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Title 'Classroom walk-throughs' as a management approach

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University management today is under considerable pressure from requirements for transparency and documentation, and evidence of effects. This is what the academic literature will tell you. At the same time, the self-same academic literature will tell you that there is a strong tradition for collegial management among university managers, according to which managers are appointed from among colleagues and are expected to return to the same teaching staff after completion of their management tenure (Dopson, S., & McNay, I., 1996; Christiansen, N. F. V., Harboe, T., Horst, S., Krogh, L., & Sarauw, L. L., 2013; Harboe, T. 2013; 2015; 2016; Kallenberg, A.J., 2015; Wright, S., & Ørberg, J.W., 2008) .

There is a suggestion for how collegial managers act in Dopson and McNay's (1996) description of traditional collegial managers whose management is based on the idea of an "organisation of consent" in which employees expect to be involved in decisions, in which decision processes are typically bottom-up and in which, as a result, managers prefer to practice management through "management by walking about, sensing views and generating consensus and compromise". This approach to programme management puts priority on conversations with the local organisation, with equal priority on contact with students.

Other authors (e.g. Sharp and Walter, 2012) point to Hewlett Packard and United Airlines as examples of companies where 'management by walking about' and 'open door policies' were practiced in the 1980s. To begin with, the strategies were an attempt to speed up decision-making processes by encouraging managers to leave their offices and take to the corridors to meet and talk with their employees. Naturally, it was not about planned meetings, but rather about managers gathering knowledge of the organisation through more authentic and occasional meetings.

In the 1990s, Frase and Hatzel (2002) described management by walking about as a management approach for school leaders. School leaders have probably always walked along the corridors and talked to students and teachers, but the approach could be strengthened, for instance through 'classroom walk-throughs' (Sharp and Walter, 2012), where the school leader visits a classroom for a few minutes to sense the atmosphere and approach and then discusses the teaching with the teacher afterwards.

This paper examines the degree to which heads of studies apply observation of classroom teaching as a strategic tool to identify and monitor didactic quality and development. The study is based on interviews (and possibly observations) at selected Danish universities. This paper focuses on the heads of studies as a managerial group.

The Danish context

There are eight universities in Denmark, and each has its own academic, regional and historical profile¹. The universities are responsible for by far the majority of public research, and they offer research-based

1 <http://dkuni.dk/English/The-Danish-Universities>

education at Bachelor's, Master's and PhD levels. As central institutions in society, the universities are also tasked with taking an active part in sharing experience and knowledge with the surrounding society.

All eight universities are primarily publicly funded (private universities are not allowed in Denmark) and as such they are subject to common legislation adopted by the Danish parliament.

Danish universities have a strong and long tradition of involving students in management decisions. Since 1970, there has been a statutory requirement for all important decision-making bodies to have student representatives, and all programmes to have a study board (in Danish: *studienævn*) composed equally of students and internal academic staff. The primary areas of responsibility of the study boards are curricula and evaluation of teaching.

The title of 'head of studies' was originally introduced at Danish universities in 1993. The introduction was part of a major reform of the universities. Before 1993, all important decisions regarding study programmes were in principle made by various collegial councils and study boards.

Today, heads of studies at Danish universities are characterized as managers without a formal management mandate with regard to finances and staffing, while *at the same time* they have an immensely important managerial role with regard to programme development and programme administration. In other words, heads of studies are today not only expected to act sensibly with regard to local and routine teaching challenges related to students and teachers; they are also expected to have a more strategic mindset. Today, heads of studies have to be able to work with a more long-term and proactive perspective. Furthermore, they have to be more involved in the university as a whole, and not merely represent a specific, limited academic and/or organizational area.

A significant characteristic of the present situation among this group of managers is a call for a methodical approach to knowledge, as well as skills to translate this knowledge into qualified management decisions (e.g. the Committee on Quality, 2015). This, in itself requires heads of studies not only to know the organization and academic environment in which they are involved but also to have deep insights into teaching and management, and they must know how they can search for relevant material, academic literature, and research literature.

It is against this backdrop that new methods for heads of studies to observe teaching become relevant; that is, methods which do not entail a burden financially or in terms of time.

Methodology

At present (June 2017), this paper is still 'work-in-progress' and the empirical data is not yet complete. The empirical data falls into two categories. Firstly, a large number of heads of studies have been interviewed over the telephone in order to estimate the extent to which the method of 'classroom walk-throughs' is being applied as a managerial tool. Secondly, two heads of studies have been interviewed in depth in order to gain an understanding of existing possibilities and challenges when heads of studies observe teaching. Furthermore, there is a plan to collect case material on how 'classroom walk-throughs' can take place, and the paper will therefore discuss the possibilities and challenges associated with different forms of walk-throughs.

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