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CONTEXTUALIZING MANAGERIAL WORK IN LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

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# ABSTRACT

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This thesis is about managerial work in local government organizations. The purpose is to explain important aspects of managerial work with the help of a contextual perspective. The focus is on managers at the operational level of education, health and social care services, and technical services. Two research questions are raised. The first question considers the relationship between context and managerial work: how does organizational context influence managerial work, and how does managerial work influence organizational context? The second question is about contextual variations within the municipal sector: does the organizational context for lower-level managerial work vary between differently gendered municipal services, and, if so, how can this variation be explained?

In order to answer these questions, I have used a cross-level and comparative research design. The design is cross-level in the sense that I consider how factors at different analytical levels interact. The design is comparative in the sense that the services have been strategically selected to represent differently gendered municipal contexts.

The theoretical framework evolved mainly from management, organization, and gender theory. With the help of Gary Johns' (2006) framework of organizational context, I outlined a model of how to understand the relationship between context at different levels and managerial work practice. Other central concepts in the thesis are Yvonne Hirdman's (1988) idea of an omnipresent gender system and Joan Acker's (1990) notion of gendered organizations.

The empirical work of the thesis consists of three quantitative studies (Study I, II and IV) that are based on a two-wave survey of over 400 operations managers in five different types of services, and one qualitative study (Study III) based on eight interviews with managers, politicians and controllers in two different organizations. In the first study, the impact of organizational traits on the unnecessary and unreasonable tasks in managerial work is investigated, using multilevel regression analysis. The aim of the second study was to provide a measure that can be used in order to evaluate and compare organizational conditions for managers in different types of services. The third study is an investigation into how the generic traits of the New Public Management have been implemented in differently gendered local government organizations. Lastly, the fourth study explores variations in organizational conditions in differently gendered services.

The first overall conclusion of the thesis is that the relationship between managerial work and context is recursive. Organizations are arenas of conflict in which different stakeholders try to turn their ideas into governing formalities. Managerial work practice is to a large extent governed by the formalities that constitute the organizational context, which would in turn cease to exist if not for the daily work practices of managers and other organizational actors. The second conclusion is that there are systematic differences in organizational conditions between differently gendered services, and therefore a structural approach to gender is an important complement to more individualistic views on differences in male and female managerial behaviour.



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Göteborg, November 2013

Lisa Björk



## INTRODUCTION

*A former district manager of a social care department protests against the department's chief administrator in an opinion piece in the local newspaper. Together with one of the unit managers, she has recently been discharged for exceeding the social care budget. To defend her actions, she refers to the Social Care Act that prevents her from refusing social service to citizens in need. She simply needed to exceed the budget in order to comply with the legislation that governs the activities at the Social Care Department. In his reply, the chief administrator regrets the dismissal but nonetheless defends his position. He refers to a decision taken by the local political board, stipulating that the budget must govern the level of ambition of services: "[...] we have a great responsibility to be there for the ones that need us and have the right to get help. At the same time, we have a fixed amount of revenues. We must never lose control. We must do the right things." (Göteborgs Posten, October 2012)*

This short report is an illustration of a dilemma that derives from the context in which first-line managers work in local government organizations. On the one hand, the district manager is expected to follow the Social Care Act and the norms of the social care profession. On the other hand, there are not enough financial resources to do so. This is a dilemma that derives from the public sector setting that the district manager has to cope with, regardless of her individual leadership attitude or style. Accounts like the one above - stemming from managers who work close to education, care and technical service operations in local government organizations - have inspired me to situate the work of managers in a wider context, in order to understand the constraints and opportunities of managerial work from a contextual perspective.

It has been argued that managers who work close to the organizational core in bureaucratic organizations face a relatively stable environment (Osborne, Hunt & Jauch, 2002). There are good reasons to question this view. Positioned in the middle of the organization, operations managers are exposed to a variety of interests that managers higher up in the hierarchy do not face directly. Politicians, audit agencies, higher-level managers, support functions, employees, union organizations, journalists and service users, and their peers are some of the actors with whom operations managers communicate in their work practice. Instability and uncertainty can thus come from various sources. Operations managers interpret an abundance of national-level regulations and policies, as well as local-level rules and directives, and are responsible for their implementation at the operational level. They generally have professional or semi-professional training, and have gained their position on occupational merits. They subsequently have a detailed knowledge of service provisions and are aware of the possibilities and constraints that the operational reality entails. They have the responsibility to secure the safety and occupational well-being of employees, and to lead and organise their work.

For some decades, trends in public sector management have posed higher demands on local service production. Demands on systematic quality work and customer orientation have to be met at the same time as budgets are slimmed, central control increased, and organizations constantly changed. Management models have been imported from the private sector. Time Quality Management, Lean Production, SWOT-analysis and procurer/producer models are commonly used today in municipal schools and social care services. Bureaucratic, market and network organization ideals give rise to a rich ecology of bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic features in contemporary public organizations (Hales, 2002; Bolin & Härenstam, 2008; Olsen,

2006; Hasenfeld, 2010; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). In combination with an increasing use of information and communication technology, these control systems bring about new routines for administrative work, and expose managers' work performance to politicians, audit agencies, support functions, and the public. On public national and regional homepages, citizens and journalists can compare and evaluate the performance of individual elder care homes and schools.

The responsibilities of lower-level managers in the municipal sector have thus been expanded in the last decades, and their position in the middle of the organization expose them to conflicting logics and ambiguous situations; they are supposed to subject to the law, loyal to their superiors, attentive to the citizens, and legitimate in the eyes of their subordinates (Lundquist, 1991; Hagström, 2003; Lundberg Rodin, 2010). Managing public sector organizations has been depicted as "an unremitting navigation between different value systems" (Holmberg, 2003; p. 19).

Even though this complexity is widely discussed and generally accepted in research, there have been few systematic investigations into how public organizations can be designed to help operations managers cope with this complexity. Instead, the management literature is often designed to help individual managers tackle the multifaceted demands on public sector leadership. For example, managers as supervisors, rule-followers and work organisers (i.e., 'transactional leadership'), managers as enthusiastic missionaries of organizational visions (i.e., 'transformational leadership'), and managers as servants of employees and citizens (i.e., 'servant leadership') have been extensively explored in the management and leadership literature throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Van Wart, 2003; Svenningsson, 2011). The necessary traits, skills, and behaviours of managers have been investigated, as well as the charismatic and ethical sides of managerial work. Less attention has been paid to the context faced by managers. Examples include how the number of subordinates affects managers, or what difference it makes to have regular access to administrative support functions or to extra resources when there are unexpected work peaks. In this thesis, I shall call such factors the organizational conditions of managerial work. These are factors that exist in the managerial environment and influence managerial discretion. For example, managers with 50 subordinates are likely to spend substantially more time with traditional staff work than managers with ten subordinates, and managers that have close access to human resource specialists are likely to receive more help with complicated staff issues than managers that must compete with other units for the attention of centralized HR functions. When addressing the relationship between principles of organization and the day-to-day practices of managers, I am dealing with a core relationship of the social sciences: the relationship between the human being and her environment, between structure and agency. I will further elaborate in this relationship in the theoretical section.

The municipal sector consists of many different types of services. Over time, the municipal competencies of education, health and social care and technical services have followed their own institutional and legislative trajectories, and developed into separate municipal jurisdictions. The occupations that are involved in municipal service production are heavily gender segregated, with women and men clustering in separate organizational contexts. Local government managers manage teachers of different educational levels, care workers, librarians, fire fighters, and

maintenance and production workers, and all of these occupations are ‘gendered,’<sup>1</sup> in the sense that they are associated with stereotypical ideas of male or female (or gender-neutral) attributes and behaviours. Given the gender segregation of the municipal sector, it is of interest to explore whether the organizational prerequisites for managerial work are similar across the sector, or whether there are differences in differently gendered municipal services. How many subordinates do managers in these different milieus handle, and do they have the same access to support functions and resources? In this thesis, I will largely ignore gender as an individual level parameter, and instead focus on both male and female managers in differently *gendered contexts*.

Public debate and management research often focus on the attributes and skills of super-leaders, who cope with great challenges and turn their schools and hospitals into successful organizations. As a response to this emphasis on the individual, influential scholars call for a less individualistic view that recognizes the national, sectoral and organizational influences on managerial work practices (for example, Nordegraaf & Stewart, 2000; Mintzberg, 2006; Dierdorff, Rubin & Morgeson, 2009; Morgeson, 2012). They claim that it is important to consider the possibilities and constraints that are embedded in the context where managers operate. Leadership and management theories that take their point of departure from managerial *practice* tend to view managerial work as interactive and situated phenomena, highly embedded in context and dependent on situation. Managers are not only *in control*, they are also, to a large extent, *controlled by* the complex, ambiguous and fragmented nature of the managerial work practice (Tengblad & Vie, 2012). One way to consider the situation in which managerial work takes place is to incorporate several contextual levels into the analysis (Rousseau & Fried, 2001; Johns, 2006; Dierdorff et al., 2009). Practical consequences of such analyses might be that individual leaders appear less heroic, and that many simplified tools and ‘one-size fits-all’ advice in the management literature must be discarded. In turn, less simplistic and more realistic explanations of why organizations and their managers fail or succeed in their goals can be identified.

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<sup>1</sup> I prefer, and will henceforth use, the term ‘gendered’ instead of the alternative term ‘sex-typed’ (Westberg-Wohlge-muth, 1996), in order to clarify that we are dealing with social, and not biological processes.

## AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Managerial work is not conducted in a vacuum; it is always situated in a specific organizational context. In the local government setting, there is a plethora of rules, norms, policies, laws, routines and resources that to a large extent regulate what managers can and cannot do. The general purpose of this thesis is to explain important aspects of managerial work in local government organizations with the help of a contextual perspective. More specifically, it is hoped that, if the organizational context that encloses operations managers in local government organizations can be theoretically conceptualized and empirically investigated, the problems that these managers face in their daily work practice – for example, high work strain and inadequate performance – can be better understood and handled. It is also hoped that such an organizational perspective on managerial work can, to some extent, relieve individual managers of responsibility for problems that have at least as much to do with the organization of work as with individual traits, skills and behaviour.

By ‘organizational context,’ I mean what Johns (2006) has depicted as the “situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behaviour” (p. 386). Context consists of configurations of factors that lie outside of individuals, and that frame and influence their daily activities. Yet, context is not fixed or independent of individual behaviour; on the contrary, context at any level comes into existence through human action. A central idea in this thesis is that the relationship between context and managerial work practices is recursive (Endrissat & von Arx, 2013); in other words, context and practice influence each other.

By ‘managerial work,’ I mean activities that are associated with the formal responsibility for staff, budget, and operations in an organization. What distinguishes a manager from a leader is this formalized managerial function; a leader might or might not have formalized responsibilities and powers (Yukl, 2002). This distinction between leaders and managers is not always clear in the management literature, and the terms ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’ appear in the text when I refer to studies that explicitly use these terms. However, the present thesis is about managers with formalized responsibilities.

By ‘managerial work at the operational level,’ I mean the work of first-line/unit managers *and* middle/service managers that work close to the operational activities, and are in regular contact with service staff and service users. These operations managers are orientated toward the production and delivery of services, rather than toward strategic work (Slack, Chambers & Johnsson, 2001). For example, school principals and school district managers are operations managers, while the head of the department of education in the municipality works in a higher and more strategic position. Henceforth, ‘lower-level’ and ‘operations’ managers will be used synonymously.

As advertised in the introduction, two research themes will be addressed in the thesis. The first theme explores and establishes associations between contextual conditions and lower-level managerial work in local government organizations. The issues considered include how resource deficits, span of control and organizational incoherence and irrationality affect the prevalence of

managerial tasks that are perceived as unnecessary and unreasonable in relation to the managerial assignment, and how such tasks indirectly affect the organization. Other questions concern whether it is possible to capture organizational capacity by letting managers rate the opportunities they have to fulfil their managerial responsibilities, and whether this has anything to do with organizational performance. Other issues include how new management techniques of control affect managerial work practice in municipal organizations, and the strategies managers use in order to cope with increased pressure for work standardization and efficiency. The first theme is expressed in the first overarching research question:

*How does organizational context influence managerial work, and how does managerial work influence organizational context?*

The second theme explores and explains contextual variations within the municipal sector. The questions include how new management techniques of control are implemented, and whether there are systematic differences in organizational conditions for managers in differently gendered municipal services. This second theme is expressed in the overarching research question:

*Does the organizational context for lower-level managerial work vary between differently gendered municipal services, and, if so, how can this variation be explained?*

These questions indicate that there is more than one analytical level involved in this work. At the individual level, there are the daily practices of operations managers. At the organizational level, there are local government organizations designed in ways that can constrain or facilitate these practices. These organizations are, in turn, parts of a wider service context. This contextual understanding of managerial work will have consequences for the choice of theory and analytical design of this thesis.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

The first section of the thesis consists of an introduction to the general setting of public sector management, and the specific setting of Swedish local government organizations. The following theoretical section consists of two parts. First, I present previous research that has looked into the relationship between context and managerial work and sketch my own understanding of this relationship. Second, I account for the relationship between gender, work and organization. The theoretical section is concluded in a few theoretical assumptions that frame the scope of the thesis.

This dissertational work has been conducted as a part of a wider development and research project CHEFiOS (Härenstam, forthcoming). Section three starts with a depiction of the research design of the larger project, and then proceeds to the general methodology and the empirical material that I have used in the four studies that constitute the empirical work of this thesis. Finally, I summarize the four studies and discuss the contribution of the thesis.

## BACKGROUND

Just like private companies, public sector organizations are social structures that have been established to achieve more or less well-defined goals (cf. Fleetwood, 2004, p. 35; & Christensen, Jensen & Lindquist, 2011, p.11). In contrast to the customers of the private sector organization, the ‘customers’ of the public sector organization – the citizens of a state, a region or a municipality - are incorporated into the organization as owners that decide who will lead the organization. The central task of the public sector organization is to deal with the variety of problems, beliefs, and conflicting interests and demands that the citizens represent. Often, these problems are difficult to tackle or simply insolvable (for example irreversible diseases or chronic delinquency). To the private business organization, the ‘customer is king,’ while the group of citizens that use public services do not have more influence over the service than other citizens. In addition, the citizens and their political representatives do not only care about the final product (i.e., the service); they are equally concerned with how and by what means the service was produced. And dissatisfied citizens do not simply change service providers; they complain. The conflicting interests and demands are reflected in the organizational structures and procedures of the public sector organization, which are more oriented towards handling insolvable problems than finding solutions. Rational decision-making and management by rules are attractive procedures for organizations that must handle ambiguous interests and insolvable problems in a democratic and legally approved way (Brunsson, 2011).

In an article from 1989, Stephen Ackroyd, John A. Hughes and Keith Soothill identified two distinct relationships inherent to the structure of public service organizations: the relationship between political controllers and the managers responsible for service provision, and the relationship between service clients and public service workers. Public sector management is about mediating between these relationships: between control and service delivery. Public service providers are professional or semi-professional experts in their fields who have gained their



positions by virtue of training and experience. They are relatively independent of their managers and will only accept being supervised as long as they find the supervision to be in accordance with professional norms. This forces public service managers to have a custodial approach to management that is “/.../centred on existing services; focused on the necessity of maintaining minimum standards of provision, and almost invariably wedded to the conceptions of practice held by service providers themselves“ (Ackroyd et al., 1989, p. 613).

However, real organizations are seldom perfect representations of organizational ideal types. It has become a trend to import institutional features from the private business organization into the public sector. The precedence of contract over hierarchy, professional and private sector style management, performance measurement and output control, organizational disaggregation, and incentives to increase competition and efficiency in the public sector are some of the doctrinal components of the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm (Hood, 1991). The role of the public manager within the realm of NPM is to lead at a distance, to ‘steer rather than row’ (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992), and to use performance indicators and other market incentives to control performance. It has been argued that the bureaucratic model benefits the professionally-trained officials who are the experts on service-specific rules and statutes (Weber, 1978; Lipsky, 1980), while the market model menaces the discretion of professional groups (Bejerot & Hasselbladh 2008; Healy 2009; Newman & Lawler 2009), and benefits professional managers (Clarke & Newman 1997; Røvik, 2008; Strömberg & Szücs, 2009; Hall, 2012) and administrators of performance measurement, inspections and audits (Power, 1997; Ivarsson Westerberg, 2004). In addition to operating in the borderlands between political authorities and employees, and between politics and administration, public sector managers must tackle the ambiguities that arise when bureaucracies are subjected to marketization (Nordengraaf, 2000; Ivarsson Westerberg, 2011). Even though the custodial approach to management is still a strong ideal in public sector services, it has been confronted under the New Public Management (Kitchener, Kirkpatrick & Whipp, 2000).

Within this general public management setting, the Swedish local government sector has its own specific features. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a gradual transmission of welfare service provision from the state and regional levels to local level authorities. A stepwise reduction of the number of municipalities, starting in the 1950s, enabled a more efficient organization, and local officials replaced laypeople to take care of the ever expanding and more complex local government organizations. These developed to become the foundation of the post-war Swedish welfare state (Strömberg & Westerståhl, 1984). Today local government organizations are vital providers of health and social care services, education, sanitation, emergency service, infrastructure and leisure.

In 1992, local government organizations received extended rights to form their internal organization. In general terms, municipalities organise their services according to a model with an elected municipal assembly (kommunfullmäktige), which appoints the municipal executive committee (kommunstyrelse) and the specific service committees (nämnder) at the political level, and with specific service departments (förvaltningar) at the administrative level. In the larger Swedish cities, it is common to divide the organization into district-specific committees and departments. Besides the gradual decentralization of welfare service provision, local autonomy is guaranteed by the statutory principle of local self-governance, giving the municipalities’

considerable freedom to adapt their activities to local conditions. However, the Local Government Act regulates substantial parts of their organization, obligations, and financial administration. Most of the municipal competences are also regulated by national framework laws, and are subject to substantial state control, which delimits local self-governance (Bergmark, 2001; Dalman et al., 2011). Today there are 290 municipalities in Sweden employing 20 per cent of the Swedish working population (Statistics Sweden 2013a). 80 per cent of all municipal employees and 66 per cent of all municipal managers are women (Statistics Sweden, 2013b).

The post-war expansion of the municipal sector had great importance for women's labour market participation. Local government services took over traditional women's work and served as the main employer of the female labour force (Hirdman, 1998). The traditionally female activities of caring for small children, and the elderly and disabled, moved from the domestic into the public domain. The vast expansion of public nursery schools that took place between 1960 and 1980 enabled mothers to leave the home and enter into the labour market. Meanwhile, middle-aged housewives started to work in the expanding elder care sector (Edebalk & Lindgren, 1996; Sundin, 1997). The primary segregation of men into the paid labour force and women into the unpaid domestic sphere was gradually replaced by a secondary segregation of women and men into different domains in the labour market (Hirdman, 2001). The parallel development of welfare service expansion and female labour market participation had consequences for the staff composition of different municipal service domains, as well as for the 'gendering' of municipal service activities (Westberg-Woghlemuth, 1996; Westerberg, 2001; Forsberg Kankkunen, 2009). Within the important municipal domains of care, education and technical services, women are concentrated in elder and social services and pre- and primary school education, while men predominate in technical services (Statistics Sweden, 2013c). Secondary education is the most gender-integrated activity within these three municipal service domains. Each domain has a specific legislative and institutional background, and is today subject to specific laws and regulations and controlled by different inspection agencies (Dalman et al., 2011).

In the 1990s, the number of employees in the municipal sector decreased for the first time in decades, especially among women (Statistics Sweden 2013b). Decentralization of competences from the state to the local level, deregulation of these competences, increasing demands to hold back expenses, and a shift towards marketization resulted in significant changes to local government organizations (Szücs, 1995; Wise & Szücs, 1996). For example, the act governing the system of choice in the public sector (SFS 2008:962) allows municipalities to buy health and social services on the market and lets clients choose among different service providers. Independent schools were established and the influx of pupils from public to private schools increased (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2002). The role of local government has increasingly become that of a contractor with external providers of welfare services (Hartmann, 2011).

The marketization of local government services has led to a swelling number of managers. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of employees in the public sector increased by 1,5 per cent, while the number of managers increased by 38 per cent. In local government organizations, the absolute number of managers was 28 900 in 2012, compared to 23 640 in 2000 (Ivarsson Westerberg, 2013, p. 149). Ivarsson Westerberg provides three explanations for this augmentation. The first factor has to do with the decentralization of public organizations as expressed by private sector managerial concepts, such as management by objectives, purchaser-

provider models and profit units. The second factor is a general tendency in the media, public debate and popular management literature to attribute substantial importance to the leadership abilities of individual managers in explaining organizational success or failure. The third factor is the movement towards the formulation of management as a profession in its own right, disassociated from the professional values that dominate in specific public services (see also Clarke & Newman, 1997; Røvik, 2008; Hall, 2012). The professionalization of managerial work is advocated in particular manager associations and union organizations, and also in governmental policies for public management.

Municipal managers face many dilemmas in their day-to-day work. These include the impossibility of achieving established goals with the available resources, contradictory directives delivered by different political levels, and the clash between political decisions and professional norms (Lundberg Rodin, 2010). New (predominantly female) managers are entering public organizations where responsibility has been decentralized, while control and resources have been centralized; there is an obvious risk that these managers will become hostages of 'greedy organizations' that want more (service) for less (resources) (Rasmussen, 2004, see also Hood, 1991; Holmquist, 1997). Given the inherent complexity of public sector organizations, and the increasing focus on the managerial function, researchers have been asking how work can be organised to help public sector managers do their jobs. Supportive structures and communication about everyday dilemmas in the organization have been put forward as important conditions for managerial work in public service organizations (Skagert, 2010). The purpose of decisions, activities and events must be synchronized between organizational levels; otherwise, contradictions and misunderstandings trickle downwards in the organizations to lower level actors who are left to cope with means that do not meet the ends (Forsberg Kankkunen, Ylander, Höckertin, 2010). If actors in different functions, and at different levels of the organization, share views on goals and resources, they can also share the responsibility for solving ambiguous situations. The decision-making processes, responsibilities, role requirements and discretion must be formalized in order to be clear to all actors (Thulin Skantze, 2006; Härenstam, 2010). In a recent research review of factors that generally characterize a good work environment, Per Lindberg and Eva Vingård (2012) conclude that the factors that have been most frequently mentioned in the literature since the 1990s are (p.5)

/.../positive, accessible and fair leaders; skilled communication; cooperation/teamwork; positive, social climate; participation/involvement; autonomy/empowerment; role clarity, with clear expectations and goals; recognition; development and growth at work; moderate work pace and workload; administrative and/or personal support at work; good physical working environment; and good relationships with stakeholders.

These factors are essentially in line with what are found to be good work environments for managers (Lundqvist, 2013). Previous research thus suggests that work can be organised in a way that assists managers in handling the inherent conflicts and dilemmas of public sector organizations.

To summarize, managerial work in local government organizations is, to a large extent, characterized by complexity and ambiguity. At the macro-level, the overarching legal background

(for example, the Constitution and the Local Government Act) and trans-organizational public management trends constitute a common setting for local government managers. Yet, at the meso-level, municipal managers spend their workdays in gender-segregated municipal jurisdictions. An investigation of the work situation for local government managers, in general, would conceal any implications of this meso-level gender segregation. In order to investigate organizational conditions in a sector that is so strongly gender segregated, it is important to include both predominantly female and male services into the analysis; otherwise, only parts of the story would be recognized. In order to achieve this goal, there is a need for a comparative research design and a strategic sample of differently gendered services. With the help of previous research, I will further elaborate the relationship between organizational context, managerial work and gender in the next sections.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework consists of two parts. In the first section, *Managers in organizations*, I will present two rather distinct approaches to the relationship between managers and their organizational environment, and propose a way to reconcile them. In the second section, *Gender in organizations*, I will address the issue of how gender is (re)produced in organizations. Lastly, I recapitulate the theoretical assumptions in a final summary.

### MANAGERS IN ORGANIZATIONS

When managers communicate with stakeholders, employ staff members, go to work meetings, and do the administrative paperwork, they are active shapers of the social relationships that constitute an organization. On the other hand, the organizational structure regulates what managers can and should do and not do. Like other social scientists, management and organization researchers are often tempted to put either agency or structure between analytical brackets, because considering both can be theoretically and methodologically tricky. In the following sections, I will review some studies that investigate managerial work as a context-bound practice; these studies can be said to give precedence to structure over agency. Then I turn to investigations of managerial work as a context-shaping activity. In this vein, agency is given precedence over structure. I will provide a third view that assents to both claims. I will argue that, when managers perform their daily work, they shape the context that in turn serves as the framework for the managerial practice.

#### MANAGERIAL WORK AS A CONTEXT-BOUND PRACTICE

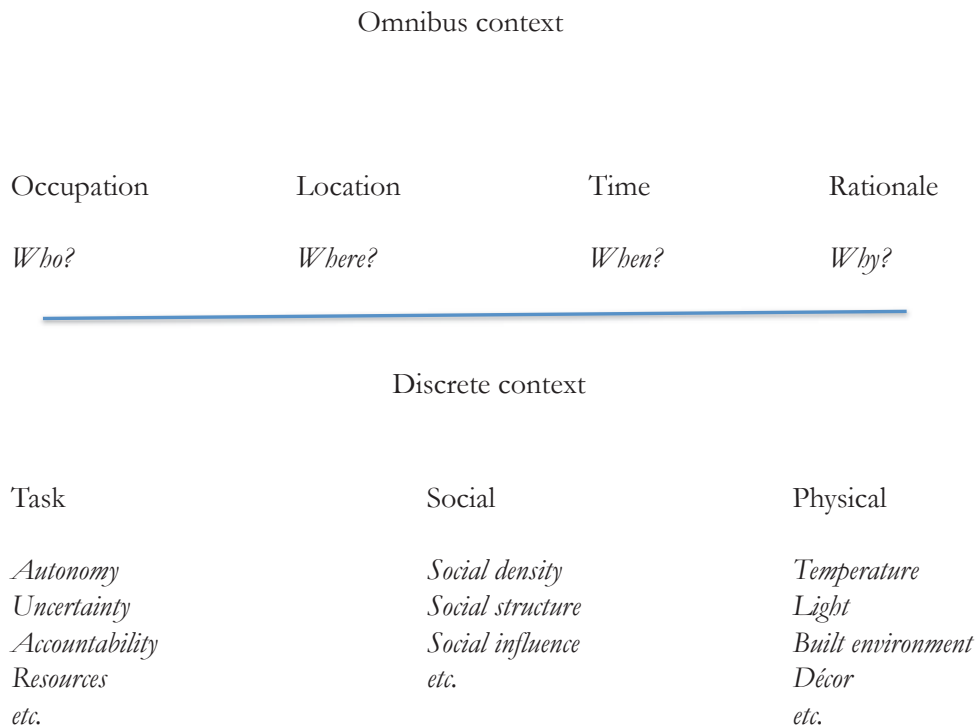
“One cannot separate the leader(s) from the context any more than one can separate a flavour from a food” (Osborn et al., 2002, p.799).

Most empirical investigations of the contextual influence over managerial work practice are consistent with situational or contingent leadership theories (Fiedler, 1967; Hersey & Blanchard, 1982; Totsi, 1991). In this vein, there is no such thing as a best way to lead organizations; it all depends on the situation. In leadership research, the contingency models usually consider the impact of particular aspects of context (e.g., organizational culture, industry or size) on particular dimensions of leadership (e.g., leadership efficiency, performance, or style). Many times, the main objective of contextualizing leadership research is to strengthen the robustness of suggested models and the validity of findings. In a review article, Porter and McLaughlin (2006) sort organizational context components that are covered in contemporary leadership literature into seven categories (p. 563): culture/climate (e.g., type of culture, norms and ethics); goal/purpose (of individuals, groups and organizational units); people/composition (e.g., demographic variability); processes (e.g., task factors, policies); state/condition (e.g., resource availability); structure (e.g., hierarchical levels, size, shape and type of organization); and time (e.g., organizational life cycle stage effects). Osborn et al. (2002) propose four macro-level contexts through which the interplay between leadership and context can be addressed: stability, crisis, dynamic equilibrium and edge of chaos. They argue that, in relatively stable bureaucratic settings, the meaning and importance of various leadership dimensions depend on environmental (e.g., culture, economic, industry) and organizational (e.g., strategy, size, technology, structure) conditions (p. 807). In Jepson’s framework (2009), the immediate social context (e.g.,

organization, technology, hierarchy, department) exists alongside and in relation to the cultural (national or organizational culture) and institutional contexts (regulation, socialization, education, history).

These generic frameworks conceptualize organizational context as multidimensional. Yet they do not sufficiently clarify that lower level dimensions of context can be nested in higher levels dimensions, for example, that local organizational cultures can be affected by national regulations and policies. In their methodological contribution on how to conceptualize and conduct multilevel organizational research, Katherine J. Klein and Steve W. J. Kozlowski (2000) distinguish between three types of higher-level constructs. Teams, departments or organizations can have relatively objective, descriptive and easily observable *global properties* that characterize them, and that are independent on the characteristics of the individuals that populate them. Industry, function, structure and size are examples of such global properties. *Shared properties* are those that “/.../originate in experiences, attitudes, perceptions, values, cognitions, or behaviours that are held in common by the members/.../” (p.215) that populate a team, department, or organization. Normally, shared properties are aggregated from individual level data when the researcher has theoretically motivated and statistically sound reasons to believe that there is a considerable homogeneity within, and a substantial variability between, organizational units. Then there are *configural properties*, which are supposed to vary between the members of a unit, but still can be measured as higher-level constructs. Dierdorff et al. (2009) take account of the multileveled nature of context in their study of over 8 000 managers in 52 different managerial occupations. They found that occupation (a global property) accounts for significant variance in the requirements of managerial work, and that this variation, in turn, was partly explained by the social, task and physical context at the organizational level (shared properties). In this article, Dierdorff and colleagues made use of Gary Johns’ (2001 and 2006) conceptualization of organizational context. Similarly to the frameworks reviewed above, this framework specifies the important dimensions of context, but thereafter it conceptualizes context as a multileveled phenomenon. Johns (2006) distinguishes between the *omnibus* and *discrete* levels of context (Figure 1). At the *omnibus* level, there are broad societal elements that are related to the specific culture, the specific period in time, and the specific population in which we are interested. The *who* dimension refers to the occupational and demographic context in which all organizational members are embedded. The gender composition, levels of education, ethnic structure, and professional norms of an organization are parameters that depend on the general occupational and demographic context in which the organization is embedded. In Dierdorff et al.’s study, managerial occupation served as an identifier at the omnibus level. The *when* dimension refers to the time at which the research event occurs. Institutions, economic structure, societal norms and technology are examples of factors that change over time, and affect the way work is organised. The *where* dimension refers to the location of the research site; national and regional differences in economic conditions, ethnic and social class compositions can be as important as differences between industries or sectors when interpreting organizational behaviour. Finally, it is also important to account for the rationale for the research; the *why* dimension. That the reasons and means for data collection can interfere with the organizational behaviour that the researcher sets out to study has been generally recognized in organization research since the Hawthorne experiments.

Figure 1. Important dimension of context (source: Johns, 2006, p. 392)



The omnibus context is the wider framing of organizational life. Many of the concepts commonly used in organization and management research - like ‘organizational justice,’ ‘support,’ ‘reward,’ and ‘performance’ - may have very different meanings in different occupations and cultures, and at different points in time. Johns claims that, just like journalists, researchers need to provide the reader with basic information about the general setting where the research was conducted. The omnibus context, in turn, constitutes the frame for the *discrete* context, in which, task, social and physical features influence behaviour and attitudes in organizations. Discrete context dimensions are meso-level parameters of, for example, levels of uncertainty, autonomy and resources (task context); social density, influence and structure (social context); and location, buildings, décor and light (physical context). The effects of the omnibus context on organizational behaviour are mediated through these meso-level parameters. For example, by knowing someone’s occupation, we may deduce the sort of social, task and physical work environment in which that person is found, and what influence this environment has on the person’s work behaviour.

An early organization theorist that recognized the meaning of omnibus context for organizational design and behaviour was James D. Thompson (1967). To Thompson, organizations are to a large extent determined by their capability to adapt to the surrounding environment (see also Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2008). At the core of any organization, there is a technical function, an instrumental achievement of organizational goals; teaching in schools, producing goods in factories and providing health care in hospitals. Thompson claimed that it is crucial to consider the nature of the core activity when explaining differences in organizational structure and design. Actors in organizations are rational when they undertake activities, or use technologies, that are believed to be effective in achieving the desired outcomes. However, there are different types of technologies that correspond to different kinds of rationalities. Thompson provides three

examples of technologies to illustrate this. The *long-linked technology* is appropriate for series of actions, where act A depends on the completion of act B, which depends on act C, and so on. The assembly line is the perfect example of long-linked technology. In this setting the desired outcome - for example, cars - is generated as standard products through repetition of the same procedures. Once started, the actions follow the internal logic of the technology itself, uncertainty is reduced and the technology can reach almost perfect rationality. Organizations that are mainly involved in providing the service of linking supply and demand are involved in *mediating technology*. Banks, insurance companies, brokers and travel agencies are examples of organizations that use this type of technology. Standardization and impersonal application of rules are qualities that are required in order for the organizations to be able to provide the same service over time and across places. Clients' unpredictable behaviour introduces an amount of uncertainty that organizations must deal with. *Intensive technology* refers to activities that are dependent on the reaction of the work object itself. This is often true in human service organizations (Hasenfeld, 2010); a teacher must be attentive to the pupils' acquired level of knowledge before introducing new themes in the class; a doctor must wait and observe the effects of the first treatment before knowing what to do next; a nursing assistant should be prepared to adapt the care to the current state of the patient. In human service settings, the specific case defines which activities are required to obtain the goal.

It is interesting to consider Thompson's argument in light of recent organizational and management trends, where similar organizational designs and ideals have spread across intensive, mediating and long-linked sectors. Public sector organizations are commonly human service organizations involved in intensive technologies such as caring and teaching. Lean production and Total Quality Management have become as common in hospitals as in car factories; and any large company without ethical and environmental guidelines is viewed as irresponsible and obsolete. The marketization of public sector organizations and the politicization of private business organizations have led to institutional confusion (Brunsson, 2011). These developments suggest that organizational design, structure, and behaviour may vary less with core technology than they did when Thompson launched his organization theory. However, the disassociation between management models and core technology may be an explanation of the strained work situation in many public sector organizations today, and this may support Thompson's idea of a correspondence between organizational structure and core technology.

The contributions reviewed so far have been concerned with the question of how context influences managerial work. Johns' theory is not particularly designed for management research, but I have found it applicable in the present research setting. In Figure 2, the relationship between omnibus context, discrete context and managerial work is depicted. The upper down-pointing arrow illustrates that the cultural setting (*where*), occupation, industry (*who*) and period in time (*when*) define the social, task and physical context of organizations. The lower down-pointing arrow illustrates that the discrete task, social and physical context in turn shapes the work behaviour of the population under study.



Figure 2. Managerial work as a context- bound practice

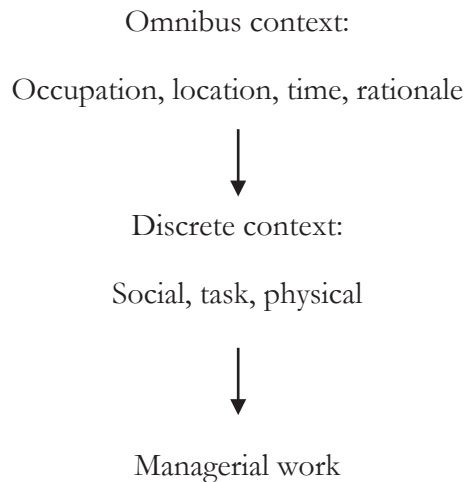


Figure 2 represents a perspective where structure has primacy over agency. A quite different approach in organization and management research is to focus on how managers influence their environment. We will now turn to this issue.

#### **MANAGERIAL WORK AS A CONTEXT-SHAPING PRACTICE**

“Managers are not merely entangled within webs of morally neutral information but are also compelled to try to spin that information in particular ways in order to accrue praise and avoid blame” (Hales, 2002, p. 63).

Managers exercise power over the organization in the sense that they demonstrate, use and develop their discretion in order to encourage the organization to change in the desired direction (Christensen et al. 2011). When dealing with the inherent complexity and ambiguities of public sector organizations, managers interpret situations, make choices and decide to act in specific ways, and thereby they partly construct their environment. Other staff members can also influence the organization, but managers do so from influential positions. The practice of managerial work is “a re-occurring pattern of influence tactic or decision-making behaviour,” critical for organizational change (Endrissat & von Arx, 2013, p. 284). Managers and decision-makers construct context when they try to legitimize their intended or executed actions with the context of their environment (Grint, 2005). They are active agents in interpreting problems and solutions, and in persuading others in their environment of the adequacy of their interpretations. Organizational events occur on the basis of interpretations, rather than on the basis of any objective truth. The meaning that subordinates and other agents give to actions of leadership is of central importance for how leadership is carried out in organizations (Holmberg, 2003; Sveningsson, 2011). This social constructivist view of context is part of a wider ‘practice turn’ in organization research, where actual activities are placed at the centre of attention (Whittington, 2003). Common to the leadership-as-practice view is a focus on *how* leadership is conducted - through which conscious and unconscious, formal and informal, and rational and irrational practices (Carroll, Levy & Richmond, 2008). This perspective places importance on interpersonal micro-level activities through which leadership is constituted (Denis, 2010).

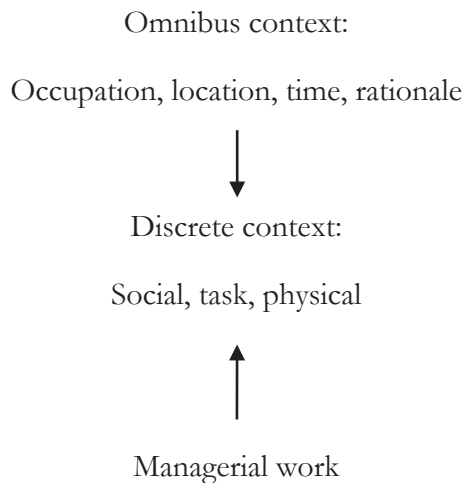
In a recent review, Stefan Tengblad & Ola Edvin Vie (2012, p. 40) synthesize over 60 years of studies of managerial work behaviour. They conclude that managers

*/.../* spend little time dealing with systematic approaches to planning and decision-making; instead, most of their time is spent discussing issues and exchanging information in personal meetings, often in response to unanticipated problems.

This view is distinct from that of rational management theorists, who repeatedly have tried to decompose the work of managers into its basic elements and posit ways by which these elements can be mastered. In practice, managerial work is essentially a social activity, conducted partly in informal arenas. In order to be successful, managers must control the emotional, symbolic and informal aspects of managerial work, as well as the formal administrative routines. When coping with uncertain and complex organizational environments, managers are active constructors of organizational structure in that they interpret rules and cope with deviations (Lind, 2011). The key role of public sector managers is to be interpreters and implementers of the organizational goals, and this gives them a substantial amount of power over the organization (Ivarsson Westerberg, 2011).

This line of argument is depicted in Figure 3. Here, the down-pointing arrow illustrates the same condition as in Figure 2: that the omnibus context influences the social, task and physical contexts of any work organization. However, this time, managers are themselves shapers of context through their daily actions. They make decisions, set agendas, interpret goals, defend their positions and adhere to certain rules while neglecting others. In performing such regular managerial work tasks, they are active constructors of their own and other's work environment. This argument is illustrated in the up-pointing arrow in the figure.

Figure 3. Managerial work as context-shaping practice

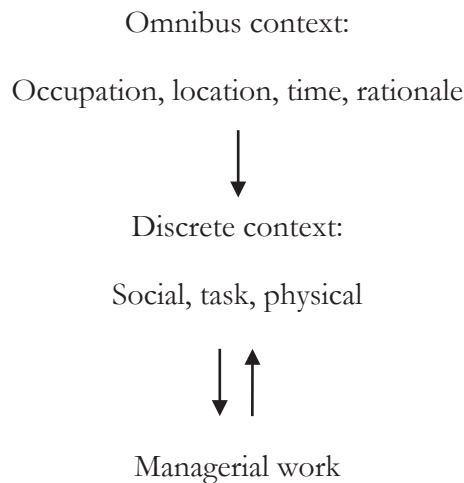


Now, which of the two figures best represents reality? Is it the one where managerial work is context-bound, or the one where managerial work is context-shaping? Next, I will suggest a third model and argue that both assumptions are true.

#### ***THE RECURSIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT AND MANAGERIAL WORK***

Organizations depend on human activity for their existence, reproduction and transformation. Managers are one of many actors in the web of social relations that constitutes an organization. By virtue of their position in the organizational structure, and the practices that are attached to this position, they constantly reproduce and/or transform the organization through their actions (cf. Archer, 1998, Bhaskar, 1998a; Fleetwood, 2004). Yet managerial work takes place in organizations where physical, social and task context factors regulate what managers can and cannot do. For example, operations managers in local government settings have a particular number of subordinates (a *social* context) that influences how much time they must dedicate to staff work. The spatial distance between their offices and the unit they run (*physical* context) implies opportunities and constraints for sharing and receiving information with service clients and subordinates (*social* context). Managers can work with operations characterized by high levels of uncertainty and client exposure or in stable settings with little client work. They can be expected to manage rigorous systems of budgetary control, or to delegate such tasks to support functions (*task* context). I call this interplay between structure and agency the recursive relationship between managerial work and organizational context (cf. Endrissat & von Arx, 2013).

Figure 4. The recursive relationship between managerial work and organizational context



The lower down-pointing arrow in the figure illustrates the influence of context over managerial work practice. The discrete context is in turn shaped by the omnibus context (upper-down-pointing arrow). Occupation is an element of the omnibus level. Dierdorff et al. (2009, p. 974) define occupations as “/.../ collections of work roles with similar goals that require the performance of distinctive activities as well as the application of specialized skills or knowledge.” I will henceforth use the term *type of service* to denote the same thing. The specific goals of local government organizations depend on the core technology; the goals that govern a local fire station are totally different from the goals that govern the local elder care services. The employees of these services apply different skills and knowledge in their daily work. These differences, in turn, shape the social, task and physical features of their respective organizations. The upper down-pointing arrow in the model illustrates the influence of these omnibus conditions – via the discrete context - over managerial work. Finally, the up-pointing arrow demonstrates how the organizational context is dependent on human action for its existence. Every time a manager fills in a form, responds to an e-mail, goes to a scheduled meeting, gives advice to a subordinate, or has a coffee break with a colleague, he or she is reproducing the organizational structure. Without such ordinary and trivial activities, the entities that we call organizations would cease to exist.

A recursive relationship between organizational context and action is reflected in Stinchcombe’s theory of formality (2001). Stinchcombe claims that the outcome of formalized situations depends on how well formalities, such as rules, guidelines, policies, standards, norms, routines and laws, represent the problems and solutions in the delimited area of social life that they were designed to govern. Stinchcombe claims that successful formalities are *cognitively adequate, communicable* and *improvable*. This means that the formality must represent all the essential activities of the specific area, and that the actors involved in the formalized activities must be able to interpret the formality. Furthermore, governors must validate the formality in relation to what is going on in the factual world. If a system of formalities lags behind the changes in the area of social life that it is intended to govern, it is rapidly out-dated and mistrusted, and eventually it dies. Effective formalities are not fixed but adapt constantly to changes in the details they are intended to govern. If the criteria of cognitive adequacy, communicability and improvability are

not fulfilled most of the time and in the long run, the actors do not believe that the way to behave dictated by the formality is the adequate and most effective way to meet the objective. They will find other, informal ways to go behind the formality in order to pursue the objective. Formality and informality are thus not in opposition, but rather two sides of the same coin. An imperfect system of formality causes informal behaviour simply because it is not adequate to its purpose. Conflicts between what is misconceived as formal and informal ways of proceeding are mostly conflicts between different formalities.

The formalization of organizational action is a *process* of rendering unique formalities and entire systems of formalities authoritative. In Stinchcombe's view on organizational life, it becomes clear that organizations are arenas of conflict, where different actors aspire to render their preferred formalities authoritative and thereby gain influence over organizational action. Such a conflict is illustrated by the example that introduced this thesis, where a social care district manager was dismissed for neglecting the budgetary limits of her operation. This can be interpreted as punishment for an informal behaviour; she ignored the financial frames and for that she was dismissed. However, the situation can also be interpreted as if there were two different and contradictory formalities that governed her role as a manager: the budget and the professional codes that are expressed in the Social Care Act. Her behaviour was completely formal from the professional, or custodial, perspective, but informal from a financial perspective.

Recalling the literature on managerial work as a context-bound practice, I have concluded that context is multilevel and multidimensional. I have used Johns' concept of omnibus context to denote the spatial, temporal and substantial milieu in which organizations are embedded, and his concept of discrete level to denote the task, social and physical dimensions of an organization. Recalling the literature on managerial work as a context-shaping practice, I have concluded that managers, through their daily actions, are active constructors of the discrete context. They can influence the social, task and physical aspects of their environment by following, neglecting, or trying to change the organization. While the physical context is constituted by material things such as light, décor and buildings, I argue that the social and task contexts are constituted by formalities. In any organization, actors must consider a set of rules, norms, laws, routines, policies and standards, and these formalities regulate how actors interrelate in organizations - what tasks they do and don't do, and how they do it. Another way to say that managers influence the organizational context would be to say that managers sustain or transform the formalities that govern their work practice. Every day, managers consciously or unconsciously relate to a large number of formalities, mostly by adapting to what the formalities dictate, but sometimes by opposing them. When there is a conflict between unique formalities or between entire systems of formalities, managers are forced to choose which one to obey and which one to reject. In the short run, they may try to reconcile conflicting rules, but, according to Stinchcombe, inadequate formalities will be mistrusted and will eventually perish in the long run.

Let us now return to the specific setting of local government organizations. How can the concepts presented so far be used to understand what is going on in these organizations? In this thesis, I do not make use of the where, when and why dimensions at the omnibus level. The overall setting is the same; this is a thesis about operational level managerial work in contemporary Swedish local government organizations. However, the managers are involved in different types of services, and apply distinct skills and knowledge in order to comply with the

specific goals that govern these services. With Thompson's vocabulary, we would say that they are involved in different core technologies. As we have seen, the effects of the omnibus level on managerial behaviour are mediated by the discrete context. For example, public management trends and legislation, and service-specific regulations and occupational standards, are turned into formalities that govern managerial work practice. Local political boards deliver guidelines and policies, and administrative support functions establish common procedural and reporting systems for operational, staff and budgetary work. Together, these formalities constitute the task context of managerial work; they define and regulate what managers do, how they do it, when they do it and why they do it. They also constitute the social context of managerial work; they regulate which actors local government managers interact with, where they interact, when they interact, and why they interact.

In order to fully understand why managers do what they do, we need to consider the fact that the formalities that govern managerial action come from many directions. We also need to consider that what may appear to be informal behaviour at first sight can very well be formal behaviour according to a different set of rules. However, managers are not merely puppets in a marionette theatre (Carlson, 1951). Every time they act in accordance with a formality, they reproduce context, and every time they neglect a formality, they challenge the given order.

Before moving on the next section, I will illustrate this conceptualization with the help of an example of a municipal school principal. By virtue of being in a managerial position in a public sector organization, there is a certain role that the principal is expected to take on regarding the teachers, administrative staff, politicians and other school managers. This role is defined in an abundance of formalities: job descriptions, regulations, work routines, ICT systems, professional ethics, work contracts, and policies. Together these formalities constitute the task and social context of the principal's work. In terms of tasks, the principal is, for example, expected to arrange and lead staff meetings, represent the school vis-à-vis pupils and their parents, be accountable to the local political board and audit agencies for policy implementation, collaborate with union organizations, lead and develop the daily activities at the school, do paperwork, and keep the operational expenses within the budgetary framework. In the daily interaction with other actors inside and outside the school organization, the principal plays an active role in reproducing and/or transforming this organizational order. When conforming to this order, the formalities are sustained and reproduced. But if, one day, the principal should neglect the obligatory reporting in order to spend some time with the staff on pedagogical development, the established order would be challenged. Such behaviour can be interpreted as an informal procedure, but also as a way for the principal to carry out other formalities, for example, taking the supervisory role of a school leader seriously.

While some formalities are common to all bureaucratic and politically governed organizations, others are service-specific. Similarly, there are service-specific core technologies or work activities. Across cultures and over time, women and men have tended to be involved with different work activities. The concepts and theoretical ideas presented so far do not consider the fact that work activities, and the organizations where they are performed, are not gender-neutral phenomena. In order to be able to incorporate gender into the analysis, I shall now turn to theories about gender, work and organization.

## GENDER IN ORGANIZATIONS

I will start this section by making the important distinction between the concepts of sex and gender (cf. Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen & Karlsson, 2002). In this thesis, I assume that the positions women and men have in *society* (i.e., 'gender') are something different and emergent from the positions they have as biological beings (i.e., 'sex'). For gender segregation to occur in the labour market, for example, there must be biological women and men. Yet the biological mechanism that divides humanity into women and men cannot *explain* why women and men are found in different sectors and occupations, and in different positions, performing different work tasks (Kanter, 1977; Westberg-Wohlgemuth, 1996; Sundin, 1998; Bourdieu, 2001; Bergman, 2004; Gonäs, 2005; Ulfsdotter Eriksson, 2006). The capacities women and men have by virtue of their biological sex are different from the capacities they possess by virtue of their social roles as women and men. Women and men have the abilities they have, and do what they do, by virtue of their positions in a social - not a biological- structure. Hirdman (1988) called this social structure a *gender system* and identified two mechanisms that are necessary for this structure to be what it is: the separation between female and male, and the domination of the male. Gender is not only attached to human bodies; conceptions about male and female, masculinity and femininity, are attached also to "places, situations, tissues, food, politics and work" (Hirdman, 2001, p.16).

The gender categories and their properties are not fixed entities, but are constantly being recreated and transformed in social relations; women and men 'do gender' in their daily interactions (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Martin, 2003). A central assumption in this thesis that the vertical and horizontal gender segregation in the labour market and in work organizations are created and recreated in the internal processes of organizing work (Acker, 1990; 1999; 2006).

### GENDER, ORGANIZATION AND MANAGERIAL WORK

During an ordinary day, people enter into many different social relations. The activities of a specific person in a specific setting are attached to various positions that this person takes on in relation to other positions in a web of social structures (cf. Bourdieu's concept of habitus). The gender structure thus very often interacts with other social structures - such as the market economy, the family, the bureaucracy - in governing human action. Even though women were traditionally found in the lower positions of bureaucracies (a fact commonly referred to as the 'glass ceiling' effect or 'vertical segregation'), they have progressively entered into higher positions by virtue of their professional training and skill. The mechanism of female subordination has been counteracted by the bureaucratic mechanism of valuing expertise and knowledge. Like all humans who take up positions in social structures, women and men have the power to sustain or transform the structure through their actions. Actors may challenge the separation between female and male by taking up the activities (or occupations, tasks, or behaviours) that are attached to the opposite gender. Male managers can work perfectly well with female activities or vice versa without challenging the attachment of the activity to a specific gender position. However, if many men enter into female sectors, professions or positions, the very mechanism of gender separation is challenged and eventually the attachment of that activity to a specific gender may need to be re-negotiated.

In the mid-1970s, critical voices were raised against the gender-blindness of seminal writing in organization theory (e.g., Acker & Van Houten, 1974). Since then, a substantial body of research

has offered numerous ways of addressing the problem of gender inequality in work organizations. Scholars have examined how men and women are socialized into different behaviours, and how male behaviour is systematically preferred and rewarded in organizations and on the labour market (e.g., Henning & Jardim, 1977). The suggested amendments to gender inequality in such analyses are often re-socialization of women and men, and demolition of the normative barriers that hinder women from performing men's work. Other scholars have celebrated gender differences and argued that women should enter top-positions and male domains because what they have to offer is something unique and different that organizations should value and cherish (e.g., Helgesen, 1990).

Yet another stream of research consists of studies that look at structural barriers to equal opportunities for women and men and suggest that they can be surmounted by affirmative action and new promotion and recruitment policies. A seminal contribution to this structural approach is Rosabeth Moss Kanter's *Men and women of the corporation* (1977), which investigated how the power relations that horizontally and vertically separate women and men are created and maintained in organizations. Kanter claimed that women's problems in organizations have nothing to do with their socialization or female personality traits, but with their disadvantageous positions in the organizational structure. Ferguson (1984) went further and accused bureaucracies for being inherently masculine structures that oppress all organizational actors except for the top elite. Scandinavian sociologists raised similar arguments. Björg Aase Sørensen (1982), Hildur Ve (1982) and Kari Wærness (1984) early on wrote about a particular rationality of responsibility or caring, which can be compared to Thompson's concept 'intensive technology,' and is common in unpaid and paid female labour. Work with human beings requires an orientation towards other human beings; it requires sensitivity and adaptability to the specific person and situation. This orientation is not harmonious with the instrumental, goal oriented and standardized organizational models in which care work was framed when it became a matter of public organization.

In a series of publications, Acker (e.g., 1990; 1999; 2006) argues that organizations are not gender-neutral entities; they are structures with gendered power relations that are deeply rooted in organizational processes and practices. Organizational formalities such as job descriptions, job contracts, organizational charts, and tacit routines are constructed on the underlying assumption of a committed full-time worker without obligations outside the job. Most formalities that constitute organizational life were elaborated in a time when women were excluded from work organizations, or at best situated in low-ranked positions that enabled them to take care of the reproductive responsibilities they had outside work. These formalities, adapted to a male worker without reproductive responsibilities, continued to be reproduced long after women entered into work organizations, making it particularly hard for women to comply with occupational duties and combine work with the reproductive responsibility in the domestic sphere. It is in the internal processes of organizing work in the domestic and public spheres that gender inequalities in the family, work organizations, and labour market were created, and organizations are still the arena for their reproduction and transformation.

Acker (1990, p. 146f) identifies five interacting and 'gendering' processes in organizations: the construction of division of labour, behaviour, power, location etc. along gender lines; the construction of symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce or sometimes oppose this



division; the interactions between women and men, by which dominance and submission are enacted; the gendered identity of the work of individual actors; and, finally, the on-going processes of creating and conceptualizing organizational structures. The empirical work of this thesis is mainly concerned with the interaction between Acker's first process of gender segregation and the fifth process of constructing organizational structures. The process of division along gender lines has been investigated in writings on 'sex-' or 'gender- typing' of work activities, occupations and positions (Westberg-Wohlgemuth, 1996; Hirdman, 2001; Robertsson, 2003). The core idea is that occupations or positions are in themselves gender-neutral abstractions, which become gendered as they are filled with female or male bodies. The process of creating organizational structures is dependent on how these female and male occupations and positions are valued. In any organization, there is a generally accepted idea about a correspondence between responsibility, job complexity and hierarchical position (Acker, 1990, 9. 148f):

For example, a lower- level position, the level of most jobs filled predominantly by women, must have equally low levels of complexity and responsibility. Complexity and responsibility are defined in terms of managerial and professional tasks. The child-care worker's responsibility for other human beings or the complexity facing the secretary who serves six different, temperamental bosses can only be minimally counted if the congruence between position level, responsibility, and complexity is to be preserved.

The same argument can be applied at the sector level. Just as women's submission in organizations have been justified by the idea of an adequate correspondence between complexity, responsibility and position, the relative submission of female sectors and occupations in the labour market have been justified with the same arguments: care work is something that comes naturally to women, it is not as complex and demanding as the work performed by men, and consequently it does not deserve the same recognition (cf. Hirdman, 1998; SOU, 1998; Rasmussen, 2004).

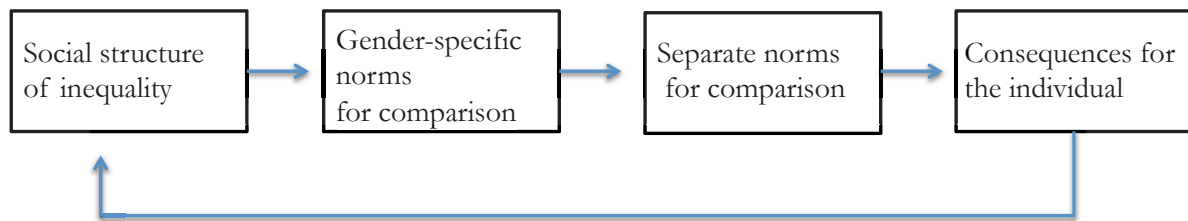
In an investigation of job evaluation processes, Kullberg and Cedersund (1996) suggest a model (Figure 5) to explain how the gender segregation in the labour market is created and sustained. The underlying assumption of the model is the social psychological belief that people tend to compare themselves to people of the same sex. Because women and men are to a large extent found in separate occupational domains on the gender-segregated labour market, they mostly compare their own situation to the situation of co-workers in their own domains. The consequence is that the differences in things like status, power, reward and appreciation between female and male domains are hidden:

/.../ since we /.../ create our perception of equity or injustice through comparisons with people of the same sex, there is an imminent risk that we do not notice the separate conditions under which women and men live. By that, we also risk accepting totally different yardsticks for the parts of the labour-market where women and men work. (ibid, p.106, *my translation*)

Segregation on the structural level leads to women and men developing separate norms for comparisons, which in turn leads to, for example, separate norms for what are reasonable

working conditions (Figure 5). The consequence at the individual level is, for example, that women earn less than men, which in turn is reflected at the structural level (illustrated by the returning arrow in the model) where female work activities tend to enjoy less pay than male activities.

Figure 5. Causal chain from a social structure of inequality to the consequences for individuals  
(source: Kullberg and Cedersund, 1996, p. 106, *my translation*)



This reasoning is in line with an institutional understanding of power (Christensen et al., 2011). A key assumption of such an understanding is that the interests of some actors are protected through a general acceptance of the norms, rules and routines that constitute the daily activities in organizations. Interests that have been developed over time are preserved simply because all actors take the given order for granted; the alternatives are inconceivable (ibid, p.17):

Power recedes /.../ in the surrounding structural and institutional frames in the shape of generally accepted rules, routines, habits and norms for behaviour/.../ These frames and possible underpinning institutions are not to be viewed as imperative. The point is instead that the frames are accepted and taken for granted. Therefore they will constrain what is considered to be possible behaviour. There are questions that are never asked because the frames hinder different questions from being posed.

My argument here is that the depreciation of sectors and occupations where women work can be explained by the fact that men and women to a large extent are found in separate worlds. They seldom compare their respective situations. Instead, they relate to the situation of the people who surround them, that is, mostly people of the same sex within the same type of service. Each of these types of service has its own set of norms and routines that are taken for granted by all actors. Systematic differences are concealed as long as comparisons are not made across domains. Yet, some conditions have been brought to the surface and challenged, and actions have been taken to minimize inequalities between female and male occupations and sectors. The most obvious examples are the gender gap in wages and work hours. However, less is known about how gender interacts with other structural characteristics, such as working conditions. There are a few empirical examples that deal with organizational conditions for managerial work in differently gendered municipal activities.

In their study of the associations between psychosocial and physical work environment and psychosomatic reactions and job satisfaction among Swedish middle managers in six different municipal types of service, Westerberg & Armelius (2000) concluded that the psychosocial work environment is more beneficial, and psychosomatic reactions less common, in departments geared towards maintenance and production (i.e., male services) than in departments oriented towards care and education (i.e., female services). Forsberg Kankkunen (2009) showed that managers in technical services had considerably fewer subordinates under their command than in the social care and education services. Standardized management instruments were easier to use on the delimited and measurable tasks of production work than in the less definable tasks of social care and education. Also, technical managers had closer contact with the strategic management in the organizations, and thereby more influence over the decision-making processes. A third study identified typical situations for municipal managers with regard to job demands and resources, using cluster analysis (Berntson, Wallin & Härenstam, 2012). In the most beneficial clusters in terms of demands and resources, the psychosocial health, motivation and performance among the managers was considerably better than in the unfavourable clusters. Managers of technical male services were overrepresented in two of the three beneficial clusters, while managers from elder care services, a female service, were slightly overrepresented in one of the two unhealthy clusters. Together these results indicate that there are differences in organizational conditions in differently gendered municipal services.

## SUMMARY

The theoretical section can now be summarized with some general assumptions. On the basis of previous management and leadership research, I propose that *different dimensions* of organizational context at *different levels* influence managerial work practice in local government organizations. At the omnibus level, managerial work is defined by the time and place where it occurs, and also by the occupations that are involved in the production of goods or services. At the discrete organizational level, managerial work is influenced by the formalities that constitute the social, task and physical context. The organizational context is in turn reproduced and transformed by managers' daily actions; the relationship between the discrete context and the managerial work practice is recursive. Every time a rule, norm or routine is obeyed or followed, it is validated as an effective way to govern action. Every time it is neglected, it is challenged as an effective way to govern action. In order to contextualize managerial work, I need a research design that is consistent with this multilevel and multidimensional understanding of context, and that enables investigation of characteristics proper to more than one analytical level. Also, I have proposed that the core technology of organizations tends to be attached to a specific gender position. The distinction between, and valuation of, female and male activities is reproduced through the mundane day-to-day processes of organizing work. With time, most occupations, organizations, and industries become gendered. I subsequently need a sample of differently gendered municipal services in order to investigate whether the gender of the service has any bearing on the organizational conditions of managerial work. I do not mean to say that gender is irrelevant at the individual level; there is, for example, an abundant literature on differences between female and male leadership styles and behaviours. However, such matters are not the focus here.

## SCOPE AND DEMARCATION

The general purpose of this thesis is to explain important aspects of managerial work in local government organizations with the help of a contextual perspective. It is intended as a contribution in work science, which is interdisciplinary in its nature (Holmer, 2006). Despite wide methodological and theoretical diversity, work scientists share an interest in the interplay between the individual and her work environment. An obvious demarcation of any working life study, then, is to specify what kind of work and what kind of work environment are under investigation. In this thesis, I look into the psychosocial (not physical) work environment for lower-level managers in local government organizations. In applying a critical realist view of managerial work, this thesis is also intended as a sociological contribution to the field of management and organization.

My point of departure is the idea that organizational context is multilevel and multidimensional in its nature. Dimensions of social, task and physical context (for example, staff composition, span of control, or routines for communication) are embedded in a wider omnibus setting of time, place and occupational sphere. The organizations that constitute the empirical material of this thesis are all contemporary Swedish local government organizations. They have all been selected for this research for the same reasons and on equal terms. However, the organizations have deliberately been selected to represent different types of service. In this thesis, I will investigate task and social context aspects, whereas the physical aspect will be excluded from the analysis. I have also stated that the relationship between the organizational context and the managerial work practice is recursive in nature. I will mainly focus on the influence of context on practice. However, on some occasions, I will also discuss the influence of managerial work on context.

## METHODOLOGY

Because the ultimate goal of all science is to offer explanations about things that happen in the world, the practice of scientific research is about taking hold of mechanisms (Hedström & Swedberg, 1998). In the search for mechanisms, organizational and management research has been criticized for being too keen on emulating the positivist methodologies of the natural sciences (Ackroyd, 2004). Put differently: ”/.../the common demands for clean (read: simple) models do not always fit with the messy reality of contemporary work and organizational life” (Rousseau & Fried, 2001, p.3). In many natural sciences, the objects of study can be artificially isolated from environmental disturbance and the unique effects of particular mechanisms on the object can be measured. The phenomena of social science exist at more abstract strata of reality and the mechanisms that make them happen can never be empirically identified (e.g., touched or seen), nor isolated from interfering factors (Danermark et al., 2002). Social structures and their mechanisms manifest themselves through their effects; they possess powers to make things happen in the world. Structures, powers and effects exist in overlapping domains of reality (Bhaskar, 1998a). While the *effects* of social structures can be identified in the *empirical* domain, there are billions of things happening in the social world independently of human observation. These are events in the *actual domain*. Behind these events are the mechanisms and structures that generate them. These exist in the *real* domain. Due to their psychological constitution, human beings possess the power of reflection and deliberate action. They can deliberately or unconsciously change structures through their everyday actions. Because the objects of social science are dependent on human action, they are under constant change. The theories that social scientists develop in order to understand why and how things are taking place in the empirical domain are therefore never perfect. Social scientists need to be critical about their conceptions, and prepared to change and improve theories about the social world (Bhaskar, 1998b).

In line with these arguments, Griffiths (1999) states that much organization research has focused too much on outcome to the expense of process. She draws attention to how the meticulous study of micro-processes of change in one sector or in one company may lead to an understanding of broad societal change. As an example, she raises the concept of social support that has been widely used in the study of work environment and health. Many positivistic studies have investigated the degree of self-reported support and its relationship to well-being. Few have focused on how support is generated or *through what mechanisms* support affects health. Therefore, it is difficult to claim what the preventive strategies would be in order to enhance social support in organizations. Quantitative approaches in the social sciences reach their fullest potential only when they are combined with qualitative methods that can go deeper into the processes that are taking place in organizations, she claims.

The realist ontology, represented by Bhaskar (1998a & 1998b); Archer (1998); Danermark et al., (2002); Ackroyd (2004); and Fleetwood (2004), has consequences for how to conduct social science research. In this empirical work, I have tried to be open-minded in method selection and adapt the methodology to the stratified or multilevel understanding of the social world that underpins this thesis. One way of contextualizing organizational research, suggested by Rousseau and Fried (2001) and Johns (2006), is to use cross-level and/or comparative designs. A cross-level

design explicitly demonstrates how higher level situational factors affect lower level factors (or the other way around, which is less common). In order to do that, access to data at different levels – for example, individual and organizational level - is necessary. A cross-level design is comparative when situations that differ in important aspects are intentionally contrasted. Comparative designs are used when cases which are supposed to manifest the mechanisms the researcher wishes to reveal, but which are different in other aspects, are compared (Danermark et al., 2002). The organizations under study in CHEFiOS and in this thesis are equal in the sense that they are all local government organizations, but they have been strategically selected to represent different types of services. Based on previous findings on differences in contextual conditions for municipal managerial work (Forsberg Kankkunen, 2009), assumed variability was built into the CHEFiOS research design (cf. Rousseau & Fried, 2001, p.3). I will return to how this overall strategy has affected the choice of method in the four individual studies. But first, I will present the overall sample and empirical data.

## SAMPLE AND MATERIAL

The purpose of the CHEFiOS project was to study the organizational conditions for managerial work and the innovative capabilities of organizations, in relation to work environment and institutional performance, in a strategic sample of differently gendered municipal types of services. Organizations and managers from seven municipalities were investigated at two different points in time: 2009 and 2011.

The sample of municipalities in the Västra Götaland (West Sweden) region represented suburban municipalities (Ale and Mark), small towns (Alingsås and Kungälv), medium-sized cities (Borås and Uddevalla) and a large city (Göteborg). Field access was granted through the agreement of four municipalities (Alingsås, Borås, Ale and Göteborg) to engage in an organizational intervention. The other three municipalities were sampled as controls to match the size, political and demographical composition of the intervention municipalities. The CHEFiOS project targeted *all* managers with personnel, financial and operational responsibilities in the selected organizations.

The empirical material for the four studies was collected with the help of three different instruments that we used in the CHEFiOS project to gather both individual and organizational level data.

### *INDIVIDUAL LEVEL DATA*

The CHEFiOS research group constructed a questionnaire based primarily on the Gothenburg Manager Stress Inventory (GMSI) instrument, developed by researchers from the Institute for Stress Medicine in Gothenburg, and from the Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine at the Sahlgrenska Academy (Eklöf et al., 2010). The GMSI instrument is the result of several qualitative studies of managers' working conditions and health in Swedish public sector organizations (see, for example, Skagert et al., 2008, 2010; Dellve & Wikström, 2009). It was expanded with indices of organizational constraints (Waldenström, 2007), illegitimate tasks (Semmer et al., 2010), employability (Berntsson, 2008) and traditional psychosocial work environment questions about demands, control and support (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Also, the questionnaire included background questions about the respondents' sex, age, and position, and descriptive questions about the organization. The questionnaire study was approved for meeting ethical standards. We distributed the questionnaire to all 766 managers in the sampled organizations in the spring of 2009, and to 739 managers in the same organizations in the spring of 2011. In 2009, the number of organizations was 29, and in 2011 it was 27 due to mergers. The questionnaires were sent to the workplaces by mail, distributed by an appointed service officer to the individual managers and then returned to the researchers in sealed envelopes. The response rate was 72 per cent in 2009 and 66 per cent in 2011, which generated a sample of 555 managers at the first take and 491 managers at the second take. In order to get a more homogenous sample of those managers that work close to the daily practices of the operations, I reduced the samples to contain operations managers in the selected types of services only (Table 1). Heads of departments, managers with expertise functions (e.g., HR managers and chief accountants), and team managers without full budgetary, personnel and/or service responsibility were excluded from the sample at both takes. At the first take, 443 operations managers answered the

questionnaire, of which 31 per cent were men. At the second take, 419 operations managers responded, of whom 29 per cent were men. 316 of the operations managers (75 per cent) answered the questionnaires at both takes.

Type of service	Sex			Managerial position		
	Women	Men	Total	Middle managers	First-line managers	Total
Care of disabled	92/96	18/13	110/109	14/14	96/95	117/111
Pre-school/primary school	86/84	33/30	119/114	9/19	110/95	133/126
Upper secondary school	23/22	25/20	48/42	14/12	34/30	60/49
Technical services	28/31	54/47	82/78	28/25	54/53	113/100
Elder care	76/66	8/10	84/76	8/12	76/64	98/78
<b>Total</b>	305/299	138/120	443/419	73/82	370/337	443/419

#### ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL DATA

Besides individual level data, we wanted to obtain information about the organizations and the organizational characteristics that have been found in previous research to be important for managers' working conditions (Bolin, 2009; Forsberg Kankkunen, 2009; Forsberg Kankkunen et al., 2010; Skagert et al., 2008). Questions about the principal activities of the organization; the sex composition and educational level of the staff; the level of managerial turnover; the average staff/manager ratio; the average wages of managers at different levels; the physical location of managers in relation to their staff; levels of employee sick-leave; budgetary situation and consequences of budgetary retrenchment; meeting frequency and meeting content between different managerial levels and between managers and politicians; and the prevalence of NPM features in the management of the organizations were posed in a standardized interview form. The form was distributed by e-mail to one key representative - such as a controller, HRM-specialist, or chief administrative officer - in each of the sampled organizations in spring 2009. Telephone interviews with these representatives were then conducted a couple of weeks later, when the informants had had the opportunity to collect the requested information. The researcher filled out the form during the telephone interview. Interviews lasted about half an hour. This procedure was repeated in spring 2011. It is important to note that these interviews did not touch upon individual perceptions of any kind. All the questions were about organizational characteristics.

Between April and September 2009, semi-structured and semi-standardized interviews were conducted with managers and politicians in the selected organizations. The head of the department, one middle manager, one unit manager, one politician from the political board and one from the local executive committee, and finally one accountant/controller in each



department were interviewed. The informants were sampled with the help of an in-house project leader in each organization, who worked part-time to support the research project. All interviews were tape-recorded. All in all, we conducted approximately 40 interviews. The interviews represent a qualitative delving into the processes of budgetary and operational work, into the patterns of interaction between different functional levels, and into the predominant techniques for controlling organizational output. The focus for these two studies was to understand how the organizations were modelled and their internal functioning and working methods. This ambition affected the question formulation and interview techniques. For example, instead of asking how the respondents perceived the communication in the organization, we asked about how many times per week they went to management team meetings, spoke on the telephone, e-mailed, or met with colleagues in the corridors. We asked what issues those meetings, phone calls, e-mails and corridor talks were about, and which organizational functions were involved. We continuously asked for concrete examples. Little by little, we uncovered the organizational processes and practices, rather than the respondents' personal attitudes and perceptions.

### ***REFLECTIONS ON THE EMPIRICAL PROCESS***

This thesis draws on the joint efforts of junior and senior scholars from various disciplines: economy, public administration, sociology, work science, psychology, political science and occupational health. I have been more or less involved in every step of the CHEFiOS enterprise, including the development of the instruments, collection of data, analysis, and reporting to project participants and scientific journals. As I see it, the common denominator of the multidisciplinary team has been an interest in the organizational conditions of managerial work, which has resulted in a general acceptance of the comparative and cross-level design. It has been of tremendous importance to have this common interest as guidance in such a complex project. However, the design was not always easy to implement in practice. For example, it has demanded an advanced knowledge of, and rigorous control over, sampling and coding procedures. Also, it proved to be quite difficult to collect data at an adequate level. I will return to this issue in the discussion. Although most data collection was made at an early stage, I continued to do field work on ensuing projects, or in order to comply with the obligations that stemmed from the survey/feedback design of the CHEFiOS project. In that way, managerial work never became merely an abstraction to me; instead it has been constantly present in the many conversations I have had with real managers, sharing their daily dilemmas and enjoyments with me. Throughout the dissertational work, I thus had the opportunity to discuss ideas that emerged from literature studies and data analyses with the managers. And conversely, many ideas have been born in these conversations that inspired me in the data analysis. To me, this zigzagging between the research field and the office has been a very valuable experience.

## THE FOUR STUDIES

As has been mentioned before, the sampling of organizations and managers was made to enable a cross-level and comparative research design. The empirical work of this dissertation consists of one qualitative and three quantitative studies (Table 2). However, a cross-level rather than comparative design is used in the first study, where the impact of organizational traits on illegitimate tasks in managerial work is investigated. If we computed an OLS regression on nested data – in this case, managers that are grouped in organizations - we would violate the core assumption of unit independence and underestimate the standard errors of the coefficients. Managers that work in the same organization influence each other and have shared experiences; they are to some extent interdependent. In multilevel analysis, standard errors are adjusted by taking account of the intraclass correlation, which is the second (or other higher) level proportion of the total variation (Hox, 2002). The intraclass correlation is an estimation of the extent to which managers in the same organization respond in similar ways. By separately estimating the variance associated with groups (e.g., organizations) and individuals (e.g., managers), multilevel modelling takes account of the dependencies between units. Recent advances in statistical methodologies and software may be useful for context theory development and design in organizational research (Bamberger, 2008).

The second study can be seen as either cross-level or comparative in its design. However, the main objective of the study was to provide a measure that can be used in order to evaluate and compare contextual preconditions for managers between different types of service. It can be said that it is conceptually, but not empirically cross-level; it doesn't make use of data on several levels, but it is intended as a contribution to a contextual view of managerial work.

In the third and fourth studies, new public management traits and organizational conditions of managerial work, respectively, are compared across different types of municipal services. Additionally, the design of the fourth study can be said to be in line with what Rousseau and Fried (2001, p. 4) call a 'configurationally approach'; it takes advantage of the opportunities to study specific practices implemented across settings, by bundling contextual factors together.

Table 2. Overview of the four studies					
	Purpose	Field		Method and sample	Results (keywords)
		Empirical engagement	Theoretical engagement		
Study I	To provide insight into the contribution of characteristics of the organization to the prevalence of illegitimate tasks in the work of first-line and middle managers.	Illegitimate tasks in managerial work	Semmer, et al. (2010)	Multilevel analysis (2009 survey data N=440)	Organizational control deficits
Study II	To develop a measure that can be used to evaluate organizational capacity to perform across local government jurisdictions, using operations managers' own assessments.	Prerequisites for managerial work and performance	Ingraham, Joyce & Donahue (2003)	Confirmatory factor analysis; ICC (1) and ICC (2) (2009 survey data N=443 repeated on 2011 survey data N=419)	Organizational capacity to perform  Comparative service performance
Study III	To investigate how New Public Management is put into practice in two differently gendered local government organizations.	Differences in organizational technologies	Thompson (1967) Acker (1990)	Qualitative interviews (N=8)	Techniques of control  Gendered organizations
Study IV	To explore differences in organizational conditions of managerial work in differently gendered contexts.	Prerequisites for managerial work	Johns (2006) Acker (1990)	Chi-square test F-test (2011 survey data N=419)	Gendered organizations

## STUDY I:

### *I SHOULDN'T HAVE TO DO THIS: ILLEGITIMATE TASKS AS A STRESSOR IN RELATION TO ORGANIZATIONAL CONTROL AND RESOURCE DEFICITS*

All occupations entail conceptions about core and peripheral tasks. To a doctor, all tasks that contribute to healing the patient are plausibly considered as core tasks. If doctors were to take over administrative tasks from nurses and nursing assistants due to budgetary cutbacks, they would probably consider their new tasks to be illegitimate in the sense that they violate the norms associated with the role requirements of their profession. A particular task may be considered legitimate to one role occupant but not to another; while teachers would consider teaching to be at the very core of their occupation, school principals might regard teaching as too operational and therefore inappropriate at their level. A Swiss research team has constructed a specific scale, the Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale (BITS), to capture this idea of tangential tasks. Illegitimate tasks refer to work tasks that fall outside the core of one's occupation or professional identity. Managerial work at the operational level is not a profession in the strict sense of the word. It is therefore difficult to categorize which tasks are core tasks, and which are peripheral. However, in our qualitative interviews with managers at different levels, several tasks were mentioned which were not considered meaningful or rightly appointed to the managerial level:

*“Since administration and caretaking have been downsized, many tasks, such as keeping minutes, have fallen to my share.”*

*“Different processes of budget work, personnel work and IT that have been delegated down to line managers should to a larger extent be managed by a support function.”*

*“Administrative work is increasing! It feels like I am doing work that someone else was doing before me, even though administrative work has been digitalized. This takes time from the operative work.”*

While previous studies have been devoted to validation of the scale as a new stressor in occupational health research (Semmer et al., 2010; Aronsson, Bejerot & Härenstam, 2012), we were interested in the contextual origins of illegitimate tasks in managerial work. Illegitimate tasks burden those who have them. It is thus of importance to gain insights into what causes them.

#### Aim

To provide insight into the contribution of characteristics of the organization to the prevalence of illegitimate tasks in the work of first-line and middle managers.

#### Material and method

The Bern Illegitimate Task Scale was used on a sample of 440 operations managers in 28 different organizations from the first take of the CHEFiOS survey. Examples of items on the scale are: *‘Do you have work tasks to take care of, which keep you wondering if they have to be done at all?’* and *‘Do you have work tasks to take care of that you believe are going too far and should not be expected of you?’*

The answers to these questions were analysed through multilevel referential analysis that takes account of the fact that the managers are nested in organizations. The first multilevel model

included only the intercept: the mean of illegitimate tasks over individuals and groups. In the following models, the predictors and controls were included stepwise. Resource deficits and control deficits (Eklöf et al., 2010) were assessed as organizational level predictors of variance in illegitimate tasks. On the individual level, the number of subordinates, gender, managerial position, and managerial experience were evaluated as predictors. In the final model, only significant parameters were kept.

## Results

The findings validated previously found results of a positive association between illegitimate tasks and stress and a negative association between illegitimate tasks and work performance. Results further showed that about 10 per cent of the variability in illegitimate tasks could be attributed to the organization where managers work. Multilevel analysis showed that managers report more illegitimate tasks when their organization is characterized by competition for resources between units; unfair and arbitrary resource allocation; difficulty in implementing top-down decisions; and an obscure decision-making structure. Also, the larger the number of subordinates the manager had under his/her command, the more illegitimate tasks he/she reported. Finally, female managers reported more illegitimate tasks than male managers. Our original assumption that managers in organizations with resource deficits would report more illegitimate tasks found no support in the analysis.

## Contribution

The illegitimate tasks scale is a new stressor construct in occupational health psychology. In this study, we focused on plausible explanations for this undesired phenomena in working life. Because the results indicate organizational causes of illegitimate tasks, the main contribution of the study is that it identifies opportunities for intervention. As it stands, managers seem to compensate for organizational deficits by performing work tasks that might be detrimental to their psychosocial health and professional performance.

Despite scarce resources, there are possibilities for strategic-level managers to act on the organization of work. Decision-making structures can be clarified, justice and clarity in resource allocation improved, and managerial assignments spelled out in order to avoid illegitimate tasks. The span of control of individual operations managers is also a strategic, higher-level responsibility; it is up to the employer to assign a reasonable number of employees to every manager. In sum, these findings should be valuable for strategic-level managers and politicians when they design organizational processes and structures.

## STUDY II:

### MEASURING CAPACITY TO PERFORM ACROSS LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES – MANAGERS' PERCEPTIONS

Operations managers have key positions in the process of converting tangible and intangible organizational resources, such as human, capital and financial assets, into service performance. In this study, we take the point of departure in Ingraham et al.'s (2003) view of organizational capacity as the organization's *ability to use* resources, rather than the resources *per se*, and on managers as integrators of the different management systems in organizations. Even though there is a rich literature on organizational capacity and performance, there is no general agreement on how to gauge either of the two concepts empirically. This leaves space for methodological contributions.

While techniques for performance control drench public sector organizations, less attention has been paid to the prerequisite that public sector actors have to perform high quality services. If operations managers do not feel that the operational requirements are taken into account in performance management programs, they are not likely to consider them useful. This in turn can lead to counterproductive work behaviour and inefficiency. In order to bridge this strategic-operational disconnect, the intrinsic conditions of public sector organizations must be taken into account when reaching for high performance.

#### Aim

To develop a measure that can be used to evaluate organizational capacity to perform across local government jurisdictions, using operations managers' own assessments.

#### Material and method

In 2009 and 2011 respectively, over 400 operations managers from a variety of local government services rated their satisfaction with the opportunities to safely and satisfactorily fulfil their responsibilities for operational, personnel and administrative and budgetary work. Moreover, they rated how well they considered their own operation to perform concerning service quality, cost efficiency, and work environment standards in comparison to similar operations. The survey questions were designed to refer to the organizational context, not to individual attributes such as managers' competence, skill or work performance. In order to construct psychometrically consistent measures of organizational capacity and performance, the answers from the first take were investigated through explorative factor analysis and the structure obtained was validated through confirmatory factor analysis for both takes. The inter-item scale reliability for both dimensions and the intraclass correlations 1 and 2 for the central capacity measure were also computed.

#### Results

First, findings showed that capacity to perform in one aspect of the managerial assignment is related to the capacity to perform in other aspects. We called this composite measure the Organizational Capacity to Perform, OCAP. Second, the analyses confirmed that organizational capacity to perform is empirically distinct from, yet positively related to, service performance *per*

*se.* Finally, 12 per cent of the variance in OCAP in 2009, and 6 per cent in 2011, could be attributed to the organization where managers work. However, the reliability of the mean rating in each group was somewhat low.

### Contribution

Recent public management research indicates that rationalistic management models are often scantily grounded in day-to-day practices at the operational level. One way of bridging this divide is to provide a 'from-within' perspective of the organizational preconditions that underpin any public service achievement. The main contribution of this study is the Organizational Capacity to Perform (OCAP) measure. Our findings show that the capacity to perform in one aspect of the managerial assignment, for example, responsibility for budgetary work, is related to the capacity to perform in the other aspects, for example, responsibility for personnel and service quality. A solid organizational capacity to perform would indicate that the management systems are well integrated as means towards a common goal.

The opportunities that individual managers have to fulfil their assignments can inarguably differ within the same organization. However, managers in the same organizations also seem to share the experience of these opportunities. OCAP is a service-neutral measure, which can be used in a variety of municipal services or other public sector services. For example, OCAP could be used to support transparency, justice and equality by constituting an important basis for decisions on resource allocation between different sectors and domains. It is our aspiration that this study will contribute to an increased awareness of the premises of managerial work, and of the internal activities and processes that create the basis for any public service achievement.

### STUDY III:

#### *THE MANAGED MANAGER - VARIATIONS IN GENDERED SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS*

Much effort has been invested in describing the overall logic and the constituent parts of the New Public Management (NPM). In practice, however, this management paradigm encounters the rich variety of public sector services. Previous research has pointed to variations in the consequences of NPM, depending on the gender characteristics of the services where it is implemented (Worts, Fox et al., 2007; Forsberg Kankunen, 2009). It is hoped that this study can contribute to this tradition.

#### Aim

To investigate how New Public Management is put into practice in two differently gendered local government organizations.

#### Material and method

Two organizations were selected from two different municipalities. Both municipalities were under financial pressure due to the financial crisis of 2008-2009, and the organizations used similar models of financial and performance control. Any difference in the investigated parameters could thus not be sought in divergent management models or financial situations. The first case was the elder care service in the health and social care department in one of the municipalities. All in all, this department employed 400 employees, out of which 98 per cent were women. The other case was a technical department involved in water and sewer, sanitation, land development and maintenance of streets and green areas in the other municipality. The technical department had 120 employees; 18 per cent were women.

Eight separate interviews were conducted in spring 2009 with the head of the department, one middle and one first-line manager, and one chief controller in each of the two departments. The interviews were conducted according to a semi-structured and semi-standardized questionnaire, which covered questions about service mandates and goals, budgetary work, decisional and organizational structure, development work and systems of control. All interviews were attended by two researchers, one interviewing and one taking notes. I interviewed two informants and attended three other sessions. (Tina Forsberg Kankunen interviewed three informants, John Ylander one, and Christer Theanderson two.) This procedure warranted an internal learning process among the interviewers. After each session, we discussed how the interview proceeded, advised each other on interview techniques, and discussed how the questionnaire worked. Interviews lasted for about two hours and were tape recorded. Only the parts of the conversations that concerned the particular research questions were transcribed.

In order to sort and analyse data, an analytical model developed by Eva Bejerot and Hans Hasselbladh (2008, 2009, and later 2013) was used. The model aims to reveal how governmental forms of intervention in different areas of expertise (e.g., laws and regulation, audit and inspection) are integrated. The model was used in a first step to construct questions about techniques of control. For example, we gained information about models of financial and performance control through questions like: *'Tell me about the techniques that are used in this organization to control finance,'* and *'Does this department use any particular methods to measure service*



*performance?*' Each of these questions was followed by questions about how the instruments were used, how they were perceived by different functional units in the organization, and their consequences. The model assumes that different techniques of control interact, and that the specific mechanisms of interaction, in particular in public services, are a matter for empirical analysis. The model was therefore used in a second step to analyse the interaction of the different techniques of control (for example, implementation of values to guide behaviour, and tools for performance measurement) that were mentioned in the interviews.

## Results

The findings show clear tendencies of decentralization of budgetary and performance responsibility, as well as standardization of work processes, in both organizations. We identified three themes with which to classify the different technologies of control that we came across under the interviews. The first theme concerned *finance control, accountability and market*. In both organizations, the heads of departments and the controllers aspired for increased financial control through delegation of the responsibility over a balanced budget down to the unit level. The second theme was *performance management, goals and customer orientation*. This theme was manifested in both organizations by business plans that defined detailed goals for all the organizational levels. In other words, both cases show evidence of increased institutional pressure for *standardized working methods and inspection*. This overall top-down strategy of decentralized accountability and standardization was thus common to the two services. What differentiated the cases were the actual practices resulting from the strategy. In the health care service, the above technologies have been overwhelmingly implemented; even the exact number of meals in relation to the number of occupied beds in the elder homes is calculated. Managers and employees have adapted to a strict economic rationale for systems of performance measurement and standardization. This has resulted in an increased work-load. Even the head of department was doubtful about the actual meaningfulness of the wide-ranging form-filling and evaluation. In the technical service, the actors at the operational level had closed the door to top-level management and support functions as a strategy to protect service production from the management techniques of control. Not all units depended on revenues. Different models for funding eased the pressure for financial control; the operations managers could either apply for extra money from the political committee, or use saved money to cope with economic hardship. As long as the new management systems threatened this discretion at the operational level, there was active resistance among operational staff and managers.

## Contribution

It would be sensible to believe that services involved with tasks which can be easily delimited, categorized and priced would match the economic rationality of NPM. And conversely it would be reasonable if services involved with tasks that are more elusive would be more difficult to govern with rational management systems. However, the results of this case study challenged this intuitive line of argument. While new techniques of control took hold in the health care organization, they were confronted in the technical service organization. An explanation could be based in the very nature of technical work. As technical tasks are delimitable and categorizable, they are also communicable. Communicability facilitates a shared understanding of the operational possibilities and constraints among operational and strategic level functions and

politicians. How does one describe the technologies involved in caring for an upset patient with dementia, or different steps in the learning process of school children? Shared understandings in turn evolve into organizational conditions that are adapted to the service at hand. As long as the organizational structure benefits the service production, there is no need for new formalities.

In the health care organization, the intangible and flexible nature of care work made it difficult to communicate. A way of dealing with this incommunicability was to adapt to the new management systems, while at the same time attending to the operational problems that were not solved through formal procedures. This led to a work-load increase among staff and operations managers.

## STUDY IV:

### *CONDITIONS OF MANAGERIAL WORK IN GENDERED SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS*

First-line and middle managers have key positions in their organizations. In public sector organizations, they must balance between the ambiguous and sometimes even contradictory demands of various stakeholders. Even though this complexity is inherent to public managerial work, little research attention has been paid to how organizations can be designed to support operations managers in their daily work.

Since the 1970s, scholars of gender and organization have been investigating gender as an axis of power in organizational life (Acker & Van Houten, 1974; Kanter, 1977). In this structural approach to gender, organizations themselves are viewed as gendered entities (Acker, 1990). The Swedish local government sector is heavily gender segregated in the sense that female and male employees are found in separate types of services. The gender segregation in the municipal sector originates from how the relationship between gender, work and organizations has developed historically. In this study, we combined Joan Acker's idea of gendered organizations with Gary Johns' (2006) understanding of organizational context as a configuration of physical, social and task factors, in order to shed light on how gender interacts with organizational conditions for managerial work.

#### Aim

To explore differences in organizational conditions of managerial work in differently gendered contexts

#### Method

We used a cross-level/comparative design to examine how different aspects of the organizational context are affected by the type of municipal service. Differently gendered services were strategically selected and contrasted in order to compare the organizational conditions that enclose local government managers.

As a first analytical step, we used the answers of 419 operations managers from the second take to test whether there were any significant differences in 21 different variables of organizational prerequisites in pre- and primary school education, secondary school, elder care, care for the disabled and technical services, respectively. The chi-square test and the F-test were used on categorical and continuous variables, respectively, in order to check for differences between services.

As a second step, the variables that showed significant differences between services were selected. For each of the variables, we ranked the services from 1 to 5, depending on their relative position. The ranking procedure was done on the basis of theoretical assumptions about good and bad organizational prerequisites for managerial work. Eventually, the scores for each service were summed together, and a final ranking of the different types of service emerged.

#### Results

Our findings revealed an overall pattern of differences in organizational prerequisites for managerial work between differently gendered services. We found significant differences in 17 out of the 21 context variables that we examined. When the rankings of each service on each variable were summed together, the predominantly female services of care for the disabled, elder care and pre- and primary school were found at the lower end, followed by the gender-integrated secondary education service and male technical service. *In relation to* the traditionally male and gender-integrated service organizations, the female service organizations offer a disadvantageous environment for managerial work. For example, operations managers of female services have significantly more subordinates under their command and have less full time administrative support, and they experience more organizational control deficits.

### Contribution

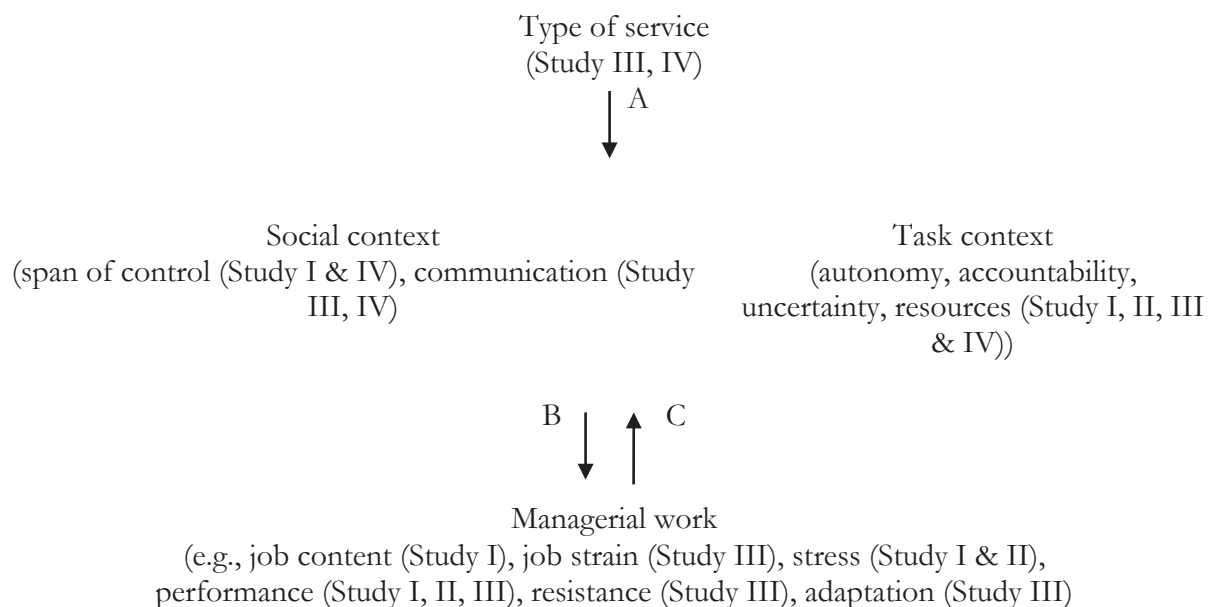
The study casts light on organizational inequalities that would have remained hidden to us if we had not been inspired by gender theory to compare differently gendered services. The findings showed that local government services can be organised in a way that systematically supports operations managers in their work. There is no obvious or justifiable reason why managers in male services should have more beneficial organizational conditions than managers in female services. Higher-level managers and politicians can counteract this inequality, preferably by providing *all* operations managers with equally good organizational conditions. All stakeholders - citizens, public sector professionals, their managers and politicians - would benefit from solid and sustainable organizational structures in all public sector domains. We hope that this study can serve as a basis for decisions on resource allocation and organizational design in the public sector.

## DISCUSSION

The four empirical studies that underpin this thesis have all been about different aspects of managerial work and the social and task context of Swedish local government organizations. The sampling of the organizations was done strategically to include managers of female, male, and gender-neutral types of municipal services. I will start this section with a discussion of how this model can be used to address the first research question of the thesis (*How does organizational context influence managerial work, and how does managerial work influence organizational context?*) I will then turn to the second question (*Does the organizational context for lower-level managerial work vary between differently gendered municipal services, and if so, how can this variation be explained?*). Finally, I will end the section with a discussion about limitations and general contributions.

In the figure below (Figure 6), I have adapted the recursive relationship between managerial work and organizational context that was presented on p. 30 to the empirical demarcations.

Figure 6. The recursive relationship between managerial work and organizational context



The findings from the first study show that the more organizations are characterized by unfair and arbitrary resource allocation and obscure channels for decision-making, the more unnecessary and unreasonable work tasks operations managers report. This is a clear example of how uncertainty and resources in the task context affect managerial work practice (B in the figure). Also, the more subordinates the managers had under their command, the more unnecessary and unreasonable tasks they reported. This is an illustration of how a social context variable affects managerial work practice (also B in the figure). Unnecessary and unreasonable tasks in turn stress the managers and negatively affect their satisfaction with their own performance. It is reasonable to assume that managers that have many tasks that fall outside the realm of their managerial commission, at some point, will start to protest against the situation. As a result of such protests, support functions might take over some of the illegitimate tasks, or the organizational routines that cause managers to do these tasks might be assessed and changed. Job

descriptions and organizational routines are formalities that govern actions in organizations. When managers contribute to transforming these formalities, they also change the discrete context of their organizations (C in the figure).

The second study shows that the opportunities that managers have to carry out one of their obligations, for example, budgetary work, is related to the opportunities they have to fulfil their responsibilities in other areas, for example, staff and service quality. The resulting Organizational Capacity to Perform (OCAP) measure is a composite of the organizational opportunities managers have to do a good job. It can be interpreted as a general assessment of the social and task aspects of the discrete context, an evaluation of the extent to which the organization offers beneficial preconditions for managerial work. A high OCAP would indicate that the formalities that govern the different aspects of the managerial assignment are compatible; for instance, that the formalities that govern budgetary work are harmonious with the formalities that govern the work with service quality. The second study is intended as a methodological contribution, and the OCAP's utility as a predictor of managerial work practice must be further investigated. However, the second study shows that OCAP is positively related to the managers' perceptions of service performance (B in the figure), which is, of course, one crucial aspect of managerial work practice.

In the third study, we investigated how different aspects of the New Public Management paradigm were realized in two differently gendered service organizations. We found three different categories of techniques of control that were used in the organizations; these were financial control, accountability and market; performance management, goals and customer orientation; and standardized working methods and inspection. These three categories can be interpreted as systems of formalities that constitute the task and social context and govern the actions of managers and staff members in the organizations (B in the figure). They stipulate what managers should do and how they should do it. We also identified other formalities that govern managerial action in the organizations, for example, what they should report to higher levels and how they should do so (i.e., accountability). We found that the different models for funding operations in the male service organization permitted the managers to resist rigorous financial control and the demand for a balanced budget. The non-tax-based models were associated with wider discretion at the operational level (B in the figure), at the same time they served as a rationale for managers to neglect the formality of a balanced budget (C in the figure). In the female service organization, there were also examples of managers acting to influence the organizational context. For instance, the management team excluded the controller from team meetings and sometimes reallocated resources without consulting the political committee. However, the overall picture was that the operations managers of the male service organization enjoyed more influence over their work situation. In Ackroyd et al.'s (1989) terms, it can be said that the custodial approach to management prevailed in the technical service, despite attempts from the higher levels to professionalize the operations managers, to distance them from operational details, and to standardize the work procedures (cf. Kitchener et al., 2000). In the female service, the new techniques of control caused a substantial increase in the general workload among managers and staff (B in the figure). The health care managers tried to conform to the new formalities while they continued to keep up high quality health care. The incompatibility of the different systems of formalities took its toll at the individual level. By contrast, the operations managers of the technical service organization protected the service production from

the new formalities simply by neglecting them. These results lead us to the second research question.

In the third study, we saw that the social and task contexts of managerial work differ between differently gendered services (A in the figure). The findings of the fourth study show that there were systematic differences between differently gendered services in 17 out of 21 social and task context variables. Now, how can this variation be explained?

In the local government sector, there are several activities taking place: children are being educated, streets cleaned, libraries are held open, water cleaned and elderly people taken care of. These activities represent different technologies (Thompson, 1967) or rationalities (Wærness, 1984) and tend to be associated with gender-segregated jobs. While the production and maintenance of streets, parks, buildings, and sewage and waste disposal systems have traditionally been male activities, caring for the elderly and small children have been female activities. (In the education sector, it is a bit more complicated. A tendency here, as was shown in the fourth study, is that the younger the children, the more teachers are female teaching: upper secondary education is a gender-integrated activity, while preschool education is a female activity.) Many public reforms have been dedicated to counteract the tendency of the gender structure to separate women and men into different activities and to subordinate the female activities in terms of, for example, wage levels. However, less attention has been paid to “the gendering processes of organizing” (Acker, 1999, p. 188) and the inequalities that are embedded in the different organizational contexts of gendered work activities. Such inequalities are only visible if the organizational contexts are compared between male and female gendered services. Our finding is that the organizational prerequisites managers have to face when performing their jobs are less favourable in female than in male services. Managers of female services report less support, less resources, more uncertainty and more subordinates than managers of male services. I believe that an explanation for this is that, historically, the complexity and responsibility in female activities has not been valued as much as the complexity and responsibility in male activities (cf. Acker, 1990). Even though many efforts have been made to equalize wages and status, there is still a subordination of female activities that is embedded in the generally accepted ways of organizing local government services. This subordination of the female affects both female and male managers who work in female-dominated services, in the sense that it makes them operate under organizational conditions that could be improved. To put it pointedly: “where women are, power is not” (Hirdman, 2001, p.177).

Figure 5 (on p. 36) is useful when trying to explain how differences in organizational conditions in female and male municipal domains are created and sustained. Because women and men are to such a large extent separated in the municipal sector, they seldom have a chance to compare their situations. The different structures that constrain the managerial discretion or offer opportunities for power are then normalized *within* each service type. Shortly put:

From a power perspective, the unconscious acceptance of behavioural rules results in an automatic preservation of historically developed interests without critical challenge. (Christensen et al., 2011, p.96, my translation)

If the managers of care for the disabled generally compare their work situation to the situation in other care services, then unclear tasks, conflicting priorities, and deficient administrative support

will be perceived as normal characteristics of managerial work. And if the secondary school managers compare their own span of control with the span of control of pre-and primary school managers, they would probably feel privileged. The consequences for individual managers can be that they blame themselves, or are blamed by others, for strained work situations and deficient work performance. The results of this thesis show that the organizational structures that govern so much managerial work practice are better in the municipal sectors where mostly men work. Change can only take place if generally accepted ideas about how to organise work in different municipal domains are brought to the surface and challenged. The technical service organizations stand out as good examples of how work can be organised in order to help managers do a good job.

An institutional understanding of power is different from an understanding of which individuals or groups within an organization hold power over resources. This is not to say that the power relations between women and men in organizations are unimportant, but a study of institutional power takes a different perspective and focuses on the frames that regulate the behaviour of both sexes. Although earlier studies have noted the association between the way municipal activities are gendered and the organizational framework within which managers perform their jobs (Westerberg & Armelius, 2000; Forsberg Kankkunen, 2009), the particular empirical contribution of this thesis has been to investigate this association in a more systematic way, by including several contextual parameters in the analysis. It may be noteworthy that male managers also operate in unfavourable environments, since they sometimes lead female activities, just as female managers can enjoy favourable conditions when leading male activities. I suggest that further research into the context of managerial work should deploy a comparative approach and continue to consider how gender is built into the structural arrangements of organizations. Cross-level and comparative research designs should also be fruitful in the exploration of gendered organizations in other domains, inside and outside the public sector.

### **LIMITATIONS**

I would like to raise three limitations of the thesis; the first has to do with the scope of the thesis, while the second and third issue relate to the methodology. First, the focus on context has implied a deliberate exclusion of the influence of individual level parameters on managerial practice and behaviour. With the exception of a few lines in the first study, I have not considered the meaning of individual properties for managerial work practice. Consequently, I cannot provide any estimates of how much the managerial practice is affected by context *in relation* to individual level parameters. Also, there are obviously a lot of other structural factors that affect managerial practice, which could have been investigated using a similar design, but which lie outside the scope of this thesis. Examples include work-family conflict, ethnicity, social class and so on. Readers interested in such matters must turn to other studies.

Second, it can be argued that shared properties - such as organizational resource deficits, control deficits and capacity - should be measured in the organizational level in order to be valid and reliable measures of organizational characteristics. However, when conducting cross-level research, this is often a challenge. It is difficult to operationalize generic measures of resource deficits and organizational performance, for example. Instead, organization researchers usually aggregate individual level data, and replace individual perceptions with the mean scores of the groups in which the individuals are members (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). When using this



procedure, it is of course important to have a sound theoretical idea about why managers within the same organization would share the property, and why there would be variability in the property between different organizations. Second, it is important to word the survey item in line with this theoretical idea, so that it refers to an organizational rather than to an individual level property. Third, there are a number of statistical techniques, based on one-way analysis of variance, to investigate the construct validity of the aggregated measures. The values that I used in the studies to investigate to what extent a property varied *between* organizations versus *within* organizations were the eta-squared value and the intraclass correlation coefficient (1) (see Study I and II). In order to check whether the group means within the sample were reliable, I used the intraclass correlation coefficient (2). The larger the groups on which the group means are based, the more reliable is the measure (see further in Study II).

Third, readers may find that the empirical investigations of the *recursive* relationship between organizational context and managerial work turned out to be quite biased towards a *structural* perspective. It is true that the empirical studies focus more on how organizational context affects managerial work (B in Figure 6) than on the micro-processes by which managers in their daily work sustain and/or transform the organizational context (C in the figure). This is partly a deliberate choice I have made since a contextual approach to leadership has been lacking, especially in the public management literature. However, I can only encourage more qualitative research into how organizations are structured through the mundane activities of managers and other organizational actors. This approach is important in order to understand more about organizations as arenas of power.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

It is my hope that this thesis will be received as a serious attempt to answer Nordegraaf and Stewart's (2000), Mintzberg's (2006) and Morgeson's (2012) calls for taking context seriously in management and leadership research. I have tried to consider organizational context in the formulation of research questions, theoretical elaborations, analytical design and method selection. I have argued that organizational context is multilevel and multidimensional in nature and recursive in relation to managerial work practice. I argue that organizational context affects managerial work through the unique formalities and systems of formalities that stipulate what managers should do and how they should do it. These can be implicit or explicit, and wittingly or unwittingly followed or neglected by the managers. Sometimes, these systems are harmonious, but often there are tensions or incompatibilities between different sets of formalities that put managers in tricky positions. I also argue that managers are active shapers of these formalities; every time managers conform to the given order, the formalities that constitute this order are validated, and every time they neglect or protest against a formality, it is challenged. The four studies offer various empirical examples to illustrate this understanding of the relationship between managerial work and organizational context. It is rare to come across empirical studies that investigate several discrete context variables at the same time, and my intention has been to do just that.

This brings me to the second contribution of the thesis: the consistent focus on gender as embedded in context rather than as an individual level parameter. Although the idea that actors 'do gender' in already 'gendered' work contexts is far from new, it is unusual to exclude individual gender from the analysis. There is much literature about how gender as a social construct is

deliberately and unintentionally created in the daily interactions that take place within organizations (e.g., Martin, 2003), and about the diverse behaviours of female and male managers (see, for example, Due Billing & Alvesson, 2003 for a critical perspective on such research). However, much less is known about the way gender is ingrained in organizational routines. Strategic-level managers are inclined to make decisions that govern groups, rather than individuals. Theories incorporating contextual elements should thus be meaningful to them (Bliese & Jex, 2002). In practice, the results of this thesis can be used to inform higher-level managers and decision makers about inequalities in organizational structures between different public sector domains. The results can also serve as an input to staff and operations managers across the municipal sector, and hopefully inspire them to widen their views on how organizations can be designed in order to facilitate service production. There is no obvious reason why organizational conditions should be less favourable in female domains. As with most social orders, the gender structure generates reasons for reproduction for some and transformation for others (Bhaskar, 1998a). This can be important to bear in mind when organizational inequalities are to be challenged.

As a final remark I would like to urge politicians and higher-level decision makers to pay more attention in general to the organizational conditions that lower-level managers need to cope with, given the increasing complexity of managing local government organizations. It seems as if a constant stream of new management techniques and concepts; new routines for controlling activities and fulfilling goals; and new policies on diverse matters trickle down to the lower managerial levels for implementation, without anyone having an overview. These top-down initiatives are often intended to help the operational level managers and staff operate in lawful, democratic and efficient ways. In isolation, each initiative is important and often incontestable. However, the abundance of formalities can be very difficult to tackle at the operational level, particularly in the absence of additional resources. It is up to the individual manager to be selective and make priorities in order to protect him/herself and the staff members from an overwhelming work burden. Adequate prioritization requires experience and integrity. And yet even very experienced managers may fail to balance between demands, as was illustrated in the very introduction of this thesis. I believe it is time for strategic level management, administrative staff and politicians to pay attention to the strained work situation of operations managers in local government organizations, and to think carefully before new duties are delegated down the line. An alternative strategy would be to increase the human and material resources in the public services in terms of staff, support functions, and modern equipment and facilities, in order to match the high ambitions of public service. Otherwise, it may be continuously difficult to recruit and keep skilled and dedicated managers in local government organizations.

## EPILOGUE

Like the wetland to the ornithologist, the work organization is an exceedingly suitable place for a social scientist who wishes to study the interplay between working individuals and their environment. It is a place where the inquisitive spectator can witness how desirable and limited resources are shared between a variety of species, according to hereditary and socialized patterns of behaviour. With time, the devoted observer will be able to detect how these patterns change over cohorts, through deliberate or unintentional activities among individuals and groups of individuals. Some species undeniably catch the observer's eye more often than others. Due to their key position at the top of the hierarchy, or maybe to their relative rarity, managers tend to receive special attention in organization theory, and it is easy to be captivated by the beautiful colours of their feathers or the sound of their singing. I hope to have shown in this thesis that it is equally important to take a closer look at the milieu where they can thrive.

# SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

## SYFTE OCH FRÅGESTÄLLNINGAR

Detta är en avhandling om chefsarbete i kommunala organisationer. Framförallt handlar den om verksamhets- och enhetschefer på operativ nivå. Syftet är att förklara viktiga aspekter av chefsarbete med hjälp av ett kontextuellt perspektiv. Det innebär att strålkastaren riktats mot de organisatoriska villkor som chefer har att förhålla sig till. En utgångspunkt i avhandlingen är att det är komplext att leda kommunala verksamheter. Komplexiteten består främst i att många aktörer vill vara med och påverka hur verksamheten sköts; politiker på olika nivåer, strategiska chefer, brukare och deras anhöriga, personalen och deras företrädare, specialister och administratörer. Komplexiteten kommer sig också av att den byråkratiska ordningen med beslutshierarkier och regelstyrning fått sällskap av nya styrningsideal och organisationsformer. I takt med att den offentliga sektorns organisationer stöpts om i linje med vad som kommit att kallas New Public Management (NPM) har chefer på lägre nivåer fått ett större ansvar över budget, personal och verksamhet. Ökade krav på kostnadseffektivitet och resultatuppföljning innebär snävare ramar. Kommunernas äldreboenden, skolor och sophämtningstaxor jämförs i media och av olika myndigheter och utfallet kan ligga till grund för direkt eller indirekt resurstilldelning, exempelvis i form av fler brukare. Handlingsutrymmet kan alltså vara ganska begränsat för operativa chefer. Detta motiverar varför det är viktigt att ta hänsyn till den organisatoriska kontexten för att kunna förstå vad det innebär att arbeta som chef i en kommunal organisation.

Den svenska kommunala sektorn är könssegregerad. Könssegregering skapas och förstärks genom att arbetsuppgifter, yrken och sektorer tenderar att förknippas med föreställningar om manligt och kvinnligt beteende - de tenderar med andra ord att genusmärkas. Den som är intresserad av organisatoriska förhållanden inom kommunal sektor behöver ta hänsyn till att det kan se olika ut inom kvinnligt och manligt genusmärkta områden. För att möjliggöra jämförelser behövs därför ett strategiskt urval av olika verksamheter. I avhandlingen studeras kommunal skola, vård/omsorg samt teknisk verksamhet.

Den första forskningsfrågan gäller förhållandet mellan kontextuella förhållanden och operativt chefsarbete i kommunala organisationer: *Hur påverkar den organisatoriska kontexten chefsarbetet och hur påverkar chefsarbetet i sin tur den organisatoriska kontexten?* Med begreppet kontext avser jag ett sammanhang av strukturella möjligheter och begränsningar som påverkar förekomsten och betydelsen av beteenden inom organisationer.

Den andra forskningsfrågan berör variationer av kontext inom den kommunala sektorn: *Varierar den organisatoriska kontexten för operativt chefsarbete mellan olika genusmärkta kommunala verksamheter och i så fall, hur kan denna variation förklaras?*

## TEORI

I teoriavsnittets första del redogör jag för teorier om hur chefsarbetet påverkas av organisatoriska förhållanden, och om hur chefer i sin tur är med och formar dessa förhållanden. Med hjälp av Gary Johns (2006) modell argumenterar jag för att chefers handlande alltid äger rum och får

mening inom ett specifikt socialt och uppgiftsrelaterat sammanhang. Detta sammanhang skulle i sin tur upphöra att existera om det inte vore för chefers och andra organisatoriska aktörers alla vardagliga handlingar. På så vis råder det en ömsesidig påverkan mellan organisationen och chefernas dagliga arbete. Då kommunala organisationer är arenor där olika intressenter utövar inflytande så är det vanligt att chefer står inför motstridiga organisatoriska budskap. Så länge cheferna följer organisationens rutiner, normer och regler så återskapas dessa och bekräftas som styrande. När chefer av någon anledning väljer att följa en rutin - och kanske därmed bryta mot en annan - så utmanas den senare och ett utrymme för organisatorisk förändring uppstår. Den sociala och uppgiftsrelaterade kontexten påverkas i stor utsträckning av ett övergripande sammanhang. Typ av verksamhet är en aspekt av detta sammanhang som spelar roll för organisationernas utformning. Detta för oss över till den andra delen av teoriavsnittet som handlar om genus och organisation.

Yvonne Hirdman, Joan Acker och flera andra har undersökt de processer som skapar, återskapar, och omskapar genus i arbetslivets organisationer. Över tid överförs kulturella förväntningar på, och värderingar av, manligt och kvinnligt beteende till numeriskt kvinnodominerade respektive mansdominerade sammanhang. Kvinnor och män inom den kommunala sektorn befinner sig i hög utsträckning inom separata organisatoriska kontexter. Risken är stor att det utvecklas olika måttstockar för kvinnligt respektive manligt genusmärkta kontexter och att systematiska skillnader i löner och arbetsvillkor normaliseras och tas för givna. Om detta handlar teoriavsnittets andra del.

## **METODOLOGI, URVAL OCH EMPIRI**

Avhandlingen är en del av det större forsknings- och utvecklingsprojektet CHEFiOS som handlade om organisatoriska förutsättningar för chefsarbete i offentlig sektor (Östebo & Härenstam, 2013). CHEFiOS-projektet byggde på en komparativ design vilket innebär att organisationer och chefer valts ut strategiskt för att representera olika genusmärkta kommunala verksamheter – närmare bestämt skola, vård/omsorg samt teknisk verksamhet. Sju kommuner i Västra Götaland valdes ut för att representera förortskommuner (Ale och Mark), mindre städer (Alingsås och Kungälv), mellanstora städer (Borås och Uddevalla), samt storstäder (Göteborg). Förvaltningar i fyra kommuner (Göteborg, Alingsås, Ale och Borås) deltog i en organisatorisk intervention och matchades mot motsvarande förvaltningar i tre liknande kommuner. CHEFiOS vände sig till samtliga chefer med personal-, budget och verksamhetsansvar i de utvalda förvaltningarna.

Data samlades in på både individ- och organisationsnivå. En enkät gick ut till samtliga chefer i ett trettiotal förvaltningar 2009 och 2011. Enkäten bygger på frågebatterier som utvecklats av en forskargrupp vid Institutet för stressmedicin och Arbets- och miljömedicin i Göteborg (Eklöf, et al. 2010). Instrumentet utökades med bakgrundsfrågor, traditionella arbetsmiljöfrågor, samt frågor om organisatoriska hinder och möjligheter, illegitima arbetsuppgifter och anställningsbarhet. Enkäten gick ut till sammanlagt 766 chefer 2009 och 739 chefer 2011. Svarefrekvensen var 72 procent 2009 och 66 procent 2011. Studierna i denna avhandling bygger på enkätsvaren från enhets- och verksamhetschefer (eller motsvarande).

Utöver enkäten samlade vi in data på organisationsnivå. Vi lät en representant från respektive förvaltning samla in information om antal medarbetare, antal chefer, utbildningsnivå och kön bland personalen, sjuktal, chefsomsättning, ekonomisk situation, mötesrutiner samt styrning av verksamheten. Därefter genomfördes telefonintervjuer med representanterna för att samla in informationen. Frågorna berörde absoluta tal och faktiska praktiker och handlade inte om informanternas individuella uppfattningar.

Under 2009 genomfördes ett 40-tal semistrukturerade och semistandardiserade intervjuer med ekonomer, nämndpolitiker samt chefer i hela linjen inom samtliga interventionsförvaltningar. Intervjuerna handlade om styrning, budget- och verksamhetsprocesser, samt om interaktionsmönster mellan operativa och strategiska nivåer inom förvaltningen. Intervjuerna gav en bild av förvaltningarnas interna funktionssätt och processer.

## EMPIRISKA STUDIER

### Studie I:

Björk, L.; Bejerot, E.; Jacobshagen, N. & Härenstam, A. *I shouldn't have to do this: Illegitimate tasks as a stressor in relation to organizational control and resource deficits.* *Work & Stress*, Vol. 27, No. 3, sid. 262-277

Stress kan betraktas som ett hot mot självkänslan (Semmer, et al. 2007). Enligt teorin *Stress-as-offence-to-self* (SOS) kan arbetsuppgifter som normalt inte associeras med individens yrkesroll och professionella identitet nöta på individens självkänsla och leda till stress. Sådana arbetsuppgifter är *illegitima* i bemärkelsen att de strider mot de normer och regler som utgör yrkesidentiteten. Ingen arbetsuppgift är illegitim i sig själv, det är i relation till en specifik yrkesroll som illegitimitet kan uppstå. Medan lärare betraktar undervisning som en kärnarbetsuppgift så kan en rektor som återkommande tvingas träda in och undervisa på grund av personalbrist uppleva att denna uppgift ligger utanför uppdraget som rektor. En undersköterska som tvingas ta medicinskt ansvar för en patient betraktar troligen denna uppgift som orimlig medan en läkare som måste lägga flera timmar på att ordna en sängplats åt en patient på ett överbelagt sjukhus önskar att denna uppgift kunde utföras av någon annan personalgrupp.

Syftet med studien var att undersöka förhållandet mellan arbetsorganisation och förekomsten av illegitima arbetsuppgifter bland kommunala chefer på operativ nivå. Vi utgick ifrån att förekomsten av arbetsuppgifter som uppfattas som illegitima delvis är en fråga om arbetets organisering. De senaste decenniernas effektiviseringstrend inom offentlig sektor har bidragit till att arbetsbelastningen ökat för sektorns personalgrupper. För den kommunala chefen kan det handla om att uppgifter tagits över från tidigare administratörer och enklare fastighetskötsel från tidigare vaktmästare. Det kan också handla om helt nya uppgifter som tryckts nedåt i linjen. Vi antog att det skulle finnas ett positivt samband mellan resursbrist i organisationen och illegitima arbetsuppgifter bland de operativa cheferna. Med resursbrist avses saker som att de operativa cheferna inte har tillräckliga möjligheter att påverka hur mycket resurser verksamheten får, att verksamheterna inte har resurser att klara arbetstoppar eller att kvalitetskraven är så höga att det är svårt att hinna ge service till alla brukare.

I takt med att verksamhets-, personal- och budgetansvar decentraliserats och detaljstyrningen avskaffats inom den kommunala sektorn så har nya organisationsmodeller och styrningsideal införts. Kommunikation om mål och medel mellan organisationens strategiska och operativa nivåer är central för att uppdrag och ansvarsfördelning ska vara tydliga inom förvaltningen. Vi antog att det skulle finnas ett positivt samband mellan graden av organisatorisk styrbrist i organisationen och illegitima arbetsuppgifter bland de operativa cheferna. Med organisatorisk styrbrist avses till exempel att strategiska beslut är svåra eller omöjliga att implementera i verksamheten, att beslutsstrukturen är oöverskådlig och att cheferna har svårt att få en tydlig bild av vad de ansvarar för.

Vi lät 440 operativa chefer från 28 olika förvaltningar skatta förekomsten av illegitima uppgifter i arbetet. Vi använde de åtta frågor som utgör *The Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale* (BITS). Cheferna fick exempelvis skatta hur ofta det förekommer i deras arbete att de har arbetsuppgifter som de undrar över om de egentligen alls behöver göras; är vettiga och meningsfulla; eller alls borde finnas (eller kunde göras med mindre ansträngning) om saker och ting var annorlunda organiserade. Därtill fick de skatta hur ofta de måste utföra arbetsuppgifter som de exempelvis menar borde göras av någon annan eller kräver mer av dem än vad de anser vara rimligt.

Vi fann en förväntad positiv korrelation mellan BITS och stress ( $\alpha = .38$ ) samt en negativ korrelation mellan BITS och nöjdhet med arbetsprestation ( $\alpha = -.40$ ). Ungefär 10 procent av variansen i BITS härrör från förvaltningsnivån. Det innebär att chefer som arbetar inom samma förvaltning delvis har liknande erfarenheter av illegitima arbetsuppgifter. När vi prövade sambandet mellan de antagna oberoende variablerna och BITS i en flernivåanalys fann vi att den organisatoriska variansen inte förklarades av resursbrist så som vi antagit. Däremot förklarades den organisatoriska variansen av graden av organisatorisk styrbrist - ju mer en förvaltning kännetecknas av organisatorisk styrbrist, desto fler illegitima arbetsuppgifter upplever dess chefer. Därtill visar resultaten att ju fler underställda en chef har, desto fler illegitima arbetsuppgifter har han eller hon. Även detta är en organisatorisk fråga; normer för hur många anställda en chef kan och bör ha ansvar för varierar mellan olika typer av kommunala verksamheter. Kvinnliga chefer rapporterade något fler illegitima arbetsuppgifter än manliga chefer.

Resultaten tyder på att en otydlig organisation genererar illegitima arbetsuppgifter som i sin tur bidrar till att chefens tillfredsställelse med den egna prestationen minskar och att stressen ökar. Det är upp till chefer och beslutsfattare på strategisk nivå att se till att resurs- och ansvarsfördelningen är rättvis och tydlig för alla parter, samt att alla chefer har lagom många underställda för att klara av sitt uppdrag. Vi föreslår att framtida studier kring illegitima arbetsuppgifter i arbetslivet tar hänsyn till arbetets organisering.

## Studie II:

**Björk, L.; Szücs, S. & Härenstam, A. (2013) *Measuring capacity to perform across local government services - managers' perceptions*. Kommande i *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*.**

Organisationer beskrivs ibland som svarta lådor där diverse resurser omsätts till resultat i tämligen svåridentifierade processer. Det är ont om vedertagna mått på hur en välfungerande organisation ser ut. Med hjälp av både enkät- och registerdata har organisationsforskare i många

decennier även försökt att mäta offentliga organisationers resultat. Ändå finns det inga vedertagna svar på hur man bör mäta i vilken utsträckning den offentliga sektorns olika sektorer levererar det de ska. Denna situation lämnar utrymme för metodologiska bidrag. Syftet med studien var att, med hjälp av operativa chefers uppfattningar om organisationen, utveckla ett mått som kan användas för att utvärdera organisatorisk kapacitet inom olika kommunala verksamhetsområden

Ibland införs nya organisationsmodeller, standardiserade arbetsmetoder och rutiner för uppföljning och kontroll utan att hänsyn tas till de faktiska förhållandena i verksamheterna. Om de nya rutinerna upplevs som omständliga, orimliga eller rentutav oförenliga med den faktiska verksamheten så är det ätt hänt att strategiska intentioner motarbetas av aktörer på den operativa nivån. Operativa chefer innehar nyckelpositioner i sina organisationer. Med hjälp av ekonomiska och personella resurser ska de omsätta organisationens mål i faktisk verksamhet. De måste ta hänsyn till nationella och lokala regelverk samtidigt som de behöver vara lyhörda inför personalens och brukarnas behov. Vi menar att operativa chefer därför är lämpliga informanter för den som vill bilda sig en uppfattning om hur väl organisationens olika styrsystem är integrerade. Det är deras uppgift att se till att målen omsätts i verksamhet med hjälp av de resurser som finns till förfogande. Vi antog att de organisatoriska förutsättningarna att utföra chefsuppdraget inom ett ansvarsområde (exempelvis ekonomi) hör samman med förutsättningarna att utföra uppdraget inom andra områden (exempelvis personal och verksamhet). Vi förutsatte att chefer inom samma kommunala förvaltning delvis delar uppfattning om förvaltningens organisatoriska kapacitet. Vi antog vidare att chefernas uppfattningar om organisatorisk kapacitet skulle vara skilt ifrån, men positivt relaterat till, deras uppfattningar om verksamhetens resultat inom olika områden.

Operativa chefer i ett trettiotal olika kommunala förvaltningar fick 2009 och 2011 skatta sina möjligheter att på ett säkert och tillfredsställande sätt uppfylla sina åtaganden inom en rad olika områden (exempelvis administrativt arbete, arbetsmiljö och kvalitetsarbete). Därtill skattade de den egna verksamhetens resultat vad gäller servicekvalitet, kostnadseffektivitet och arbetsmiljöarbete i förhållande till liknande verksamheter. En explorativ faktoranalys av de totalt tolv rågorna för båda tidpunkterna gav två faktorer. En två-dimensionell modell fick också stöd i konfirmatoriska faktoranalyser för båda tidpunkterna. De två faktorerna döptes på engelska till Organizational Capacity to Perform (OCAP) ( $\alpha = .86$  vid T1,  $\alpha = .85$  vid T2) och Comparative Service Performance ( $\alpha = .67$  vid T1,  $\alpha = .65$  vid T2). De två faktorerna korrelerade med  $r = .49$ , vilket gav stöd åt hypotesen att organisatorisk kapacitet och verksamhetens resultat hänger ihop. I övrigt visade resultaten att tolv procent av variansen 2009 och sex procent 2011 kunde hänföras till förvaltningen där cheferna arbetar. Det innebär att chefer som arbetar inom samma förvaltning delvis har liknande erfarenheter av de organisatoriska förutsättningarna att göra ett gott jobb. Detta stärker måttets validitet. Däremot var reliabiliteten av medelvärdet inom respektive förvaltning (ICC(2)) något sämre än väntat vid båda tidpunkterna, troligen på grund av få svarande inom vissa förvaltningar.

Resultaten tyder på att förvaltningar som erbjuder goda förutsättningar för sina operativa chefer att utföra ett gott arbete inom ett ansvarsområde (exempelvis budget), också ger bra förutsättningar för chefer inom övriga centrala ansvarsområden (exempelvis arbetsmiljö, administration och löpande verksamhet). Förvaltningar med ett högt OCAP är med andra ord



organisationer med välintegrerade ledningssystem. OCAP är inte ett mått på faktiska resurser, utan på hur organisationen lyckas omsätta resurser till verksamhet. Det kan användas för att undersöka organisatorisk kapacitet inom olika typer av offentliga verksamheter. I en tid där externa kvalitets- och effektivitetsmätningar blir allt vanligare är vår förhoppning att OCAP kan förstärka inifrånperspektivet och ge inblick i hur väl organisationen fungerar.

### Studie III:

**Björk, L.; Forsberg Kankkunen, T. & Bejerot, E. (2011) *Det kontrollerade chefskapet- variationer i genusmärkta verksamheter*. Arbetsmarknad och arbetsliv, Vol. 17, No. 4, sid. 79-95**

Den omvandling av den offentliga sektorns organisationer som sedan början av 1990 talet gått under samlingsnamnet New Public Management (NPM) har inneburit en motstridig utveckling för chefer på operativ nivå. Å ena sidan har deras ansvar för ekonomi och implementering av verksamhetens mål ökat, å andra sidan har kravet på effektivisering, standardisering och målstyrning minskat deras handlingsutrymme. Genusforskare har betraktat de processer av standardisering, effektivisering och målstyrning som kännetecknar NPM som inkompatibla med de särskilda behov av anpassning och flexibilitet som karaktäriserar kvinnligt genusmärkta människobehandlande verksamheter. Som styrlogik förväntas NPM rimma bättre med manligt genusmärkta verksamheter som hanterar standardiserade produkter eller tjänster. Trots detta är studier som jämför NPMs implementering i manligt respektive kvinnligt genusmärkta verksamheter mycket sällsynta. Syftet med den tredje studien var därför att undersöka hur NPM omsätts i praktiken i två olika genusmärkta kommunala organisationer.

Intervjuer genomfördes med informanter på olika nivåer inom en omsorgsförvaltning och en teknisk förvaltning i två olika kommuner. Totalt genomfördes åtta intervjuer med ekonomer samt chefer från hela linjen (från enhetschef till förvaltningschef) i de båda förvaltningarna. De semistrukturerade och semistandardiserade intervjuerna berörde olika NPM-typiska styrteknologier. Vi frågade om ekonomistyrning, resultatstyrning, policys och värderingar, nyckeltal och mål, standardiserade arbetsätt och kundorientering. För varje instrument bad vi dels informanten beskriva *om* och i så fall *hur* styrinstrumentet tillämpades i förvaltningen samt de konsekvenser denna styrning fått på arbetsplatsen.

Resultaten visade att de olika styrteknologierna hängde samman enligt ett liknande mönster inom de två organisationerna. Den ekonomiska kontrollen hade ökat genom möjligheten att utkräva ekonomiskt ansvar av enhetscheferna. Ekonomerna hade fått en nyckelroll i att med hjälp av ökade befogenheter följa upp de olika enheterna. Detaljerade enhets- och verksamhetsplaner avkrävdes regelbundet linjecheferna inom båda förvaltningarna och arbetet med att standardisera arbetsprocesser var i full gång i båda organisationerna. I linje med tidigare forskning tycks det dock som om denna styrning trängt djupare in i omsorgsverksamheten än i den tekniska verksamheten. Medan det tekniska arbetet av personal och lägre chefer värnades gentemot ett styrsystem som ibland upplevdes som alltför kontrollerande, så genomsyrades omsorgsverksamheten av ett minst lika detaljerat styrsystem. Konsekvenserna av att försöka leva upp till ledningens krav hade stundtals lett till en mycket hög arbetsbelastning bland omsorgens chefer och anställda.

## Studie IV:

**Björk, L. & Härenstam, A. (2013) *Conditions for managerial work in gendered organizations*.  
Manuskript.**

Syftet med den fjärde studien var att undersöka skillnader i organisatoriska villkor för chefsarbete inom olika genusmärkta kommunala verksamheter. Vi jämförde organisatoriska villkor i kommunal funktionshinderverksamhet, äldreomsorg förskola/skola, gymnasieskola samt teknisk service.

Vi inspirerades av Gary Johns (2006) teori om organisatorisk kontext och kategoriserade variabler som tidigare forskning funnit vara viktiga förutsättningar för chefer i social och uppgiftsrelaterad kontext. Över 400 kommunala chefer på operativ nivå fick svara på en rad frågor om sina organisationer. Inom kategorin socialt sammanhang frågade vi exempelvis hur många underställda chefer hade samt i vilken utsträckning de möter chefer på andra organisatoriska nivåer. Inom kategorin uppgiftsrelaterat sammanhang frågade vi exempelvis i vilken utsträckning cheferna har möjligheter att realisera egna idéer i verksamheten, om de tycker att befogenheter och ansvarsområde är tydliga och avgränsade, om verksamheten präglas av resursbrist eller styrbrist, samt om chefernas tillgång till administrativt stöd och rådgivning. Totalt blev det 20 parametrar som analyserades med hjälp av variansanalys. I de fall där vi fann signifikanta skillnader mellan funktionshinder, äldreomsorg förskola/skola, gymnasieskola samt teknisk service rangordnades verksamheterna från 1 till 5 utifrån teoretiskt underbyggda idéer om vad som är goda respektive dåliga förutsättningar för chefer. Även om skillnader i medelvärden i enskilda variabler var relativt små, så kunde vi genom att sammanföra resultaten ändå få fram ett mönster och placera verksamheterna i förhållande till varandra.

Vi fann signifikanta skillnader mellan verksamheter i 17 av 20 variabler. När rankningspoängen summerats fick funktionshinderverksamheter 25 poäng av 85 möjliga, följt av äldreomsorgens 51 poäng, förskolan/grundskolans 53 poäng, gymnasieverksamhetens 55 och teknisk service 72 poäng. De kvinnligt genusmärkta omsorgssektorerna och förskola/grundskola föll alltså sämre ut i relation till den genusintegrerade gymnasieverksamheten och den manligt genusmärkta tekniska verksamheten. Dessa resultat tyder på att chefer har olika förutsättningar beroende på i vilken verksamhet de befinner sig. Chefer i kvinnligt genusmärkta verksamheter har exempelvis fler underställda, sämre tillgång till administrativt stöd och rådgivning, upplever fler logikkonflikter, och mer resurs- och styrningsbrist i förhållande till chefer inom gymnasieskola och teknisk service. Särskilt chefer inom funktionshinderverksamhet tycks vara missgynnade.

Kvinnors arbete har traditionellt värderats lägre än mäns arbete. Denna värdering tycks med tiden 'sätta sig i väggarna' på kommunernas olika förvaltningar. Ur ett strukturellt perspektiv blir det relativt oviktigt - åtminstone på kortsikt - huruvida förvaltningarna styrs av manliga eller kvinnliga chefer. Chefer av båda könen har liknande organisatoriska förutsättningar att förhålla sig till. Däremot kan man tänka sig att könsfördelningen på lång sikt har betydelse eftersom kvinnliga och manliga chefer kan ha olika strategier för att skaffa sig makt och inflytande och eftersom chefer på högre nivåer, politiker och medarbetare kan bemöta kvinnliga och manliga chefer olika. Oavsett könsfördelning så går det emellertid att synliggöra, ifrågasätta och vid behov utmana skillnader i förutsättningar mellan verksamheter. Organisatoriska förutsättningar behöver

säkerligen vara olika inom skilda verksamheter, men det är svårt att motivera rimligheten i att vissa verksamheter systematiskt faller sämre ut än andra. Vi tror att ett strukturellt och jämförande perspektiv är en lämplig väg framåt för att undersöka och på sina håll förbättra situationen för kommunala chefer.

## ÖVERGRIPANDE SLUTSATSER

Med denna avhandling har jag avsett att studera chefsarbete i kommunal sektor utifrån ett kontextuellt perspektiv. Den kommunala sektorns komplexitet är särskilt kännbar för chefer på operativ nivå. När dessa chefer blickar uppåt i hierarkin ser de lagstiftningen inom verksamhetsområdet, lokala målformuleringar, standardiserade arbetsmetoder, de strategiska chefernas direktiv, arbetsmiljölagstiftning, ekonomiska ramar och initiativ som sjsätts av diverse stabsfunktioner. När de ser åt sidan ser de chefskollegornas rutiner och värderingar för hur verksamheten bäst styrs, och när det blickar nedåt i organisationen finner de medarbetare med tillvägagångssätt som ofta är grundande i professionella eller semiprofessionella normer, samt brukarnas önskemål och krav. Tillsammans bildar dessa förutsättningar ett ramverk som i hög utsträckning styr chefens vardag. I den första studien såg vi exempelvis att chefer i organisationer som kännetecknas och otydlig styrning har uppgifter som de upplever som onödiga och oskäligen. Sådana illegitima arbetsuppgifter kan på sikt leda till stress och missnöje med den egna prestationen. I den andra studien såg vi att chefens möjligheter att göra ett gott jobb inom exempelvis budgetområdet hänger ihop med möjligheten till ett gott jobb också inom arbetsmiljö, kvalitetsarbete och administration. I den tredje och fjärde studien visade det sig att dessa förutsättningar tillsammans med en rad andra organisatoriska parametrar skiljer sig åt mellan olika typer av kommunala verksamheter och formar chefernas vardag olika.

Samtidigt är chefer delaktiga i att återskapa och omforma organisatoriska strukturer. Varje gång chefen går på möte, fyller i en uppföljningsrapport, fattar ett beslut, gör en anställningsintervju, har lönesamtal eller besvarar ett telefonsamtal, så reproduceras eller omformas den sociala och uppgiftsrelaterade kontext som utgör själva organisationen. Kommunala organisationer är arenor där olika intressenter försöker få makt och inflytande över verksamheten. Operativa chefer är viktiga aktörer när det kommer till att göra avvägningar kring vilka bollar de själva och personalen ska springa på. Ibland *tvings* chefen att avfärda ett visst direktiv till förmån för ett annat, eftersom direktiven kan vara motstridiga eller oförenliga. Ibland *väljer* chefen att göra det. I den tredje studien såg vi exempelvis hur operativa chefer uteslöt ekonomen från ledningsgruppsmöten för att ostörda kunna prata verksamhetsfrågor och hur chefer på strategisk nivå möter motstånd från operativa chefer och personal när nya styrmodeller ska implementeras. I samma studie såg vi samtidigt hur omsorgschefer samlade in och lämnade ifrån sig en mängd uppgifter om verksamheten och anpassade verksamheten till snäva regelsystem utan att de själva såg någon mening eller nytta med det hela. Sammanfattningsvis råder ett ömsesidigt beroende mellan organisatorisk kontext och chefsarbete; chefers handlingar och beteenden får betydelse först inom en given organisatorisk struktur, men denna struktur skulle upphöra att existera om det inte vore för att chefer och andra organisatoriska aktörer upprätthöll organisationens rutiner och normer genom vardagliga praktiker. Det som kan uppfattas som informella handlingar och

beteendemönster hos chefer kan i själva verket vara vara formella ageranden enligt en annan måttstock.

En rad centrala välfärdstjänster utförs av kommunerna. Medan arbetet med att hantera avfall, underhålla parker och gator, samt förse hushållen med vatten traditionellt sett varit ett manligt genusmärkt område, så är omsorgen av gamla, funktionsnedsatta och små barn ett traditionellt kvinnligt genusmärkt område. Många lokala och nationella ansträngningar har gjorts för att bryta könssegregeringen och locka män in i kvinnodominerade sektorer och vice versa. Arbetet med att höja löner och heltidsarbete i kvinnodominerade sektorer och har pågått länge. Mindre uppmärksamhet har riktats mot de organisatoriska villkoren. I avhandlingen undersöker jag om chefer inom olika kommunala sektorer har liknande organisatoriska förutsättningar för att göra ett gott arbete. I den tredje men framförallt i den fjärde studien fann vi att villkoren ser olika ut inom olika kommunala verksamheter. Chefer i kvinnligt genusmärkta verksamheter rapporterar exempelvis mindre stöd, mer styrbrist, större otydlighet, fler logikkonflikter och fler underställda än chefer inom genusintegrerade och manligt genusmärkta verksamheter. Chefer av båda könen är således styrda av den genusordning som liksom 'satt sig' i invanda organisatoriska rutiner och praktiker. Jag tror att det behövs fler studier som inte bara jämför manliga och kvinnliga chefers strategier och förhållningssätt, utan som också tar hänsyn till genusmärkta kontexter. Jag tror också att ett strukturellt perspektiv är viktigt att bära med sig för de maktavare som intresserar sig för kommunala chefers situation.

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