

Comments and Reviews

Review of Tom Christensen: *Organisasjonslederskap under endrete handlingsbetingelser**

Erik Damgaard, Aarhus University

Tom Christensen's book deals with the development of the Norwegian Teachers' Association in the postwar period. The focus is on the leadership of the organization, or, stated more precisely, on the changing conditions for organizational leadership. The form or type of leadership is conceived as determined by, or at least dependent upon, a number of internal and external factors. The internal factors are such as cleavages in the mass membership and, at the elite level, the agenda and degree of conflict. The external factors include relations to the central government administration, parliament, parties, and other interest groups.

The overall research problem and guiding hypotheses are not clearly spelled out, however. The book, indeed, is very comprehensive in its coverage of the Teachers' Association's development. It contains a number of interesting perspectives and questions derived from organizational theory and democratic theory, and it reports a massive amount of empirical data. But theory and data are not always put together in the best possible way. It is probably fair to say that Tom Christensen attempts to do much more than can be done within the framework of a single book. A less comprehensive approach giving priority to selected problems and hypotheses might have been a wiser research strategy. Is Christensen perhaps too enchanted with substantive problems and issues concerning teachers and schools? Has he not the heart to omit any, in some way, interesting problem for the sake of a sharper analytical focus? Anyway, the investigations are marked by a certain overall purpose, although this purpose is not quite clear until the final page has been read.

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leadership that can be practised. Christensen distinguishes between a period (roughly to the mid-sixties) of a rather stable 'entrepreneur' leadership exercised by the chairman of the association and a subsequent period characterized by a relatively unstable 'coalitional' leadership. Although the actual leaderships in the two periods are not described thoroughly per se, the analysis provides sufficient evidence — scattered over several chapters — to justify a conclusion about an important change in type of leadership in the direction mentioned. What makes it a bit difficult to follow the 'real' argument is that the (implicit?) hypothesis about a change in type of leadership is intertwined with the attempt to explain why the change came about. In short, explanandum is not clearly separated from explanans. (To see this, read pp. 19-21, 110, 116, 137, 165, 209f, 247f, 281f, and 286-291).

Christensen's book is of interest beyond the concrete context of the Norwegian teachers' organization. A large part of the findings may be summarized under the heading 'heterogeneous membership and expanding public agenda' (cf. section 9.6) signifying important changes in internal and external factors that make entrepreneur-leadership more difficult and coalition-leadership more likely. As the author notes (p. 298) these tendencies are probably common to most if not all large interest organizations in the period under study. Christensen's book can thus also be regarded as a well documented example of fairly widespread organizational developments. This theme is not discussed as much as one could have liked. It is merely hinted at in the concluding chapter but it might well have served as a point of departure for the whole book.

In the final chapter Christensen also discusses the theme of 'internal democracy versus external effectiveness' which he introduces on the very first page of the book. The tension between these two aspects of organizational activity is mentioned in chapter 5 on the secretariat and committee system (p. 165). It is noted that originally the organization had only limited internal democracy but large decision-making capacity. During the '70s a swing occurs toward much more internal democracy and less capacity for decision-making. This point seems well founded. However, in the final chapter Christensen arrives at the conclusion that eventually there is an increase not only in internal democracy but also in external effectiveness even if there are problems with the balancing of the two considerations (p. 292). This conclusion seems at least debatable. Christensen defends his position by arguing that internal and external processes to some extent have become disconnected through increasing specialization and segmentation of the organization. Parts of the organization are directed toward the servicing of members while others handle the external affairs of the organization (p. 294). This may be true, but all problems are certainly not solved by these means, as Christensen indeed seems to acknowledge (p. 299).

Christensen's book is, as mentioned, very comprehensive in its dealing with

matters concerning the teachers' association. Numerous aspects are studied over time by the use of solid empirical methods. But the specific purpose of the investigation is not always clear. Chapter 8, for example, analyzes contacts to parties and parliament and yields a number of interesting results about, e.g., specialization and recruitment (pp. 256-267) not unfamiliar to students of legislatures. However, such findings are often only remotely related to the stated research objective (cf. pp. 252f).

Generally speaking, the strength and importance of Tom Christensen's book lies in its solid empirical foundation, and the wealth of information it provides. It also has a number of interesting theoretical perspectives, but it suffers from a certain lack of theoretical integration and explicit criteria of relevance. Finally, non-Scandinavian specialists may deplore that this academic dissertation does not have a summary in English.