

Abstracts

Observations on Using Scientific Evidence in Practice and Policy-making

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Given that the use of scientific evidence in practical and political decision making cannot basically be understood as an exercise in technical problem-solving, it seems reasonable to examine what the use of evidence actually entails in real-life situations. This paper explains six points: Evidence is not the same as data. Evidence is neither a »base« nor a »foundation« for decision-making. Scientific evidence is only one of several kinds of knowledge necessary for policy-making. Use is not the same as a simple transfer of knowledge from producers to consumers and its subsequent immediate and direct application. Use is a collective, interactive phenomenon. To understand use, we need to pay more attention to situated cognition, cognitive processes, and argumentation.

Evaluation as political insurance

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This article examines whether insurance can serve as a metaphor to comprehend evaluation and how it may influence the understanding of evaluation in society. The perspective adds a rationalistic counterpoint to leading studies that perceive evaluation as a ritualised practice. The article argues that evaluation can be understood as insurance in the sense that evaluation distributes the risk of decision-making parallel to the distribution of economic risk of insurance. Additionally, the article identifies central differences between insurance and evaluation, especially in regard to the two different logics at stake: market logic and hierarchy logic. The differences imply that the costs of evaluation – in contrast to costs of insurance – are not primarily born by those who benefit from the evaluation. Moreover, while risk sharing is typically desirable in an economic context, it is more ambiguous in a political context. Evaluation is often employed to enhance accountability, yet, when evaluation is analysed

as insurance, it becomes clear that evaluation also diffuse accountability.

Eight attention points when evaluating political reforms

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This article analyses the challenges related to evaluations of major policy reforms. It is based on a meta-evaluation of the evaluation of the NAV reform in Norway, who was both a significant reorganization of the central, regional and local government and a social policy reform. Meta Evaluations assess the usefulness of one or more evaluations and should not be confused with meta-analyses. The purpose of this meta-evaluation was to identify general principles for organizing the evaluations of large political-administrative reforms.

Based on the analysis eight crucial points of attention when evaluating large scale political-administrative reforms are elaborated. We discuss their reasons and argue that Denmark and other countries can learn from the experience of Norway.

Evaluation of large-scale national political-administrative reforms: A comparative analysis

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Large-scale national political-administrative reforms are a rare evaluand in the evaluation literature for at least two reasons. First such interventions are relatively less frequent than the countless changes happening in for instance the health care sector and the education systems. Second although their frequency seems to have increased in recent decades they are often not evaluated. This article provides a systematic comparative analysis of recent evaluations of two large-scale national political-administrative reforms. Two of the largest political-administrative reforms in the Nordic countries in the 2000s were the reform of labor and welfare administration in Norway (NAV reform) and the local government reform in Denmark. The two reforms have a number of characteristics in common – also with other major political and administrative reforms. They were adopted centrally by the Parliament (Folketing/Storting), they affected large parts of the public sector and the population, they had several and partly incompatible objectives and they developed and changed over time. Furthermore the two reforms were characterized by a focus on formal structural change as the main policy

instrument and included both the state, regional and local level of public administration. Finally and crucial in this context, both reforms have been evaluated. The systematic comparative analysis of the evaluations of the two reforms use four theoretical lenses: A rational instrumental perspective, a political interest-based perspective, an institutional cultural perspective and a chaos perspective. The analysis shows that despite the reforms similarities their evaluations were organized in very different ways and had very different impact. While the evaluation of the NAV reform in Norway was organized as a research-based external evaluation, the evaluation of Danish municipal reform was organized as an internal evaluation where key stakeholders got evaluation responsibilities. And while the evaluation of the NAV reform was used mainly for knowledge-building and creating debate, the evaluation of the local government reform was used instrumentally to adjust the division of labor between levels of government in selected areas of activity.

Performance management in Danish municipalities after the crisis

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This article presents the results of six qualitative case studies of performance management in Danish municipalities after the economic crisis in 2009. It is argued that the municipalities have adapted their performance management practices to the new conditions of austerity, and that they aim for more strategic use of performance goals and measurements as a tool for prioritization of programs and

expenses. This development is, for example, expressed through the arrangement of political goals and targets into hierarchies and through the use of performance targets in the budgeting process. At the same time, the municipalities have deemphasized the development of common performance management systems for decentralized service providers.

A performance evaluation of sanctions on municipal accounts in Denmark, 2010-2013

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This article evaluates the low-based sanctions on the municipal accounts in Denmark introduced by the Danish government in 2011. The evaluation examines the effect of the sanctions relative to some selected evaluation criteria that are used to form hypotheses. The hypotheses concern the municipalities' ability to stay within the budgeted expenditures, the precision of the budget relative to the actual spending and finally whether the effect of the sanctions differ according to the municipalities' financial situation and the policy sector in question. The hypotheses are tested by the use of multiple regression on data from 2010 to 2013. The evaluation finds that the municipalities have indeed improved their ability to keep within their budget, but that the municipalities have not improved the spending precision relative to the budget. Furthermore, affluent municipalities are affected more by the sanctions than entities under higher fiscal stress, while schools, day-care and the specialized social area are the mostly affected policy sectors.

Do performance indicators lead to clarity for employees?

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One of the main purposes of performance indicators is to communicate clearly to employees what needs to be done in the organization. However, significant empirical variation

is found in the extent to which two comparable groups of public employees (upper secondary level school teachers and language teachers) find that performance indicators provide clarity. Qualitative data that describe the characteristics of their indicator systems and the organizational contexts in which they operate help us understand the sources of clarity/uncertainty. Finally, the pros and cons of clarity are discussed in a public management perspective and in a democratic perspective.