

Chatrine Höckertin

**Organisational prerequisites
and discretion for first-line
managers in public, private
and cooperative geriatric care**

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Preface

This report describes the results from three studies within a research project: "Power over working conditions – case studies in private and public workplaces in different branches". This particular study explores the prerequisites for leadership at seven elderly care institutions with private, public and cooperative owners. It is a comparative deep study of organisational conditions and discretion exercised by managers in order to achieve good working conditions for themselves as managers and for their staff. This work is part of a forthcoming thesis by Chatrine Höckertin, under the supervision of Professor Roine Johansson, Mittuniversitetet; Associate Professor Jonas Höög, Umeå University and Professor Annika Härenstam, National Institute for Working Life.

The project "Power over working conditions" encompasses two more case studies. One of them investigates technical and care/education administrations in two municipalities in Sörmland (Tina Kankkunen, 2006); the other study, by John Ylander, is carried out within multinational companies in the Swedish manufacturing industry (Ylander & Härenstam, 2006). All three studies have the same overall research question: How is the responsibility for working conditions exercised in contemporary organisations? That is, we are interested in daily practices and actual conditions for managers and their staff. The project is supported by the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS, grant nr 2002-0316), and is led by Professor Annika Härenstam, National Institute for Working Life. Professor Staffan Marklund, Associate Professor Tor Larsson, Chatrine Höckertin, Tina Kankkunen and John Ylander are members of the project team. The project has been approved by the regional committee on ethics in Stockholm, (Dnr:04-033/5).

The main target groups for this report are owners of elderly care enterprises, managers at different levels, HR professionals, researchers within the field and others who work with issues concerning organisation, staff and work environment. We hope that the report can contribute with knowledge and ideas on how the conditions and prerequisites for managers to exercise leadership can be improved, and on how healthy work environments within elderly care institutions can be achieved.

In order to realise a study of this kind, it is necessary that researchers gain access to the inner life that is taking place in organisations. We would like to thank the managers at the seven elderly care institutions who participated in this study for the excellent way in which they have made it possible for us to carry out the study.

Stockholm, 14 March 2007

Annika Härenstam

Professor in Work Organisation, project leader

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1. Introduction

Geriatric care in Sweden has undergone considerable changes during the last few decades, both in terms of the content of the care and the way it is organised (Andersson-Felé, 2003; Hjalmarsen et al., 2004; Larsson & Szebehely, 2006). As a result of a reform concerning the provision of geriatric care (ÅDEL) in 1992, the municipalities took over the responsibility for long-term care of the elderly, an issue that had previously been in the hands of the county councils. One aim was to make a clear distinction concerning responsibility for the elderly, and there was also an intention to create a more efficient system with better economic prerequisites to fulfil the goals stated in a parliamentary resolution (Blomberg et al., 1999). With the new reform, 31,000 beds in nursing homes were transferred from the county councils to the municipalities (Runesson & Eliasson-Lappalainen, 2000). Parallel to this development, and as a result of cuts within the county councils, there has been a large decrease in the number of beds in hospital care, resulting in elderly people often being sent home before they have fully recovered. In their own homes or in special housing, the responsibility has then moved to the municipality and this situation has created an increased financial burden on the local authorities.

In order to meet the demands for increased efficiency, and with the intention of implementing more market-influenced solutions, a change in the Local Government Act in 1992 made it possible for alternative actors to enter the previously restricted, public arena (Andersson-Felé, 2003; Bäckman, 2001). This reform has resulted in an increased number of private producers of geriatric care, both for-profit and non-profit organisations. Between 1993 and 2000 the number of employees within Swedish public welfare decreased by 40,000 persons, but during the corresponding time period the number of employees within alternatively produced welfare increased, and the largest increase was found in the for-profit organisations. It is within geriatric care and care for the functionally disabled that the share of private producers has had the largest growth; here the number of employees increased by more than 400% during the time period (Trydegård, 2001). Today, geriatric care in Swedish municipalities is often supplied by a combination of public and private producers, where the public authority has the main responsibility but production is subcontracted to alternative actors in competition. Although one of the intentions of deregulation was to increase the number of alternative producers, there has been a concentration of a few large producers of elderly care. In 2001, five large enterprises supplied more than 50% of private geriatric care in terms of number of beds (Aidemark et al., 2003). Non-profit organisations supplying geriatric care accounted for 10% of the entire private share in 2003 (Socialstyrelsen, 2007). Several characteristics determine the costs for geriatric care in the municipalities, and there are also major differences

between the municipalities. Structural factors are one such characteristic, and e.g. in sparsely populated municipalities the costs are higher than average (ibid).

As a logical consequence of the active marketisation (Forssell & Jansson, 2000; Runesson & Eliasson-Lappalainen, 2000), it has also been natural to imitate management ideals from the private sector and implement them in the public sector. In this connection, a risk that is often mentioned is that by not taking into account the special circumstances related to welfare, such copying from the private sector disregards many of the characteristics associated with welfare production (Gustafsson, 2000). The alternative producers of geriatric care most often work in collaboration with the public sector, where they submit a tender for the operations and, if the price is right, win the contract. This sets the financial framework for the organisation's activities, along with rules and regulations associated with the provision of care, regardless of the type of ownership of the producer. Since all types of ownership have to follow the regulations and jurisdiction accompanying the contract and the geriatric care per se, it is reasonable to assume that the prerequisites for management are more or less the same, regardless of ownership form. On the other hand, since it is the local municipality that formulates the local conditions for the tender as regards aspects that do not relate to central legislation, and since there are certain characteristics related to forms of ownership that might have an impact on the prerequisites for management, one might assume that both ownership form and the kind of municipality that is responsible for the care, might be circumstances that shape the prerequisites for management.

Aim

The aim of this exploratory study is to describe how the prerequisites for first-line managers are manifested in public, private and cooperative geriatric care.

Disposition

In the next chapter there is a theoretical summary of relevant prerequisites for management and how this might relate to type of ownership. This is followed by a methodological chapter covering the sample, methods and analysis procedure, after which the empirical results of the qualitative interviews are presented. Finally there is a chapter discussing the findings.

2. Prerequisites for management in geriatric care – a theoretical frame

With the increased autonomy for the municipalities over decisions concerning e.g. geriatric care, it has become common for activities to be subject to competition, and thereby to invite alternative producers to submit tenders for running the operations while still retaining the main responsibility at the municipality. Several of these management ideals and ideas can be gathered under the term New Public Management, NPM, and can be described as a set of market-influenced modernisation strategies with the aim of increasing productivity and efficiency (Forssell & Jansson, 2000; Hood, 1991; Hood, 1995). Despite the extensive restructuring of the public sector described above, surprisingly little research has been conducted on the consequences for employees (Socialstyrelsen, 2004; SOU 2001:79). In a recent literature review concerning research on the working conditions for elderly care employees, Trydegård (2005) found, among other things, that there is quite limited research in the present prerequisites for Swedish geriatric care managers, that research has been more concentrated on prerequisites in home help care than special housing and more concerned with circumstances in the public sector than the private sector.

In the description below there is a short comparison between certain public, private and cooperative characteristics that might be decisive for differences in e.g. prerequisites for management. Categorisations that aim to illuminate differences are often exaggerated in order to make clearer distinctions, but in practice organisational characteristics can rather be distinguished on a continuum (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). The description of the different forms of ownership, below, is mainly taken from Nilsson (1986).

Characteristics of public and alternative producers of geriatric care

The goals in the public sector are formulated on the basis of political decisions. With the demands for increased efficiency and improved quality, described earlier, the public sector has increasingly imitated ideas from the private sector and turned them into public practice. This development is based on the idea that private firms that are more market-influenced and for-profit are automatically more efficient (Bejerot & Erlingsdóttir, 2002). This includes e.g. a more pronounced focus on performance measurements and an increased interest in the customer as a major actor. Public organisations are characterised by a high degree of formali-

sation, which is related to the activities within e.g. health care and social services. Managers at the top of the organisation are recruited by politicians, while the recruitment at lower levels, e.g. for first-line managers, is handled by a higher-level manager.

The primary goals in private firms are financial, and the activities in the firm are thus characterised by for-profit actions. It is consequently natural and necessary to discuss financial results in terms of profit and loss accounts and this is also necessary in order to evaluate the work. Since, in contrast to the public sector, neither private firms nor cooperatives have any public obligations, they can choose what activities they wish to get involved in. Usually, private firms are characterised by a low degree of formalisation. Executive managers are selected by the owners, whereas lower level managers are recruited by higher level managers. There are variations in the characteristics of cooperatives, depending on whether they are consumer-, producer- or worker cooperatives, and there are also differences between the established cooperation and the new kind of cooperatives that have grown during the last 20 years, where the latter is more characterised by its small size, and its more dedicated and active members (Küchen, 1994). The goals of the cooperatives have a social and collective basis, and most of the small, new cooperatives are started in order to fulfil a common need in a group of individuals. Many of the new cooperatives have focused on such activities within the care sector, e.g. childcare, geriatric care and also health care services. Cooperatives are often referred to as being something in between the public and the private sector, since they have to fulfil both social and financial (non-profit) goals (Pestoff, 2000), and due to this position, cooperatives are also often referred to as belonging to the third sector (Miettinen, 2000). Cooperatives are generally characterised by a low degree of formalisation. Managers are recruited by the members, usually represented by the board.

Span of control

In order to create good prerequisites for management it is, for example, important to have a functional organisation with a manageable workload and a reasonable number of employees to be responsible for (Andersson-Felé, 2006). In a study of the work situation for managers within the public sector, 87% of the responding managers considered that in order to maintain quality in their work as a manager, 30 employees was the maximum number to have responsibility for (SKTF, 2002). Several studies conducted on the public welfare system in Sweden, have shown how the managers may have up to around 160 employees to lead, with a more common span of between 50 and 90 employees (Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen, 2000). In a recent study of the working conditions for first-line managers within public care and education, the average number of employees to

be responsible for was 55 (Forsberg Kankkunen, 2006)¹. With a heavy workload, high demands and limited resources, the manager has an important role in supporting the employees, and it is reasonable to assume that the chance of handling this role decreases with a larger number of employees. Several studies have shown that the line manager plays a very important role in supporting the employees in their work, which can also indirectly have a positive influence on the health and well being of the employees (Laschinger et al., 1999). If the number of employees is far greater than is possible to handle, the chance of the line manager acting in a supportive manner decreases.

Responsibility, demands and resources

With inspiration from New Public Management, described earlier, central issues in the reformation of the public sector have been concerned with efforts to increase efficiency and improve quality. With the implementation of the ÄDEL reform, there was a decentralisation of responsibility down to the municipalities, and in Sweden as well in many other European countries, it has increasingly become more common to separate responsibility for performance and production on the one hand, and responsibility for planning, control and strategic issues at the management level on the other hand (Hoggett, 1996; Larsson, 2000; Rasmussen, 2004). With limited resources within the public sector, those at the political level have increased their influence over the public administrations, since cost reduction is one central aim, while at the same time maintaining the same quality. Consequently, in this process, the influence and power that administrations have over strategic issues has decreased. This simultaneously emphasis on the dual logics of quality and efficiency has been referred to as customer-oriented bureaucracy, which captures both the focus on the customer, to which quality should be supplied, and bureaucratisation, which relates to efficiency and price as a key factor (Kerfoot & Korczynski, 2005).

For the provision of care for the elderly, there are mainly two laws that guide the daily work: the Act on Health Services (HSL) and the Social Services Act (SOL). Both of these are basic acts, i.e. legislation more focused on goals and general guidelines rather than detailed regulations (Borell & Johansson, 1998). The general idea of these basic acts is that the local county councils and municipalities have the best knowledge in the specific circumstances, and thus know best how to solve the needs. More detailed legislation would thus create difficulties for making adjustments based on e.g. regional or local prerequisites and needs (Gustafsson, 2006). The HSL states that Swedish health care should be organised in such a way that it satisfies demands for both high quality and cost-effectiveness; and also in SOL there is a statement that care should be of a

¹ As an interesting detail it is worth mentioning that in the same study, where comparisons were made between working conditions in technical administrations and care and education administrations, the line managers in technical administrations were responsible for an average of 18 employees. Similar results have been found in other studies as well, see e.g. Tullberg, 2006.

high quality. This simultaneous emphasis on both efficiency and quality is a phenomenon not only in Sweden, but has characterised public activity throughout the western world during the last two decades (Andersson-Fel , 2006).

From an example of Norwegian home-help care, Rasmussen (2004) showed how the employees were empowered by decentralised responsibility for the daily work but at the same time there had been a centralisation of the strategic issues and decisions concerning finance and resources. In such an example, where the employees are engaged and dedicated due to an increased “freedom within the frames” and simultaneously restricted due to limited resources, there is a risk that the employees take the responsibility for performing good, professional work on their own shoulders, resulting in an increased workload and higher demands. This is described in a study by Holmqvist (1997), where female managers within the public welfare sector were given increased responsibility while at the same time having to deal with decreased resources. A common strategy for dealing with the task of maintaining quality while at the same time cutting resources was that the managers internalised the responsibility for the organisational challenges and turned it into their own, personal problem. In order to deal with the problem they worked overtime, they tried to balance between their own superiors and their staff and they felt inadequate. Since the content in the work situation for the managers in terms of power was situated in the political top level where the decisions over resources were taken, the managers’ practical power to influence was restricted to only making decisions concerning how to maintain the same quality with decreasing resources. Also in another study, referred to by Hjalmarson et al. (2004), it was shown that the managers were responsible for very large groups of employees, and that they had financial responsibility for a budget that was in line with the prerequisites for private managers. Most of the managers had no support functions such as administrative help or support in their work, but in spite of this the supervisors considered their work to be challenging and positive.

Runesson & Eliasson-Lappalainen (2000) have used the theoretical concepts of moral and technical responsibility from Bauman (1989), in order to distinguish caring actions from non-caring ones. Whereas moral (or personal) responsibility concerns thoughtful and caring actions where the individual is held responsible for the well being of another person, technical responsibility refers to actions strictly performed in an expected and dutiful way, with no demands for personal engagement. With the transformation of the public sector, where the responsibility for resources has been separated from operative performance, there might be a risk of an increased focus on technical responsibility, where the economic frames set the limit for a “least effort”, while the professional care workers have to struggle with the feeling of wanting to do more but not being able to, due to lack of resources.

Arena for dialogue

An important prerequisite for management is that of being able to communicate and have a dialogue with superiors. Opinions about the available resources have

been shown to follow a hierarchical pattern, where politicians have the most positive opinion about the amount of resources; the further down the hierarchy, the more negative are the views concerning available resources (Gustafsson & Szebehely, 2005). The persons closest to the clients were thus most negative concerning limited resources. It is also worth noting that only half of the politicians in the above study considered that sufficient resources were available. Politicians belonging to the political majority were generally more positive than the politicians in minority. These discrepancies in how to consider the situation highlight the importance of communication between the operative and the strategic level in the municipalities. In a recent study of the prerequisites for public geriatric care managers (Hjalmarson et al., 2004), many of the managers expressed that they received no response to their opinions about organisational aspects from the level above, with the consequence that they were left alone with their responsibility and without the right tools to influence the prerequisites in the work. Similar empirical results were found in a study of working conditions for managers within care and education, where they perceived lack of opportunities to influence the budget or what tasks to perform in the unit. This situation was reinforced by the fact that all supervisors perceived that there was no dialogue at all with superior managers and politicians (Forsberg Kankkunen, 2006).

3. Method

The interest in this study has been centred on the line managers in public, cooperative and private geriatric care and their prerequisites for being managers. It is the respondents' own experiences and perceptions that have been in focus and formed the content of the interviews.

The informants

Some criteria were formulated for sampling the informants. Public, cooperative and private geriatric care all had to be represented. The respondents were to be first-line managers, i.e. they had the formal position of being the manager directly above the work group, with their own budget, responsibility for personnel and their own address. They all had the same formal position: that of being in a managerial position closest to the work group. The kind of geriatric care had to be focused on special housing². From a list of potential participants, from the administrative office at the different municipalities, seven managers were chosen on the basis of the criteria for the sampling. The table below shows how their workplaces, all of them special housing, are located in three municipalities, all in the same region of Sweden.

Table 1. Distribution of the special housing where the line managers work, in relation to municipality.

	Municipality 1	Municipality 2	Municipality 3
Public	X	X	
Cooperative	X	X	X
Private	XX		

One of the municipalities has all three ownership forms represented in their geriatric care: public, cooperative and private. This was the only municipality in the region where all three forms were represented. From a neighbouring municipal-

² Special housing (*särskilt boende*) is the official umbrella term that gathers all kind of institutions for elderly (Lindgren & Lindström, 2006; Trydegård, 2000). It includes earlier used concepts such as service flats, retirement homes, nursing homes and group housing.

ity, one public institution and one cooperative were chosen, and finally the third cooperative was chosen from a separate municipality.

The interviews

Prior to the interviews the respondents were contacted by telephone. The aim of the project was presented and we agreed upon a time for the interview. The interviews were conducted between March and May 2006. One researcher participated in the interviews and in all but one case there was only one respondent, i.e. the manager herself (in one case the managerial post was shared between two persons and for this reason they both participated in the interview). The interviews took place in the managers' offices or a meeting room, and the content followed the interview template attached in the appendix, although the order of questions was not followed in a systematic way. The question areas covered issues related to what had been pointed out as relevant, in theory and earlier research on prerequisites for management. The aim of the interviews was to collect such objective information as possible concerning prerequisites for management, as perceived by the first-line managers. A tape recorder was used, and a semi-structured interview template covering the main areas of interest constituted the frame for the interviews, which lasted on average 1½ hours. In transcribing the interviews, pauses, hesitations, laughter and local dialect have been omitted. One research person has dealt with all the different phases in the data process: constructing the interview questionnaire, contacting the participants and arranging the interviews (booking appointments on the phone), conducting the interviews, writing the transcriptions, analysing the data and writing up the report.

The analysis procedure

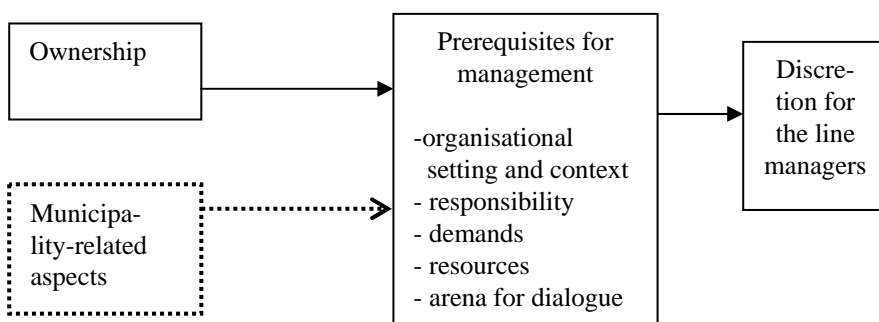
The focus in the analysis procedure has been on describing the actual prerequisites for management and the discretion as perceived by the line managers in the study, and on comparing whether there are any differences in these aspects due to ownership form or between different municipalities.

The method used is a modified version of content analysis (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Graneheim & Lundman, 2003), where focus has been on the manifest content, i.e. what is actually said and expressed by the respondents. When the transcriptions had been made, the interviews were first read right through 2-3 times, in order to get an overview. A summary was then written for each respondent, consisting of the most typical characteristics. In the next step, one interview transcription at a time was read with the aim of finding overarching themes that covered the areas of interest, i.e. prerequisites for management for line managers within geriatric care. Those themes were discovered on the basis of theory, and covered the content of the interview template (see appendix).

After the first preliminary thematising, the next step was to reduce the amount of data into units that were easier to handle. In practice, this was done by using large sheets of paper for each of the included themes. On such a sheet of

paper, all information related to each theme from each respondent was glued together, but still in separate squares, making it possible to obtain an overview and read the whole text relating to one theme as a whole in order to search for similarities and common patterns, but also to read it square-wise with three squares representing cooperative line managers, and two squares representing public and private line managers respectively. The large sheet then comprised all the relevant information from all seven line managers with one sheet for each theme. In the process of making the themes on the sheets, all text (i.e. the raw information) referring to each theme was included. The next task was then to go deeper into each theme and search for characteristics within each theme. This was a way of condensing and reducing the amount of data without losing information, and making sense of the sentences. The construction of the themes came out of the content in the interview template, which consisted of certain issues that were theoretically relevant in relation to prerequisites for management and discretion. The seven line managers constituted the units of analysis. Thus, there were no previous assumptions that e.g. the three managers in cooperative geriatric care would have more in common with each other than with e.g. those working in the same municipality. This was a way of avoiding losing information that could be cut in another direction. The themes constituting the prerequisites for management that were captured in the analyses, and how they related to the actual discretion for the managers, are illustrated by figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Illustration of the themes constituting the prerequisites for management that are considered to be determinants for the line managers exercising discretion.



The presentation of quotes

In each theme, i.e. each prerequisite for management, quotes from the respondents are used frequently in order to exemplify and illustrate a certain result. These quotes are verbally cited but carefully edited in order to increase readability. If a quote is used where names or other information might decrease anonymity, this has been taken out of the quote. If a quote is edited and e.g. one sentence has been removed due to irrelevance or protection of anonymity, this is marked

in the quote as follows: /.../. In some cases a comment has been added in order to elucidate the quote. These comments are within square brackets [].

Definition of line manager (supervisor)

The focus of interest in this study is on the formal aspects of being a line manager / supervisor, i.e. the tasks that have been formally allocated and that go with the position for the responsible manager directly above the work group. The term 'line manager' will be used consistently for the participating respondents.

4. Results

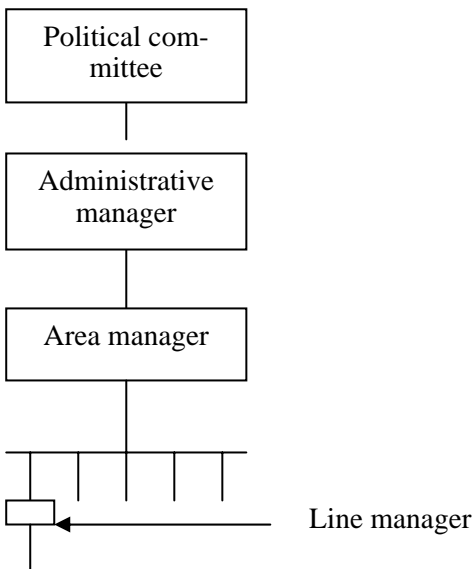
The results section covers the included dimensions constituting important prerequisites for management, as illustrated in the model above. The results are presented for one dimension at a time and in relation to the seven managers' perceptions. For each dimension, the analysis procedure has concentrated on both searching for common patterns and similarities between the seven managers, as well as potential differences mainly due to type of ownership and municipality.

The settings

The setting includes the overall structure of the organisations, including geographical location and municipality, number of employees, number of organisational levels, type of geriatric care, and also some individual characteristics of the manager. The arrows in the figures below for each form of ownership illustrate the position of the interviewed managers.

The public sector

Figure 2. Organisational placement of public first line manager.

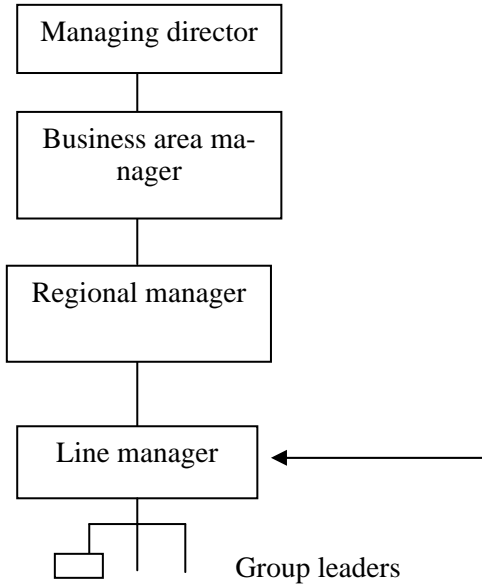


Although they belong to different municipalities, the two public organisations have almost the same organisational structure, with the political level at the top and the administration with the highest official directly below. Under this, another level has been incorporated (described in greater detail on page 13) with an area manager who is the closest manager to the line managers (i.e. the category of respondents in this study). There is one difference, however, between the two public institutions. In the first one, the line manager also has a co-manager who is the operative manager of one of the two departments belonging to the unit. The corresponding role is not present in the other public institution.

The first public institution is special housing in a large city-municipality. The organisation consists of one result unit, comprising two geographically divided departments. In one of these departments (with around 35 employees) the co-manager has the daily, operative responsibility and functions in practice as a manager. In the other department (also with around 35 employees) the line manager is both the operative and strategic manager. This department is divided into two sub-departments, which are located in two different buildings about 500 metres apart. The line manager has her office in one of the buildings and visits the other sub-department once or twice a week. Thus, this sub-department receives no supervision on a daily basis. The organisation is not subject to competition. The line manager, who has worked for 10 years in the unit, has a background as a nurse and has previously worked in other similar units, both for the municipality and the county council but not in private or cooperative forms. She got the job after being recommended by her former manager to send in an application. The second public institution is special housing in a sparsely populated municipality. The organisation consists of one result unit with six departments. All six departments are located in the same building and the line manager's office is also located there. She is directly responsible for the almost 50 employees who work there. To help her she has an administrative assistant working 75% of full time. The organisation is not subject to competition. The line manager has worked in the same organisation since she finished her university studies, where she specialised in management within elderly care.

The private organisations

Figure 3. Organisational placement of private first line manager.

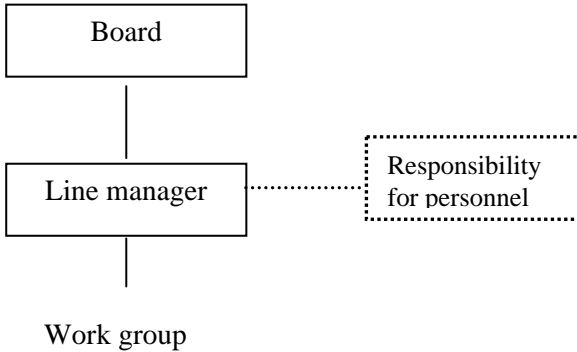


The first private institution is an elderly care unit in a large city-municipality, consisting of three departments in different but closely situated buildings: special housing, a dementia unit and home care. Each department has a group leader under the line manager and in all, around 35 employees work in the three departments. The contract with the municipality runs for five years with two possible additional years. The manager has worked around 1½ years in this unit and before that she worked for three years in another private unit. She has previously also worked in public elderly care. She has a university education specialising in management within elderly care.

The second private institution is an elderly care unit in a large city-municipality, consisting of three separate departments located in two different but closely situated buildings: special housing, service flats and home care. Each department has a group leader under the line manager and in all, around 50 employees work in the three departments. The contract with the municipality runs for four years. The manager has worked for around eight years in the same private organisation and before that she worked for more than ten years in public elderly care. She has a university education specialising in management within elderly care.

The cooperative organisations

Figure 4. Organisational placement of cooperative first line manager.



The first cooperative is special housing run as a worker cooperative and located in a sparsely populated municipality. The manager is a member of the cooperative and is also on the board; she thus has dual roles. The entire organisation is located in one single building, owned by the municipality and rented by the cooperative, and all work tasks are performed within the building. Nearly twenty employees work in the cooperative and a special person other than the manager is responsible for personnel. Around 15 elderly people live in the cooperative on a permanent basis and there are a few additional short-term places. The cooperative has 15 members, mostly employees. The contract runs for five years. The manager has been in this position since the cooperative was established nearly ten years ago. She has a background as a nurse and has worked in this capacity both for the municipality and, before the ÄDEL reform in 1992, also for the county council. It was quite natural for her to become a manager since she was one of the driving forces behind starting the cooperative.

The second cooperative is a user cooperative located in a large city-municipality, with a combination of home help in which four apartments are rented by elderly people in need of home help, and five beds for short-term care. The members comprise the elderly, their relatives, employees and other village citizens. The contract with the municipality runs for three years. The manager is a member of the cooperative but not on the board. Four of the nine employees are members. The contract with the municipality runs for three years. The entire organisation is located in one single building, which is owned by the cooperative. Due to limitations in the building there is a focus on physically healthier elderly people. The elderly rent their own apartment in which the cooperative provides home help. The manager, who is a nurse, was recruited three years ago, when she was asked to apply for the job. Before she trained as a nurse, she had previously worked in municipal care.

The third cooperative is a user cooperative located in a sparsely populated municipality, where the members consist of elderly people, their relatives, em-

ployees and other village citizens. There are around 70 members and of the 11 employees, 5 are members. The present contract with the municipality has run since 2004 but was cancelled by the cooperative two months before the interview, since they considered that the financial prerequisites were unsustainable. The manager is a member of the cooperative and is also on the board, which gives her dual roles. The whole organisation is situated in one single building, which is owned by the cooperative, but some of the work is also conducted in the homes of other elderly people in the nearby villages. The manager is responsible for the daily work and the finances, but not for the personnel – this responsibility is shared with another person. All questions relating to daily schedule and vacancies are handled by two of the staff. Eleven employees work in the cooperative. The elderly rent their own apartment in which the cooperative provides home help. The manager did not have any previous experience of the care sector when she started work three years ago. It was more by chance that she ended up in that position.

The implementation of another organisational level

In both the two private and the two public organisations there has been a change in the organisation, resulting in another managerial level being added, and in both cases this has taken place during the last four years. The change has resulted in completely different implications for the managers. From both private and public managers having the same position, i.e. being directly above their group of 20-50 employees, the private managers have taken a step upwards in the organisation with the implementation of group leaders below them, whose job is to lead the daily, operative work and they also hold development talks with all employees. As a result of all this, the work content for the private line managers (i.e. the respondents) has become more strategic, with a focus on financial issues. In both of the public sector organisations, belonging to different municipalities, the new managerial level was incorporated above them instead of below them, as was the case for the private managers.

One of the public managers perceived that her position had been taken away from her, and that she had had greater influence before this organisational change. At that time she had had direct contact with the administrative manager, but since the area managers were added she has lost that contact upwards and moved further down in the hierarchy.

... they talk about making a flat organisation , but it hasn't got any flatter now either, because there's an extra level. I mean we used to come directly under the administrative manager/.../In fact we're the ones who actually *do* that job, we're the go-betweens. I don't really know what else they [the area managers] do, apart from the fact that she's sort of our manager, but I mean in fact we manage by ourselves – that's what we've almost always done. You know what your role is, and you know what tasks you've been delegated and what to do ...

As illustrated in the quote, the public line manager expresses doubts concerning what work tasks the area manager really carries out, since she perceives that she is doing most of the work there is to do herself.

Responsibility

Responsibility relates to work content and concerns how the responsibility for personnel, work environment, finance and operations is distributed. All seven managers have the same opinion about administration, i.e. that all the work is characterised by it to a high degree. This is illustrated in the quotes below, from one of the public, private and cooperative managers respectively, answering the question “Is there a lot of administration included in your work”?

There’s certainly an awful lot, I mean it all includes administration too: the staff, the salary system, the financial side, the work environment, yes, then there are the contacts with relatives that can result in administrative measures too, that I have to write it down somewhere. So it’s connected with all of that. [public]

Yes, there certainly is, and I’m really dependent on the computer, that’s basically what I work with the whole day. Sometimes I think I’m crazy, because I have to go in and check my mail the whole time, and if I haven’t done that for a day then I’ve got 10-20 messages waiting. [private]

Yes, there is, more than I’d like /.../ it involves salaries, talks with the staff and then also paperwork, to do with sick leave, the Social Insurance Administration, the Employment Services, because we’ve got someone who’s on a subsidised salary, so that means paperwork as well. [cooperative]

When asked to describe their daily work there are several similarities between the seven managers, relating to the administrative character of the work. It concerns sick-leave reports, writing journals (social files), following up financial results, holding planned staff meetings and development talks, administration concerning salaries, contact with relatives and more. For all of the managers there is very limited time for being out on the floor with the staff and the elderly. Although there are several similarities relating to the character of the elderly care work, there are also differences concerning how the responsibility for central managerial tasks is distributed, which is shown in the table below.

Table 2. Distribution of responsibility for work environment, personnel, finance and operations for the seven managers.

Type of responsibility	Public 1	Public 2	Coop 1	Coop 2	Coop 3	Private 1	Private 2
Work environment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Personnel	X	X	-	X	-	X ³	X ⁴
Finance	X	- ⁵	X	X ⁶	X	X	X
Operations	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

The two public managers share many common features, as described under the organisational setting. They are both directly above their employees and their work content is thus characterised by daily, operative issues. The responsibility for work environment is considered wide and large, by one of the public managers:

We've recently been on a two-day course [about work environment] which I went on /.../ and then you see that you really have a great responsibility as a first-line manager/It covers everything, not just whether they go and hurt themselves – it's the whole psychosocial field and I mean that's really important, and some of them perhaps work in a dementia unit, where there are those [patients with dementia] who scratch them and spit in their face. Yes, there are lots of aspects to this. [public]

Something else the public managers have in common is that they have a large number of employees – between 35 and 50 – to have development talks with. This is further described under *Demands*. They both also have the same responsibility for operations. They have no influence over what profile the institution should have; this is a question for the administration and the manager just has to follow the decisions. One thing that differs between the two is that one of the managers (public 2) has had no influence on or insight into the work with the budget; she has just been presented with it as a fact to follow. The other public manager has been involved in the process of making the budget together with her co-manager and a consultant representative from the central administrative department.

³ The private manager has the overall responsibility for personnel but has delegated the daily, operative tasks down to her group leaders below.

⁴ See above.

⁵ In this case, the manager has been given a budget and her task is to keep within that given budget. However, the final responsibility for the budget rests with the level above.

⁶ The line manager is responsible for finance, but she has one person helping her with invoices and salaries.

In two of the cooperatives a person other than the manager has been given the responsibility for personnel. In e.g. cooperative 1, the manager has responsibility for finance, work environment and operations, but not for personnel. At the same time, she is the one who holds development talks with the employees. In cooperative 3, the manager has handed over personnel-related work tasks to another person, but it was unclear how the responsibility between them was divided. It seemed as if they divided the responsibility for personnel issues from case to case, depending on the kind of problem and the person it involved. These are aspects that appear to create unclear roles. The manager in cooperative 2 is responsible for financial issues but the daily work with administration of invoices and salaries is handled by another person. The budget process is basically the same in all three cooperatives, and is carried out in cooperation between the manager and the board. Since the managers in cooperative 1 and 3 are also members of the board, these dual roles overlap. The content of the operation, i.e. the profile, is restricted in the contract with the municipality.

The two private managers are responsible for the work environment, finance and operations. Work tasks concerning personnel are taken care of by their group leaders, so the line managers do not have to deal with the daily, operative issues concerning employees. Instead, they work closely with their three group leaders, using them as an extended arm. The group leaders also handle most of the daily issues concerning the operations and contact with e.g. relatives. For both of the line managers, the work with the budget is a long process, starting with them and going all the way up to the central management group directly under the Managing Director. This process is described by one of the line managers in the following quote:

Well, of course I'm one of those people who enjoy dealing with the financial side of things. I mean I love it when I understand the figures, so I think it's really interesting. It [the budget process] starts, well, basically in September, or in actual fact at the beginning of the year, because you start thinking about it as early as that – what you need to keep in mind before next year /.../ Together with the regional manager we go through the budget and secure it, I mean as far as quality is concerned. And a budget is a budget, it's set for the year so if there's a mistake, then it's a mistake. Then our business area manager comes up and we have to sit in a meeting with him and present the budget and say why we've put in this and that, or why things won't go as well during next year as they did this year and ... give reasons and so on. And then eventually it's taken even higher up and that's where it lies. So what at one time started out as my budget becomes the business area manager's or the managing director's budget. That can feel a bit hard, but you still feel as if you have a part in it. I mean if you use a bit of common sense and think reasonably like that, well then in fact it goes through. [private]

There are substantial differences in the distribution of responsibility for the managers in different forms of ownership. One of the public managers is only given a

fixed budget to follow. The other public manager is involved in the budget process and is also responsible for following the budget. These public managers thus have responsibility for both following and following up the budget, and also for the operative and daily issues concerning personnel. The responsibility for the private managers is mainly focused on the financial and more strategic issues, since they have delegated the daily, operative work with personnel and operations to their group leaders. These circumstances create great differences in the prerequisites for management between the public and private organisations. What is most conspicuous in the case of the cooperatives is that in two of them the roles seem to be unclear and, as is further shown under *demands*, that they have very fragmentary work tasks, having to deal with almost everything.

Divergent and high demands

The part covering demands relates to the manager's perception of how to balance the demands from above, from the work group and from external sources, and also what the demands consist of in their view. Six of the seven managers have a common opinion that the demands for keeping within the budget are not negotiable but just something to accept. The only manager who does not fit with the pattern of the others, one of the cooperatives, chose her own strategy for dealing with the financial demands, i.e. they simply cancelled the contract with the municipality nine months before the contract expired. This was done two months before the interview, and when the interview was conducted in May the municipality had still not given them any response to the cancelling of the contract. The private and cooperative managers and their organisations are under pressure of a contract with the municipality and a latent threat that the contract can be given to another actor with a better price from the municipality's point of view. This is a circumstance that the two public managers do not have to deal with, since their organisations are not exposed to competition, which means other prerequisites.

Complexity

The demands seem to be different in the different ownership forms and are characterised by various degrees of complexity. This is illustrated in the section below where one example is taken from each type of ownership. All three cooperatives consider that the diverse and external demands are difficult to cope with. By external is meant demands coming from outside the organisation, e.g. the Swedish Work Environment Authority, the National Food Administration, the county administrative board and the county council. For instance, in the largest cooperative, with almost 20 employees, they have to follow strict rules concerning how to handle their food supply in the kitchen where all the food is prepared and cooked. It is considered difficult to deal with all these demands, since they are of such different kinds and there is limited support and knowledge of how to handle it. The complexity in demands concerning e.g. work environment issues is in line with what has earlier been found in research on small-scale enterprises and how they deal with work environment issues. They are required to deal with

the issues in a systematic way, from the union, legislation and other areas, but they do not have either the right knowledge or the amount of resources required. Therefore work environment issues are dealt with, but in a way that is suitable for the prerequisites and resources for that specific organisation. In one of the cooperatives, with around ten employees, the line manager expresses that it is almost ridiculous having to deal with these questions in such a formalised way, since she considers that they deal with the work environment issues on a daily basis but without systematising them. This can be illustrated by the following quote:

Yes, generally speaking I suppose these [about the work environment] are questions that we don't deal with such a lot. It feels as if we can kind of assume that all this works anyway, I mean the whole operation is so sort of close-knit /.../ Yes, it's such a small workplace too, so that this work environment work, well it feels as if it's there anyway, but it's got to be put on paper /.../. Everything is so close together here that it almost feels as if it's superfluous... I feel that now that I've been sitting working with it, I think, "But, I mean this is just crazy, isn't it", it's really senseless to spend so much time on something that works automatically anyway. I think it's difficult for them [the unions] to understand how it works in a small workplace like this. They probably go to the main offices of the municipality and have in mind the activities there, and it's all so spread out, with bigger workplaces – which are something completely different.
[cooperative]

Complexity is also illustrative of how one of the public managers perceives the demands, coming from all different directions: from the level above, from relatives, from the elderly, from the work group. She expresses that she feels squeezed from all different directions:

There can be lots of demands both from the clients and their relatives and from the staff, and then you've got pressure from above that it's got to be like this and that, and of course I mean it can be both a question of money and based on decisions that have been taken, and what it is they need help with I can't exactly say, but there can certainly be demands. I mean there can be demands from relatives – they can make enormous demands all of a sudden. Perhaps you can't satisfy all of them, and then the staff can also make demands and think that there ought to be this and that and the other thing, so sometimes you're being squeezed from all sides. [public]

Both of the public managers have one special type of demand in common, which is not the case with the other managers, in that they have to hold development talks and "salary talks" separately with such a large number of employees compared with the other managers. Earlier it was possible to have a combined development- and salary talk but during the last few years there have been demands from the municipality for keeping them separate. One of the public managers

says that earlier she could make it work more easily when she integrated the two dialogues and she held these planned talks every 18 months, but this is not permitted any longer. Now she has to have 35 development talks and 35 salary talks each year. For the other public manager it is even worse in terms of demands: she has around 50 employees and she has both development- and salary talks, resulting in 100 each year. Time to prepare and time to document and follow up also has to be considered in the time consumed for these activities, and together this is rather demanding for the two public managers, especially in comparison with the managers in cooperatives and private organisations, who are in charge of much smaller work groups. One of the public managers also expresses that she has great difficulties in handling the demands for writing and documenting the social files – a report on social activities, related to each elderly person, which is supposed to be documented with regularity. It is legally regulated that this has to be done and it is the county administrative board that has the main responsibility for following up that the work is performed. This is something that has always existed in home care but for those in special housing it is a new phenomenon, and thus a rather new task for her to deal with. It also illustrates that the demands concerning administrative work are extensive.

But then there's one major area that I don't feel I have time for, and that's the activities and the fact that as the manager I'm responsible for and also have to write the social records for all the elderly, and that's where I really fall short ... I don't think I've got the right conditions for that – I can't have, because otherwise I would have done it and I want to, I want to do it, and I think I would manage it if I had a whole day for it. But then it may be a question of my own planning too, that I should say no to other things on days like that, for example that none of the staff can see me unless it's about something urgent, that I could perhaps steer it more /.../. It's difficult, but you could say that's the difficulty with my job.

That's what you experience as difficult?

Yes, it is, because I think I manage to do the rest. Then of course recruitment of staff can be difficult, when a lot of people are ill and I've got to get hold of someone tonight and I haven't got a night nurse, so problems like this can take half a day or even a whole day, but I mean for the most part it all flows really well. But this is the nightmare. [public]

This manager considers that the administrative work, including demands for documenting the social file, is the really great problem associated with her job, and something that she considers would take 20% of full time to deal with. It is something that she wants to do but feels that she does not have enough resources (i.e. time) to fulfil the task; this situation is perceived as a nightmare. Considering the demand for follow-up from the municipality, the pressure from the county administrative board who can carry out an inspection, and the legal regulations, it is understandable that these demands create a situation with great pressure.

For the two private managers the demands are considered better (lower) since the implementation of another managerial level between them and the staff. This has resulted in them having a more strategic role and dealing more with financial results and follow-up than earlier, when the work content was more focused on daily issues and dealing with emergencies. In this sense they consider that the work situation has improved. Compared with the public managers, the private ones only have their three group leaders to hold development- and salary talks with. The demands that are most pronounced for the private managers are related to finance, following up the budget and making prognoses ahead. Both private managers express how much fun and how stimulating it is working with figures and finance, something that they feel eases the demands on them.

... you're required to be able to make a budget and be pretty good on the financial side now, and I've been doing all that for so many years and I've had a lot of support and worked a lot with our budget model and all that, so you get, well, better and better. Now it feels really, really fun because I know so much about it ...

And feel that you have control?

Yes, it feels really great and that you sort of get the chance to do it. And you try to improve it even more and I think that's absolutely fantastic. Really great. [private]

The quote above is very similar to that of the other private manager, page 16, where she also describes how much fun it is working with figures and having financial responsibility.

Coping

There are somewhat different ways of dealing with the complex demands. Three of the managers – one from each ownership form – mention their own self-esteem and routine from many years in the profession as a way of keeping the demands on a professional level and keeping a personal distance. Although they are obliged to strictly follow the budget also in the cooperatives, in two of them the manager is also a member of the board, where decisions about finance and the budget are made. This situation seems to increase the opportunities for discussing financial demands and having a dialogue on those issues. One of the private managers has considered leaving her job, but she has come to the conclusion that as long as it does not get any worse, the positive aspects are stronger than the negative ones. The other private manager has learned to deal with her work and thinks that “this is how it is and it is just a question of taking it or leaving it....”

One of the public managers mentions that she has learned to deal with the demands from one of her former managers at the administrative department:

I remember someone from the administration saying this: “No one has said that you should be relatives”. We didn't have to compensate for that, and I think that was really clear and well put, because otherwise

there can be all this “Oh dear, poor them with the daughter living so far away and nobody cares about her”. In fact it’s not our responsibility, it’s the daughter that lives there and they have chosen to have their life like that, and then you don’t have to ... I mean otherwise they’re actually invented problems. That’s often what it’s like in the care sector.

You mean that you take responsibility on yourself?

You take other people’s responsibility on yourself, and I think that was such good [advice] /.../ and I’ve thought about that and sort of reminded myself of it a lot, I mean just remember that, we’re not the ones who have to buy Christmas presents, we’re not the ones who have to see to it that they have new clothes. I mean that shows real insight, because that’s how it’s been, especially in the home-help service, that little extra touch you want to make and so on, to brighten up their lives. Our job is to provide good and dignified care and service too, and good accommodation here. They should get help with everything they need here and they do get that. And we are supposed to take them to hospital, and we should be able to go with them to the hairdresser’s, but we can also ask a relative: “Would it be possible for you to take your mother”, because perhaps they want to do it. [public]

The fact that one former manager expressed the dilemma involved in having to prioritise, made this way of thinking legitimate. Distinguishing between the roles of professional and relative was important and seemed to strengthen the interviewed manager; she has remembered and kept that advice over the years.

Non-negotiable resources

The resources consist of two different parts: those that are directly concerned with the finances in terms of allocated resources, and those that are non-economic, such as administrative support, consultative support concerning e.g. personnel and finances, and also social support from colleagues and others.

Non-economic resources

The resources that are available for the seven managers are different and are located in different geographical places. For both the public and the private managers there is a good supply of resources and support inside and outside the organisations, and it is easy to use these resources by email or telephone. For the cooperatives, on the other hand, being more autonomous, there are few or no resources available within the organisation. All resources have to be bought or asked for externally and this is considered a lack in two of the three cooperatives, where the managers express a desire for a coach / speaking partner:

The only thing I would like to have is a mentor. I mean, now I’m turning to different people, like... [gives the names of different people] but I

could do with more. Now there's no continuity. Someone who could guide me a bit and who I could ask about different things.

A speaking partner?

Yes, really!

[cooperative]

One of the other cooperative managers describes a rather common situation when she has to act as a mediator between the board and the staff:

/.../ I'm forced to, for example that the board thinks this or that, because the staff are not supposed to tell the board what to do ... You've got to mediate and be the link in this case.

Have you got a speaking partner at a time like that then?

No, that's what I've been asking for. I mean sometimes you maybe get angry, but then I can't just go to the staff and tell them that /.../ We have been discussing that I should have someone, because we have someone who is good as a relative /.../ someone you can talk about everything with and she's worked a lot in this field /.../ so that would be one possibility, so that it doesn't get to be something that grows and grows, resulting in you getting so angry that you start telling everyone to go to

[cooperative]

All three cooperatives mention the board as an important resource, both in giving support and as a discussion partner. In both the private and one of the public organisations there are plenty of resources available that are related to financial issues, follow-up of results and administration concerning salaries, etc.

In one of the public organisations the manager has a co-manager who functions as a back-up and a supportive colleague, and the two of them can support and inspire each other. Nevertheless, as described under *demands*, p 19, she would like another resource to deal with the demands. In the other public organisation, there is one administrative assistant working 75%, and she is considered a good help and useful for several work tasks. It is interesting to note that the two private managers are the only ones that do not wish for any further supportive resources, as expressed by the public and cooperative managers.

Financial resources

Six of the managers are provided with financial frameworks that are fixed and not negotiable; they have the responsibility to make their own decisions about financial matters within these frames and in that sense they have financial responsibility. One manager, in the public organisation, has just been given a fixed budget, which she is supposed to follow. The two quotes below illustrate how one of the private and one of the public managers look upon issues related to financial resources.

... there's nothing we can do about it, but the politicians don't want us to provide different care than we do today. I mean they don't have the resources, they don't give us enough resources, because of course it would

be great if we could activate them [the elderly] more and so on, and be able to have these social activities like we did when I started at the beginning of the 90s. Then you went round and were sociable and chose not to do the cleaning and did it the next week instead. I mean today the cleaning is done every third week so you don't choose not to do it without a good reason.

You mean there's no extra margin to take from?

No /.../ and I think that many of the older ones who work here today feel this, and I mean that's what burns them out and makes them feel that it's all stress ...

So they feel that they're inadequate?

Yes /.../ and of course they see so much they would like to do, and some of them even do it in their free time because they can't do it ... and often you feel sorry for these young ones who find themselves in this stress situation and do their job on the basis of what is expected of them, and then they're regarded as less caring in the eyes of the older ones. Although they [the younger ones] are actually doing what has been ordered.

[private]

Of course, this is a fairly new institution /.../ and when I started here, there was a lot of talk about that. Then they started to make these cuts in the municipality in '95 /.../ We knew what the conditions were /.../ That's been our starting point, I think it's worse if it's an older unit that has worked to develop this or that method or way of doing things, and then they've got to start taking away things they had before, ...then I suppose you adjust. Of course sometimes it can be heavy-going, so above all the staff might think that there should be more of them – at weekends I'm sure they always think that there should be more of them – but no politician or administrative manager has expected that we should do more than we do ... The politicians have taken responsibility, because they are not prepared to lower the quality, so that's where the clash can come – if they think we must have the same level of quality with fewer of us – but no one has expected us to do that. It just can't get any tighter, because then there'll be problems, definitely, but as it is now it works reasonably well, in fact. I can even say I think it works well.

[public]

In the quote from the private manager above, she explains how the employees who have long experience and have learned their profession well, feel bad when decreasing and limited resources force them to give up earlier ambitions concerning their patients. In these situations, when a professional assistant nurse sees the needs of the patient but is unable to help due to limited resources, there is a risk of burnout, according to the manager in the quote. Results in this direction have also been found in a study referred to in the theoretical part, by Rasmussen (2004). The private manager also describes a potential reason for conflict between the younger and the older employees, since the younger ones have learned to work under limited resources and adjust the demands to that situation,

whereas many of the older employees have learned to perform their very best and put their effort and pride into doing a professional job, and now, with limited resources, the profession and their ambitions are being challenged. Parallels can also be drawn to Bauman's concepts of technical and moral responsibility (Bauman, 1989; Runesson & Eliasson-Lappalainen, 2000), where the older employees carry a moral responsibility that goes with their long professional experience of what is needed by the elderly, while the younger employees, who have not worked under times when the resources were not so restricted, have more easily adjusted to limited resources and a more instrumental or technical kind of responsibility. In a study by Gustafsson & Szehebely (2005), results showed that the caregivers closest to the elderly felt inadequate since they could not provide their clients with enough help and support. The public manager, on the other hand, explains that the unit has only existed for around 10 years and was started when the large cuts in the public sector had already begun. They have thus never been exposed to any decreased resources but have instead learned to work in a more resource-saving way from the start. This has previously been described under *Demands*.

Municipality differences regarding communication with politicians

In the following section, ways of having a dialogue with employees, superiors and politicians are described. All managers except one have organised staff meetings on a regular basis around once a month. The cooperative in which there is no manager in the daily work, have meetings when needed, around every 6-8 weeks. The form of the meetings differs. One of the public managers with nearly 50 employees has divided the staff into two groups and she has one meeting before lunch and one meeting in the afternoon. One of the private managers participates in the staff meetings, whereas the other one has left that work to her group leaders.

Whether or not the managers can get in contact with and meet their own managers is an important aspect and these prerequisites vary considerably. In two of the cooperatives the managers are also on the board, which obviously gives them a more natural access to the level above them. In the third cooperative the manager is not on the board but she has good relations with the members of the board and she feels that it is easy to be listened to. The public managers have regular meetings every two weeks or once a month with their area managers, and if needed further contact on the telephone. The two private managers have more or less daily contact with their district manager, who is available 24 hours a day and holds planned meetings in the managerial group (five line managers and the district manager) once a month. In addition, the district manager is available for special coach talks every six weeks if the managers are in need of it.

Contact between the managers and the political level is quite different – mainly due to the fact that they belong to different municipalities. In the sparsely populated municipalities the dialogue with the politicians is almost non-existent,

and in one of the cooperatives the opinion is that the politicians practically work against them. On the question of whether it would be possible to contact the politician responsible, she describes how an earlier conflict has resulted in what she describes as a strategy from the municipality:

They probably got their fingers burnt by that, so if I ring the local government commissioner then he'll refer me to the head of the municipality, who will refer me to some other person in charge who they've really appointed to be [the contact person], and he's really hard. He sounds nice, but he's hard. [cooperative]

As described under *demands* on page 17, one of the cooperatives had cancelled the contract with the municipality and eight weeks later they had still not heard anything from the municipality. One of the public managers, in one of the sparsely populated municipalities, expresses that contact with the strategic level of politicians were better before, when she was directly under the administrative manager:

... and among the politicians that's where I think we've lost out a bit, because there the area manager has taken over. Otherwise we did have a sort of dialogue, even if it was only once a year, but we got to meet the members of the committee, they came out to us here ... The year before there was a bit as well, it was almost as if you sort of shrank to nothing and felt that you didn't have so much to say, because the area manager did all the talking, and that's rather a pity because you feel that you want to put things forward yourself so that you get that dialogue. [public]

For the one cooperative and the two private organisations, all three being alternative producers of elderly care in the large city-municipality, they all express that they have good relations with the political level. The politician responsible is mentioned as a very positive person, and it is obvious that this contact is helpful for the managers and the organisations.

Our xxx [politician responsible for care of the elderly] is a real pillar of strength, so I mean he's really been the one who's stood up for us when it's been stormy, and you've felt that you've been able to talk to him and sort of be honest. [private]

When it comes to the politicians in charge – is there any kind of dialogue?

Well yes, I've phoned him and I mean he's a very normal person, I was going to say. He's pretty easy to talk to, but not often... But he's been involved in this right from the beginning, so he's taken a great interest in how things have gone for xxx [name of the cooperative].

[cooperative]

When the public manager in the same municipality was asked about her relations with the politician responsible and whether or not it was possible to have a dialogue, she directly answered that it was the level above her that had this role, and

that this strictly followed the formal structure. In this respect, being part of the same domain as the politician obviously had a negative impact on the public manager's own initiatives for a dialogue. As regards access to the political level, the result here indicates that it is both an issue related to personal attributes, e.g. as in the case of the large-municipality, where they had a politician who was genuinely interested in a dialogue, and also an issue of ownership, since the alternative producers had access of a kind that the public ones did not have. The private and cooperative actors had open access to the politician responsible, whereas for the public managers the channels of communication were restricted to following the formal hierarchy.

The previous results have shown that there are substantial differences in the prerequisites for managers and what discretion they exercise, in different forms of ownership. In the next section the results are discussed in relation to each ownership form.

5. Discussion

In the following section the results are discussed for one ownership form at a time. There is also one methodological part where reflections concerning the sample and some concluding remarks are made. It is interesting to consider that there were several similarities between the ownership forms. All seven managers have high demands on them concerning a variety of different aspects. In combination with rather limited resources that are not negotiable, this creates difficulties in their respective work situations. One thing that is also common for all seven is that they have to follow legislation laid down in HSL and SOL, and although these are basic acts that set the overall conditions in order to make it easier to adjust to local circumstances, there are still some main features that all providers of geriatric care have to follow.

One step further away from influence for the public line managers

Both public managers have a work situation that is characterised by operative tasks with a daily responsibility for large work groups. The size of the work group is an important aspect of the prerequisites for the manager (Andersson-Felé, 2006), and for the two public managers with 35-50 employees it is obvious that this has an impact on whether or not they can perform good managerial work, including e.g. holding development talks and also separate salary talks. The organisational change, which took place around 3-4 years ago, resulted in the incorporation of another organisational level above them. This has resulted in them being further away (i.e. moving a step downwards) from the administrative department to which they belong, and one of the managers expressed how she feels squeezed between two levels in this new organisational setting. Work content is largely characterised by administration and operative issues related to personnel. Both of them are expected to stick to the financial frameworks, but one of them has not been involved in making the budget. There are differences in how to consider the financial resources available. One of the organisations has only existed for ten years and has had limited resources the whole time, i.e. they started when the cuts in the public sector had already begun and therefore the manager perceives no direct deterioration. She also expresses how the work is regulated and controlled, but that there are degrees of freedom within the frames - *“it is very regulated, but how we do it is up to us”*. Similar results were found in another study, where public first-line managers within care and education perceived large freedom within the frames concerning e.g. how to organise the work

in the unit (Forsberg Kankkunen, 2006). One might ask how large this span of freedom really is. With a rather limited budget, high demands, a wide responsibility and regulations and legislation to follow, discretion is fairly limited and there is a risk that the manager has to face a dilemma concerning e.g. whether to keep an administrative resource or replace her with another employee out on the floor (ibid). Several studies have also shown how the prerequisites for public managers in the municipalities have undergone the most comprehensive changes in terms of responsibility, demands and work content (Wetterberg, 2000), and there have also been studies showing a discrepancy between available resources and responsibility (Rasmussen, 2004).

Both managers have regular meetings with their superior area managers. The relationship to the political level is in both cases described as strictly following the hierarchy, where they are not supposed to get in contact with the political level by going around their manager. The same rules also apply for the line managers in relation to the manager responsible for administration – all communication has to go through the area manager. This is especially interesting in the case of the public manager in the large city-municipality, where the private and cooperative managers mentioned the politician responsible as an important person who contributed to creating a good dialogue. Being a public manager and part of the same organisation in that sense had a more negative, reverse effect in terms of being able to communicate with the politician.

Strategic and financial work in focus for the private line managers

In the organisational change carried out around three years ago, another hierarchical level with three group leaders was incorporated below the line managers, and consequently this has resulted in a work situation for the line managers that is more characterised by strategic work tasks, with a focus on administrative work, financial planning and follow-up of results. Both line managers express the positive and stimulating aspects of working with measures and figures, and the demands are considered better, i.e. easier to cope with, since the implementation of the group leaders was carried out. The work with the budget is a long process that starts with the line managers and ends up at the level of the managing director, passing through several steps for quality checks. The focus on financial issues and economic results is natural in relation to the for-profit business logic in private firms. The demands are mainly focused on financial issues and questions related to personnel, recruitment of substitutes, etc, whereas the group leaders now handle development talks. Only large problems concerning e.g. personnel issues or more serious complaints concerning the care, which the group leaders cannot deal with, end up on the line manager's desk. One of the private managers compares her work situation today with her previous work in the public sector; she expresses the perceived discretion she exercises, the fact that it is fun to have work where there are demands, and also to be able to influence the work situation. At the same time as the manager expresses this, she also

expresses that she has considered leaving her job but has come to the conclusion that the positive aspects are stronger than the negative ones.

Access to non-economic, supportive resources is described as almost unlimited; there is a system available for nearly everything. The financial resources are not negotiable but just something to be accepted, and this is seen as a result of the fact that the municipalities lack intention and direction in elderly care, as quoted on page 22. The private line managers are in very close contact with their regional manager; they have contact on the phone almost daily and planned meetings in the management group on a regular basis. This close and systematic contact between regional manager and first-line manager was also found in another study including private geriatric care organisations (Tullberg, 2006). Furthermore, the regional manager is available for separate coaching sessions with each manager every six weeks; all this, together with the rich amount of supportive resources, implies good prerequisites for management. The political level has been very positive to the operation and the politician responsible is considered to be a central and important actor in this respect. The fact that the private managers have such close access to their own regional manager and also experience support from the political level are aspects that have proved to be rather important for the prerequisites for management. Similar results were found in a recent study on the prerequisites for geriatric care managers, where those managers that were given support from their own superior managers were capable of dealing with difficult work tasks and large areas of responsibilities, and where those that did not perceive support from superior managers asked for it and missed it (Hjalmarson et al., 2004). Taken together, with group leaders below them having responsibility for personnel and the daily operative work tasks, the line managers in private organisations can focus their work on strategic issues, mainly financial ones, where they have good support from both administrative systems and resource persons, and also from their own district manager, who is available at almost any time. As with all the geriatric care managers participating in the study, the private ones are also pressured under heavy demands, but they are satisfied with the challenge of achieving a budget in balance.

Complex multifunction and unclear roles for the cooperative line managers

The three cooperatives are all rather small in terms of number of employees. Another common feature is the autonomy that is characteristic for many small-scale new cooperatives; the organisations basically start and end with the building, including the persons working there and potential members.

In one of the cooperatives, the manager is responsible for operations and finance, but she has delegated responsibility for personnel to another person. At the same time, she is the one who holds development talks with the employees, and this seems to create slight confusion around the formal roles, something that she also confirms. External consultants have been hired to help out with the distribution of roles, due to complaints from part of the work group and the union

regarding uncertainties about responsibilities. It is unclear why the cooperative has chosen to split the responsibility for work environment, finance and business activity on the one hand and personnel issues on the other hand. One reason might be that the HR issues are considered so heavy and time-consuming that, taken together with all the tasks that rest upon the small-scale organisation with rather limited resources, this seems like the best solution. Also in one of the other cooperatives the responsibility for personnel is separated from the whole and handled by a separate person, and the work with schedules, staffing and substitutes is handled by yet another two persons belonging to the group of employees. It is reasonable to assume that this fragmentation of responsibilities might have a negative impact on the staff, since it might create confusion concerning roles. As for the managers of these cooperatives, at a first glimpse it is reasonable to assume that delegating the responsibility for personnel issues is a relief that decreases the work burden, but on the other hand it might lead to an increase in pressure and work stress, since it probably makes it more difficult to get a good, comprehensive overview. From a work environment perspective, an alternative solution would be to try to delegate other kinds of daily issues related to the property, sanitary issues in the kitchen, external visits, et c.

The work content is characterised by a great deal of administration but also by complex and diverse demands, which is typical for small enterprises which have to deal with all different kinds of issues and are thus expected to have a multi-competent management covering just about everything from personnel issues to food hygiene and real estate issues. As was shown in the results, the cooperative managers express the desire for a kind of mentor or coach to give advice and support, especially concerning the divergent roles. Today, all these non-economic resources such as consultants on specific issues related to e.g. personnel or finance have to be bought externally, since the small-scale cooperatives have no such departments available, as is the case for the public and private organisations. When e.g. the budget is made, its content and reliability is based on the competence of the board members; in both the public and the private sector it has been described how the budget process is an advanced process with quality checks, involvement of economic experts, etc. All three managers also mention the board as an important resource. One of the line managers expresses that running an elderly care institution cooperatively creates more influence over economic resources and potential surplus compared with the public counterpart. The fact that they can influence the budget and save resources that have been left over is something that is appreciated in the cooperatives and something that functions there, since it is stated in cooperatives that a surplus should go back to the members. The reinvestment of surplus in the organisation is part of the cooperative idea.

The dialogue with politicians and administrators differs between the municipalities. In the two cooperatives in the sparsely populated municipalities, contact is limited to a minimum, and one of the managers even expresses that the politicians work against the cooperative, and that the politicians in the municipality have been negative since the start. As described in the results section, one of the cooperatives had cancelled their contract with the municipality in a written document. When the interview was conducted eight weeks later, they had still

not received any answer. This illustrates an indifferent attitude from the municipality and indicates that the dialogue between them is not functioning. In the third cooperative, in the larger city, the relations with both the official responsible and the politician are very good, and the managers perceive that the politician is positive to and supports the operation.

Methodological reflections

It is important to emphasise that there is no aim or ambition to generalise these results to a broader context. The results rather illuminate the prerequisites for management, discretion and working conditions at large for the seven managers who participated in this study. With a larger number of responding line managers in each ownership form and from different municipalities, the circumstances for making comparisons would have improved further.

Another issue related to the sample is the fact that the three cooperatives are of a different kind: one is a pure worker cooperative where only employees are members, and the other two are user cooperatives where the members consist of a combination of the elderly, their relatives, employees and others. The cooperatives are described in relation to their type in the initial results section, and comparisons between them have revealed both similarities and differences. In relation to discretion for the managers there was no clear distinction between the two forms of cooperatives. However, for a future study, it would be fruitful to have a sufficiently large number of cooperatives to make a distinction of this kind possible.

As was shown in the empirical section, the two private managers were very fond of numbers and accounting, and they really enjoyed this part of the work content. This was an advantage, since so much of their work was characterised by results and finance. If they had not had the preference for figures and numbers that they both expressed, their work situation would most likely have been quite different and more negative. These two managers had both previously worked in public geriatric care, and it is possible that the very reason for moving to the private firm was their interest in financial and strategic work tasks, and that this had also helped to improve their work situation.

Conclusions

The two public line managers, with their large work groups, are exposed to a heavy workload. The daily work of these managers is characterised by a combination of high demands, rather limited resources, limited support from superior managers and politicians, and not being able to negotiate or discuss these prerequisites with those who are responsible in the administration or on the committee. With an implementation of another managerial level above them, they ended up even further away from strategic issues. As discussed previously, the managers closest to the employees have a very important role in supporting their employees so that they can cope with the demanding emotional work of taking care of

the elderly. It is thus important that the prerequisites of the public managers are adequate in order to achieve this task. The cooperatives had small work groups, but they were responsible for so many other divergent work tasks that they called for an extra resource in terms of a mentor or a coach. With regard to the factors in focus here, the two private line managers seem to have the best prerequisites for management and are best able to exercise discretion. They were responsible for the smallest group of employees, and their work tasks were delimited and focused on more strategic work. Furthermore, they also perceived considerable support from both their own manager and the politicians responsible; these are aspects that probably contribute in a positive way.

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Appendix

INTERVIEW TEMPLATE FOR GERIATRIC CARE LINE MANAGERS

Interviewdate: _____ IP-no: _____

A. Background

How long have you been employed as a line manager?

What was your professional background before you started your work here as a line manager?

What formal education do you have?

Have you previously worked in geriatric care in any other form of ownership?

How did you become a manager?

B. Prerequisites for management

How many employees are you responsible for?

Do you consider that you have enough time for your employees?

What would be an adequate number of employees to be responsible for?

Could you briefly describe your place within the organisation, your organisational placement?

Could you briefly describe where you, your co-workers/subordinates and your managers are geographically located?

Could you briefly describe your current job?

Could you describe what you do on a regular workday?

How formal is the setting when you meet your co-workers/subordinates? How often do you meet them?

a. formal b. informal

How formal is the setting when you meet your subordinates' managers? How often?

a. formal b. informal

What forums are there for the mutual exchange of information between operations managers and "side-ordinates"?

What forums for dialogue are there between the operational and strategic levels?

What forums for dialogue are there between you and the political level?

In your organisation, what decision-making levels are there for the following areas?

Personnel

Work Environment

Finances

Operations

What is the overlap between the decision-making organisations in these areas?

Can you influence decisions concerning the issues above?

Does your job involve many administrative duties?

What formal support resources do you have? Is it effective? Is it enough?

Do you have the same profession as that of the general personnel or a different one?

(Following the answer to the question above) Is this an advantage or a disadvantage?

Do you consider that there is a balance between the resources (economic frames) that are available and the goal and purpose of the work that has been stated by you and your colleagues?

Is there any area for which you consider there are not enough resources?

If you consider there to be no balance between the level of ambition for providing care and the available resources, is it then possible to raise your voice on that issue? Is there a dialogue? Are opinions received and handled by the superior level?

How do you see your role and work situation concerning demands from above and from the work group? Are the demands inconsistent or consistent? If they are inconsistent and/or the demands are too high demands - how do you deal with it?

What sort of support do you have for operational problems?

What are the most common causes of problems in the daily work?

Is there anything in the prerequisites for management that you would like to change / have different if you could make a free wish?

Do you think that you are shown appreciation when you have done a good job?

Where does that appreciation come from and how does it appear?

Describe what it is in your work that makes you feel good and what makes you feel satisfied with your work?

Abstract

The provision of geriatric care in Sweden has undergone extensive changes during the last 15 years, and with a reform that facilitated for alternative actors to enter the public market, also private and cooperative organisations are now supplying geriatric care parallel to the public sector. The aim of this study was to explore and describe how the prerequisites for first-line managers are manifested in public, private and cooperative geriatric care. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven first-line managers - two in public, two in private and three in cooperative geriatric care (where the private and cooperative organisations are run by commission from the municipality). The content of the interviews covered the organisational setting, demands, resources, responsibility and possibilities to communicate with the administrative department and with responsible politicians. One common feature for all managers was that they perceived that most of the work content was characterised by administration and routines, and with little time to spend with the elderly. The economic budget and available resources were not negotiable. There were also differences in the prerequisites for management between the ownership forms. The public and the private organisations had an established structure for administrative support concerning e.g. issues related to economy or personnel, which was not the case for the cooperatives. The public first-line managers had the largest number of employees to be responsible for - 35 to 50, whereas the corresponding number for the cooperative managers was 10 to 20. In the two private institutions another managerial level with group leaders below the first-line managers had been incorporated. With these group leaders, who took care of the daily, operative issues concerning personnel and the operations, the private first-line line managers could focus upon strategic issues related to planning and follow-up of the economic results. For the included managers in the study, the prerequisites for management, as investigated here, seem to be better for the private managers.

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11 Eskil Ekstedt och Elisabeth Sundin (red): Den nya arbetsledningen – arbets- och näringslivets organisatoriska omvandling i tid, rum och tal.

12 Joakim Landahl: Auktoritet och ansvar. Lärares fostrans- och omsorgsarbete i historisk belysning (avhandling).

13 Ann Hedlund: från elev till verksam timmerman – en utvecklingsprocess. Utbildning, yrkeserfarenhet och arbetets attraktivitet.

14 Anders Wikman: Arbetslivets omvandling genom organisatoriska föränd-

ringar – en första sammanfattning från Arbetslivsinstitutets kohortstudie.

15 Lena Gonäs, Lennart Hallsten och Roland Spånt: Uppsagdas och arbetslösas villkor och hälsa – en översikt av forskningen 1995-2005.

16 Åsa Mäkitalo (red): Att hantera arbetslöshet. Om social kategorisering och identitetsformering i det senmoderna.

17 Elisabeth Sundin och Anette Thörnquist (red): När anställda blir företagare. Studier om företagande i ett strukturomvandlings- och arbetsmarknadsperspektiv.