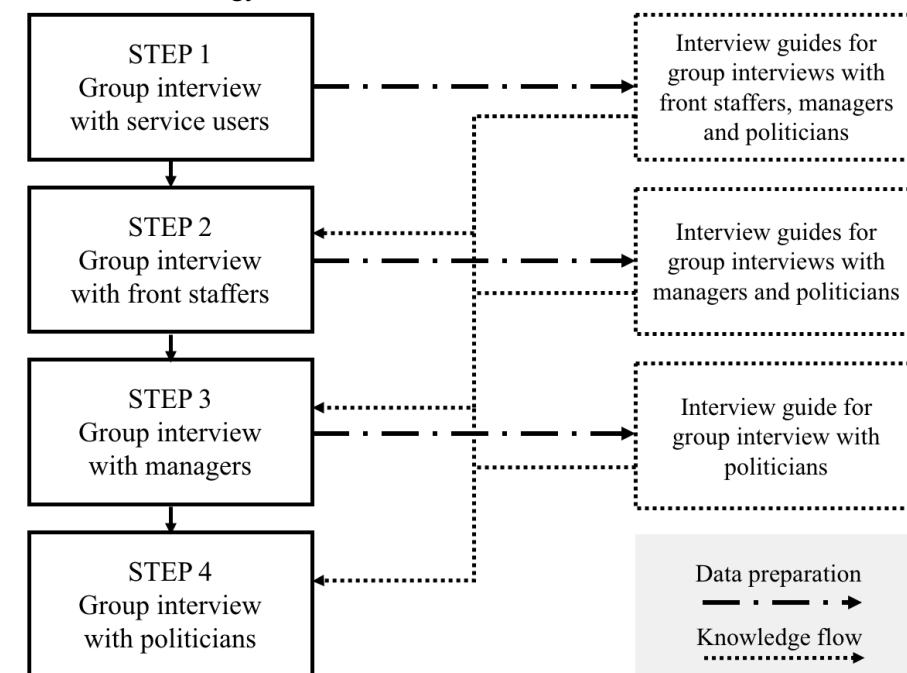
Source: Krogstrup (1997)

The service users are "triggers for learning"

The BIKVA methodology gives public service users an active role in the debate on how social provision should develop and be developed. The service users act as 'triggers for learning' in BIKVA and based on the knowledge and perspectives presented by the service users, the facilitator can involve relevant actors and stakeholders in a dialogue throughout the group interviews in the public organization. It is important to note that the BIKVA methodology can have both a retrospective and a prospective view in the way the initial questions are asked by the facilitator.

If the purpose of the BIKVA process is the creation of new routines for co-production between the service users and the public organization, the question could be: "*How would you imagine a collaboration between you and our institution could look like in the future concerning 'x theme'?*". If the purpose of the BIKVA process is evaluation and development, the question could be: "*What can be done to improve 'x theme' in your meeting with us [the public organization]?*" or "*What do you think adds value to you in 'x theme' and what provides less value to you?*"

An essential part of the BIKVA methodology is that the process is initiated by a facilitator with an open group interview *where only the service users participate*. Front staffers and street-level bureaucrats in the public sector have—when introduced to the BIKVA methodology—questioned whether it would not be advantageous for both themselves and the service users to participate in a collective group interview. An essential argument for not assembling both parties in one group interview is one of *power asymmetry*. To get the service users' subjective opinion on quality and to get an idea of the intersubjective validity criteria which exist in the service user group, it is important that the "helper" and the "help-seeker" are not invited to the same interview.

The procedural steps from the service user group interview into the public organization
The result of the group interview with the service users will introduce a number of themes, which the facilitator turns into triggers for learning in the interview guides. These interview guides are to be used on each of the three levels in the public organization, cf., the steps in the BIKVA methodology. An estimate is that 80% of the knowledge that is generated in the service user group interview concerns the relationship between the service users and the front staffers. Therefore, the BIKVA facilitator has to consider the relevance of the knowledge that is used as foundation for the group interviews on the different organizational levels. Not everything has to go to the managerial or political level.

When the facilitator has presented the front staffers with the themes stemming from the service users' knowledge and perspectives, and responses are given, the interview guide for the managerial level is updated. When interviewing the management, the facilitator could ask a question like: "*Why do you think the service users raise this topic concerning 'x theme,' and why do you think the front staffers respond to this as they do?*" A similar process is initiated when the BIKVA facilitator enters the political level. It might be irrelevant to include the political level in some BIKVA processes if the issues raised or the potentials identified can be either mitigated or implemented without political intervention. However, if the BIKVA process represents a larger study, potentially based on multiple sub-studies, then a synthesis of the BIKVA processes can be presented to the political level, so potential changes can be discussed concerning the themes presented.

Based on these four steps, the BIKVA methodology can create valuable triggers for learning that enable public organizations to approach the increased requirement for collaborative governance by involving the service users as the most important stakeholders in the context of public service creation and provision [7-9].

Author Biographies

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